

IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOR FOR ESSENTIAL GOODS: COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of the study is to examine the Impulsive buying behavior of consumers for essential goods due to COVID-19. It also reflected the changes that take place in consumer's behavior based on the current situation. The study highlights the factors that appeals consumers' to purchase impulsively. The study also provides managerial implications for marketers and the future scope of the study.

Design/ methodology/ approach: The study has undertaken a descriptive research design and collected data from 830 consumers. The non-probability sampling technique was used. The data were collected, tabulated and processed through statistical tools SPSS 20.0 and utilized ANOVA and regression analysis to examine the relationship between the constructs and their level of impact.

Findings: Results indicate that threat perception and consumer psychology significantly influence impulsive buying behavior. Moreover, panic condition and mass media lead to threat perception. Findings revealed that the income level of consumers influenced impulsive buying behavior.

Research limitations: Face to Face interaction cannot accomplish due to lock-down and social distancing.

Practical implication: The study provides insights about the variables that might be considered as predictors to understand the impulsive buying behavior and consumer psychology.

Originality/value: The research new to its category due to the occurrence of COVID-19 and supplements the somewhat limited researches fetching out on consumer psychology and panic condition that consequently lead to impulsive buying behavior.

Keywords: COVID-19, consumer psychology, impulsive buying, panic condition.

Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction

COVID 19 has enormously disrupted the global economy. India is also struggling hard in this global pandemic due to the spread of COVID 19. It massively contributed setback to the major sectors of the economy. The demand for household goods has impulsively increased because of temporary lockdown, disturbance in supply chain and anxiety among consumers. COVID 19 changed the business landscape and is likely to transform the business practices in the coming time. It is the prime objective of the marketer to understand consumer buying

behavior very effectively. Marketer tries to seek consumer information from different ways so that to know their need, preferences and decision-making process. In India, Panic-buying originated among buyers at the time of lockdown was announced, and this condition is similarly prevailing in the other countries also. Due to the unexpected changes in the logistics and supply chain consumers stockpiled the essential goods. Buyers are impulsively buying and stocking soaps, toothpaste, ready to made food, bakery products and other staples goods. The demand for essential commodities upsurges the prices and leads to advance buying for a month as compared to their normal buying. In the face of (COVID 19) the restricted movement of individuals during the lockdown, FMCG products, which are being sold under the essential goods category, are expected to gain demand. Home deliveries of essential goods have also penetrated the demand. In another word, fear buying creates apprehension about the shortage of goods (Allon, G., & Bassambo, A., 2011). The magnitude of the effect will depend on how the prolonged existence of this calamity remains. All this creates a new path for business and reveals the new face of consumer behavior and their lifestyles.

The study will provide a better understanding of the relation among the outbreak of COVID-19, outlook of consumer psychology, threat and impulse buying behavior. This process may be moderated by the more extraordinary view of the mass media and undoubtedly by the presence of panic surpassing the perception of threat. Further moderating factors like buyer characteristics will be review in short, but they will not be the leading area of the study. A very little research has been done in this area and this study is a first of its category that empirically analyses the impulsive buying behavior and specifically consumer psychology. The study intentionally brings in to light their moderating effect and their correlation effect of this phenomenon. The research has led to the succeeding question:

What is the influence of threat perception and consumer psychology with regards to impulsive buying for essential goods due to the outbreak of COVID-19?

To accomplish the above-said question, we outlined certain sub-questions as below:

- Why COVID-19 does pose the perception of Threat of non-availability of goods?
- What is the relationship between threat perception and consumer psychology concerning the outbreak of COVID-19.
- How do media and buyers characteristics influence consumer psychology in the face of the outbreak of COVID-19?
- How is panic behavior influence impulse buying?

