

Panic Buying Behaviour: The Challenges and Coping Strategies of Supermarkets in Colombo District, Sri Lanka during Covid 19 Pandemic

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The consistency of the world is always vulnerable due to the occurrence of crises. Recently, COVID-19 became the key miserable factor behind the operations of several industries in Sri Lanka, including the supermarket industry. Panic buying behavior is a kind of abnormal behavior of consumers that could be realized due to the different crises. Therefore, this study's main objective is to examine the challenges encountered and the mitigation measures taken by the Colombo district supermarkets to deal with panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative methodology was employed since the knowledge regarding panic buying behavior is minimally explored in the Sri Lankan setting. Moreover, the researcher used a survey strategy to gather data since this is an exploratory study. A convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample and eight supermarket managers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique to collect data for the study. The content analysis technique was used by the researcher to analyze the data. The challenges revealed from the interview were customer retention challenges, order management challenges, challenges regarding consumer and employee safety, stock shortages, shoplifting challenges in online delivery, and queue management. Several strategies to mitigate the effect of the above challenges were explored including, implementing CSR activities, introducing proper customer handling processes, imposing entry restrictions, customer doorstep delivery services, and increasing the number of cashiers and employees per shift. This study contributes to the existing knowledge of Sri Lanka by providing novel insights regarding the effect of panic buying behavior on the Supermarket industry and the coping strategies used by supermarket managers to overcome the challenges. In addition, this study facilitates the knowledge of supermarket managers in making the most accurate decisions during unexpected scenarios like the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Keywords: *Challenges of panic buying, Coping strategies, Panic buying behavior, Supermarket industry*