Conceptual framework

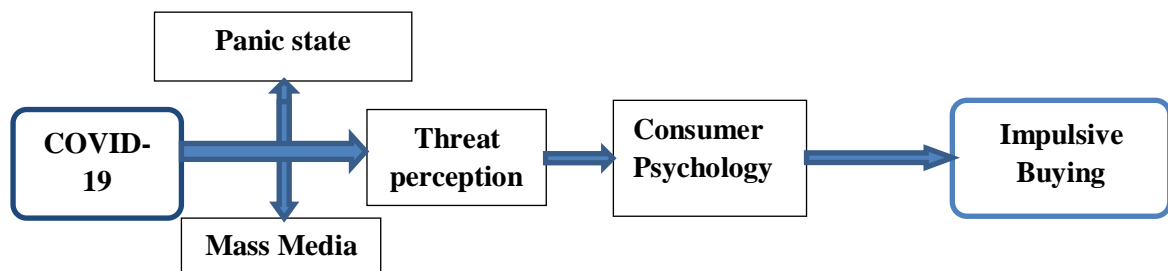


Fig-1: Conceptual framework for the relation between COVID-19 and impulsive buying. The entire research will work with the proposed background for the conceptual framework. The research is going through the following sections: The first section will discuss the COVID-19 in the Indian context. The next section outlines the theoretical aspect of threat perception and consumer psychology and also highlights the relationship between them. The subsequent section indicates the impulse buying behavior of consumer due to pandemic and draws the factors that can alter the buying motives and later section indicates the moderating

factors of the study. Then afterwards will discuss research methods and results followed by a conclusion. The last section pinpoints some managerial implications of the study.

1. COVID-19 and Indian Context

The COVID-19 pandemic shows worldwide health calamity and challenges faced in totality. The global economy is in a perilous state and the risk of global recession is very high in 2020 due to shut down of all the economic activities worldwide to control the penetration of COVID-19 (Nielsen, 2020). The scenario of Indian economy shows that the GDP slam on the brakes in the third quarter of 2019-2020 and now flare-up of COVID-19 builds a stumbling block against the economic development. The total number of coronavirus cases in India is 165829 as on 29 May 2020 and globally stands on ninth number as reported by economic times of India. The government takes proactive steps to control this pandemic by implementing complete lockdown of states, and even in stages, only essential goods like grocery, medicines and medical services are accessible. After this, the government implemented lockdown in phases and relaxation given according to the economic suitability and situations. It is observed that lockdown bring the industry and trade activity to a pause that hampers the consumption as well as investment opportunities. According to the report of the ministry of statistics and program implementation, April 2020 indicates the inverse effect of lockdown on the discrete consumption of non-essential goods. The distribution of retail industry across India was dominated by the unorganized sector at 88% while organized sector retail consumption was 9% and 3% of e-commerce. Thus big offline retailers have stepped up towards online channels to deliver goods and groceries. On the contrary, Coronavirus has increased the sale of packed food, personal and hygiene products. But put pressure on the supply chain and create fear in the minds of people because of the possibility of stock out. A survey conducted by Nilson and Delottie, April 2020 indicates the rise of demand for certain commodities. In Tier 1 cities include Banglore, Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi shows high demand for personal hygiene goods, ready to eat food, baby care products and sales accelerates by 40% as compared to the last year. Similarly, demand raised by 8-10% for baby care products, personal hygiene goods, and grocery in Tier 2 cities- Lucknow, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Pune and Surat. In this lockdown period, people are forced to stay inside and thus consumer spends carefully and tries not to be spendthrift. Individuals become self-dependent and learn new ways to engage themselves in this period. Most of them have turn into lockdown chefs and trending towards a healthy diet and spend quality time with family. Digital India is also playing a major role and swapped the requirement of roaming (Deblina Roy, et. al, 2020). Mobile and internet usage increased by 10-12% due to the condition of work from home, remote learning and entertainment through Skype, Zoom, Whatsapp, Facebook and hot star become the leading digital media technologies. All these also increase the burden on broadband and connectivity speed but also increase revenues of such companies. Therefore, In the light of current situation, researcher is interested to study the underline factors that provoke consumers to buy impulsively in COVID 19. It points out the relationship between the consumer experiences towards the low involvement products. As the whole economy is going through a tough time, the study provides a blueprint for accessing consumer psychology and consumer buying behavior in the going phase of COVID-19.

2. Threat perception and consumer psychology

The study will provide a brief understanding of both the concept so that it provides a clear picture and their distinctiveness of the current situation. A lot of studies indicate the approaches towards consumer psychology and behavior. The descriptions given in the study considers the utmost relevant information in the scope of this research.

2.1 Threat perception

The threat is a kind of unwilling state of mind where we perceive fear and risk that is usually associated with the environment (Cooper DP, Goldenberg JL, Arndt J., 2014). Oceans of fear elicited by the hasty global spread of the COVID-19 endure a huge psychological sensation preoccupied in our minds. Regardless of nations and cultures, the epidemic's waves have resulted in global health calamities and enforcing markets to slow down due to strict quarantine trials. However strict quarantine also influenced the environment in a spellbinding way. It also raises the question that how prolonged the pandemic will be and how sustainable these constructive changes in the long run? Literature point toward that, we often close our eyes that human being itself responsible for this pandemic and threat. The human being has started working in a way that has endangered the existence of other species and whatever we are doing is not to protect or to meet our needs but to meet our greediness and prove their control on all other creatures on this earth. From this pandemic (Covid-19) we should learn the principle of co-existence and do not trespass in the domain of other beings on this earth. There is a strong relationship between the pandemic and the human actions and we all should think where we were heading towards. The above-said literature indicates the outbreak of COVID-19 and its effects. The suggestive reviews would arrange in a relevant manner, it is revealed that the pandemic creates a high level of threat in the mind of consumers. Hence we put forward the hypothesis.

H1. The outbreak of COVID-19 exaggerates a high level of threat in the minds of consumers.

2.2 Consumer Psychology

Consumer psychology is associated with the cognitive theory and usually connected with the process of decision making by the individual or group of peoples (Damasio, A. R., 2001). A lot of studies indicate that it is very difficult to understand consumer psychology because an individual's having different need and preferences. In another word, we can say that consumer psychology plays an important role in synthesise information and pave the way for decision making. It is somehow related to the theory of consumer behavior however psychology has multiple dimensions that comprise values, motivation and opinion (Laros, F. J. M., & Steenkamp, J. B. E. M., 2005). These dimensions are part of individual personality and implied behavior. The study inculcates the concept of consumer psychology to know consumer behavior by aiming at the psychological effects.

2.3 The relation between threat perception and consumer psychology

As stated by past studies it is marked that there is a strong relationship between threat and consumer psychology. Sometimes threat or danger is interchanged with anxiety and recognized with a submissive attitude (Loewenstein, G. F., Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K., & Welch, N., (2001). Even though researches have revealed that threat perception and their motives are positively correlated to each other (Kasperson, et. al., 1988). The sensitivity of threat and panic also indicates the consumer attitude towards the occurrence of any event and its environment. Currently, we are fighting with a disease that is extremely contagious and deadly (COVID-19), that mystifies the whole world. The anxiety, fear, comprehensions and rumours, altogether that builds a negative effect on the mind of individuals. Thus mingling this understanding with the abovementioned literature, the hypothesis of the relationship between threat perception and consumer psychology is purposed:

H2. A high perception of threat consequently results in affecting consumer psychology.

3. Impulsive buying behavior

A lot of studies indicated rational buying and impulsive buying behavior of consumer's. In rational buying or we can say that awake behavior of consumer that creates efficiency, attainment and reliable products. It is prominently inclined to utilitarian drives (Liu, Z. and Lu, Z., (2017). Whereas impulsive behavior is a kind of unanticipated need force the

consumer to purchase the goods. It shows the irrational purchase decision towards the low involvement of goods. Sometimes impulsiveness shows as characteristics of individual personality. It considers as a reactive process that creates a strong conviction to buy something immediately (Beatty, S.E. and Ferrell, M.E., 1998) Moreover, impulsive buying behavior remains for a shorter period and difficult to understand because there is no reason for buying (Poyry, E., Parvinen, P., & Malmivaara, T., 2013). Sometimes the magnetism to make impulsive buying is due to the arousal of uncontrollable factors like COVID 19. The concept of COVID-19 incidence in India is quite new as related to other countries. In India consumers impulsively buying packed food, grocery items, personal and hygiene products, thus put pressure on supply chain and increased possibility of stock out. This pandemic has triggered historic economic turmoil and raises several questions in the minds of the individual. With this line of thinking, the following hypothesis is mentioned:

H3. A high perception of threat and fear led to impulsive buying towards the purchase of essential goods increased before the pandemic.

4. Moderating factors

As stated above consumer psychology associated with values, motivation and opinion. These features hold individual personality and implied behavior (Arnold, M. J., & Reynolds, K. E., 2003). The threat is the reaction of panic and fear owing to the information we get from the external environment like newspaper, television, social media and society. Somehow it can be observed as the impact of mass media and buyers characteristics. In addition to that individuals' attitude also a significant moderating factor that associated with consumer psychology. All these moderating factors discussed below:

4.1 Mass Media role

In the current scenario mass media plays a very significant role in connecting the world for spreading information, opinion and news. Now we can access all information at our threshold in the look of COVID-19. According to Loewenstein, G. F., Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K., & Welch, N. (2001) mass media update has equipped us with the current scenario and give us the better understanding about the impact, precautionary measures and the government instructions which is going on according to the live scenario. However, sometimes mass media also show the fabricated image, fallacy statements, includes fantasies and whims that also work like fuel in the fire and create panic. Mass media portrays the melodramatic image and overestimation of threat (Kasperson, et. al., 1988). So it is our responsibility to check the source of information whether it is authenticate or not. It is very important to find a trusting source of information. When there is any gap in the information or it is technical or scary information, the consumer will use that information according to their viewpoint and that anticipates threat and fear (Sjoberg, L. and Wahlberg, A.a. 2002). Concerning the outbreak of COVID-19, it indicates that threat perception is undoubtedly penetrated through the mass media. This proposes the following hypothesis:

H4. When the news of COVID-19 is emphasizing by mass media, the consumer will apprehend a threat perception.

4.2 Panic Conditions

Panic is considered being as a reaction towards the occurrence of any unfavourable event. Generally, this type of behavior occurs when consumers purchase abnormally huge quantity of goods in the likelihood of any incident. It encourages horde practises (Bruce Jones and David Steven, 2015). Subsequently, that will likely to increase price and shortage of goods. It is explained as complex behavior (Bradley & Lang, 2000) and point out the explicit action, behaviors and individual's cognitive reaction to the environment. Witte, Kim & Allen, Mike, (2000) emphasized that occasionally judgments on products are grounded on emotions and atmospheres. Other researches highlighted that panic appeals are worthwhile to acquire customers to think through or take actions in a definite manner. Allen and Meta, (2000)

emphasized that panic buying behavior work on the assumption that customer considers they are clever to look after themselves and it turns as a main influencing factor.

4.3 Buyers’ characteristics and individual attitude

Several kinds of research have been done on the buying behavior and attitude of consumer’s and indicate values, beliefs, cultural backgrounds positively influenced information processing and decision making. The study shows how consumer distinguishes and process information that all associated with consumer psychology. Consumer psychology deals with the individual attitude- motivation, beliefs, and values etc. Thus all these skills construct the blueprint of buyer’s characteristics. Generally, three types of buyers are mainly targeted by the marketer i.e., spendthrifts, normal spenders, and frugal. Spendthrift buyers tend to purchase excessively without any requirement. Due to the pandemic worldwide, the role of consumers is directing towards new angles. The worldwide cascading threats and the ability to compete with such threats must be of greater strength and Optimistic approach is demanded. The optimism of buyers also indicates their behavioral trait. Various individual traits and self-image may assist as an intrinsic source of impulsive buying (Powell, M., & Ansic, D., 1997). Impulsiveness reflects buyer’s personality and individual ideal self (Dittmar, H. and Bond, R. 2010). Thus we can say that buyers’ characteristics and individual’s attitude strongly correlated to each other. From the above inference we purpose the next hypothesis:

H5. Buyers’ characteristics and individual’s attitude positively influence impulse buying behavior.

5. Study objective and design

The study underlines the relationship between threat perception and consumer psychology and consequently impulsive buying, in the present scenario of COVID-19. The theoretical framework highlights the research questions to be attained and suggested hypothesis for the study as mentioned above. The Table 1 outlining the research constructs and variables below.

Table-1

Construct name	items	Explanation of variables
Threat perception (TP)	4	In this study, threat perception is shaped due to the occurrence of COVID 19, threat, risk and individual reaction (coding as TP1, TP2, TP3)
Consumer psychology (CP)	3	Consumer psychology connected with motivation, values and emotions (coding as CP1, CP2, CP3)
Panic condition (PC)	3	Panic conditions occur due to lockdown of the nation, price increase, unavailability of goods (coding as PC1, PC2, PC3)
Mass media and buyers(MMB)	4	Overemphasizing of pandemic news by mass media and Categories of buyers like Spendthrift, average spenders, frugal also influence impulsive buying behaviour (coding as MMB1, MMB2, MMB3)
Impulse buying behaviour (IBB)	4	Impulsive behaviour shows the personality, the attitude of consumer, self-identity and fear among buyers (coding as IBB1, IBB2, IBB3, IBB4)
Total constructs=5,		Total number of all attributes- 18

Source- self-prepared, explanation of constructs and variables

The present study analyses the relationship between threat perception, consumer psychology and impulsive buying. Subsequently, mass media, buyer characteristics and attitude were taken as moderating factors, to showcase the changing behavior of customers. COVID -19 taken as it presently creates a panic condition and fear among customers. The research

administrated an online survey on 850 consumers. All the data organized through Google forms and spread sheet. Data was collected with the help of 5 points Likert scale from the consumers so that to know increased consumption of essential commodities. A total of 850 questionnaires were distributed online that covers the northern region of India and after screening the responses, 830 responses were retained for data analysis. A questionnaire was prepared with 18 options. The questionnaire designed based on the above-mentioned constructs as indicated in table 1. The statistical tool SPSS processed the data by the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson correlation method. The socio-demographic data are given in table 2.

Demographic Characteristics of respondents	No. of Respondents
Gender	
Male	485 (58.4%)
Female	345 (41.5%)
Age	
25-35 Years	354 (42.6%)
35-50 Years	298 (35.9%)
55-75 Years	178 (21.4%)
Monthly Family Income	
Below Rs.30000	120 (14.4%)
Above Rs.30000-60000	228 (27.4%)
Above Rs.60000-90000	207 (24.9%)
Above Rs.90000	275 (33.1%)
Educational Qualification	
Senior Secondary	71 (8.5%)
Graduation	430 (51.8%)
Post-Graduation	329 (39.6%)

Table 2 Demographic Analysis

5.2 Analysis and Result

In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to check the internal consistency of variables. According to Hair et al. (2006) suggested that the item having a high degree of score indicates a higher consistency level. A reliability coefficient value should be >0.70 is the minimum acceptable condition as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Variables	Cronbach alpha
Threat perception	0.86
Consumer psychology	0.88
Panic condition	0.79
Mass media	0.89
Buyers classification and individual attitude	0.84
Impulse buying behaviour	0.90

Reliability Statistics

Table 4 indicates Pearson's correlation coefficients based on responses entered on the Likert scale that associated according to the above-mentioned variables. Data reveals that there are significant positive relationship variables and Impulsive buying behavior. It signifies that as when one variable increases in value, the second variable too increases and vice-versa. Table 4 indicates that the values of the Person's correlation coefficients and revealed that there is not a strong relationship between the variables as the values are low. Mass media (.428) and consumer psychology (.419) shows a high degree of correlation. The value of significance

which is less than 0.05 indicates that there was a statistically significant correlation between each variable.

Table 4

Variables	Buying Behaviour	
	Coefficient of correlation	Significance (2-tailed test)
Threat perception	.298	0.000
Consumer psychology	.419	0.002
Panic condition	.367	0.000
Mass media	.428	0.001
Buyers classification and individual attitude	.320	0.000
Impulse buying behaviour	.397	0.001

Pearson correlation of variables

The outcomes of ANOVA are shown in table 5. It determines that impulsive buying behavior is subjective toward age, income and education and indicates the relationship between the categories of buyers. To accomplish this objective one-way ANOVA has been utilised. The outcomes indicate that factors like education and age have not statistically significant difference as the p-value is less than 0.05. Monthly income factor i.e. spendthrift and average spenders have shown significant influencing factor subjected to impulsive buying behavior. The F ratio value of Spendthrift is 3.041 and significance level is 0.087 and for average spender, the F ratio is 2.664 and the significance value was is 0.034. It indicates that monthly income significantly influencing Impulsive buying behavior.

Table 5

Factors	Impulsive Buying behaviour	Sum of square	Degree of Freedom	Mean square	F- ratio	Sig
Age	Spendthrift,	1.809	3	0.479	0.764	0.450
	Average spenders,	2.209	3	0.477	0.162	0.429
	Frugal	16.904	3	3.476	0.750	0.359
Education	Spendthrift,	0.581	3	0.320	0.190	0.843
	Average spenders,	0.526	3	0.207	0.208	0.934
	Frugal	10.155	3	2.039	0.509	0.929
Monthly Income	Spendthrift,	3.584	3	0.746	3.041	0.087
	Average spenders,	4.188	3	0.697	2.664	0.034
	Frugal	15.036	3	3.509	0.759	0.853

One way ANOVA

In this present study, impulsive buying behavior has been taken as the dependent variable and threat perception, and consumer psychology taken as independent variables. To gain insight into the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable multiple regression was used as represented in table 6. Here the p-value is less than 0.005 indicates that overall regression model is statistically significant and explained total variance. The regression equation is –

$$\text{Impulsive buying behavior} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Threat perception} + \beta_2 \text{ Consumer Psychology} + \beta_3 \text{ Panic condition} + \beta_4 \text{ Mass Media} + \beta_5 \text{ Buyers Classification and Individual Attitude} + \epsilon$$

Table 6

Un-standardized Coefficient				standardized Coefficient			
Variables	B	S.E		Beta	T-value	Sig.	Hypothesis

							support
H1	Threat perception---> impulse buying	0.186	0.040	0.236	2.926	0.000	Accepted
H2	Consumer psychology--> impulse buying	0.192	0.041	0.299	3.387	0.000	Accepted
H3	Panic condition---> impulse buying	0.155	0.031	0.323	4.738	0.000	Accepted
H4	Mass media---> impulse buying	0.310	0.046	0.434	6.754	0.000	Accepted
H5	Buyers classification and individual attitude--> impulse buying	0.158	0.044	0.249	5.607	0.000	Accepted

Multiple Regression analysis

6. Conclusion and discussion

The result shows that there is undeniably a relationship between impulsive buying and outbreak of COVID-19. Data revealed that high threat perception creates fear in the mind of the consumer and the non-availability of vaccination as well as increase causalities. On the other hand, threat perception affects consumer psychology and directly associated with motivation, values and beliefs. Consequently, this pandemic elicited threat perception and have an emotional impact.

Additionally, the study point towards panic condition developed due to COVID-19 and subsequently impulsive buying towards the purchase of essential goods increased and shows significant correlation. It is proposed that the income of consumers stimulates impulsive buying behavior. Several other elements of impulsive buying remain untouched. This intends towards future research on other factors that influenced impulsive buying behavior. More insights similar to cross-cultural behavior, cross nations can be done in the future for generalising the results.

Mass media also influenced consumers and creates a threat perception. Results also show a significant relationship between mass media and threat perception. The consumer will perceive more threat when mass media overemphasizes the news like stockpiling, economic slowdown and national security issues. All these fabricate fear factor and sensitive imprint in minds. Mass media was taken as a moderating factor in this study and hence tested on threat perception. Future research can be done without taking mass media as a moderating factor so that a different perspective can be developed.

Results also indicate that buyers’ characteristics and individual’s attitude strongly correlated with each other. Impulsiveness reflects buyer’s personality and individual ideal self (Dittmar and Bond, 2010). Data revealed that the buyer’s category and income level significantly correlated with each other. The spendthrift consumer was more inclined towards impulsive buying as compared to an average spender. In this study buyer characteristics and individual’s attitude taken as moderating factor and therefore tested on impulsive buying behavior. Buyer’s characteristics and individual attitude both are very broad areas in consumer behavior, thus marketer needs to emphasis precisely in these areas to gain better understandings behind impulsive buying so that to effectively-outlined their marketing and advertising programs. Future research can be done on reflecting other methodologies, including the time-series approach, longitudinal approach. It is suggested that further study of the occurrence is required after a few months so that results can be widespread.s

7. Practical implication of the study

The study tries to deliver some practical implications based on the theoretical contributions in this area of research. The study provides valuable implications for marketers and researchers in the field of consumer behavior. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship

between consumer psychology, threat perception, panic and subsequently impulsive buying behavior. The relationship generated due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as mentioned in the earlier studies.

Consumer psychology plays a significant role in decision making. In this way, it is the responsibility of media and government to ensure the dispersal of the correct information and provoke perception of threat in consumers and thus change their objective of impulse buying. As threat perception and consumer psychology, both are distinctive areas that will influence differently. Thus the marketer needs to have an understanding of the ways buyers attitudes influence information processing and decision making. Advertising policies were stressed in this situation as marketers have the ultimate concern in ascertaining consumer psychology and attitude.

Taking everything into account this research provides a new avenue on impulsive buying behavior concerning the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The present research suggests that threat, panic condition, consumer psychology and the influence of media entirely change the mind-sets of an individual to purchase essential goods.

8. Conflict Of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest associated with this publication, and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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