Overview

Title:

Excessive buying and consumer problems during the spread of COVID-19: implications for consumer education

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● Abstract

During early 2020, the global spread of COVID-19 has transformed consumer lifestyles. In the early stages of the pandemic, there was a widespread excessive buying of masks and toilet paper in Japan and abroad, which led to confusion in consumer behavior as well as reselling, distribution of defective and inferior products, and rampant fraudulent business practices. What kind of consumers engaged in excessive buying due to the sudden change in the economic situation? Moreover, what were the factors that led to consumer problems? The purpose of this paper is to empirically examine the factors that influenced excessive buying and consumer troubles in the early stages of the pandemic, and to identify key points to emphasize in consumer education to prevent confusion in future emergency situations.

The data used is the results of a web-based survey conducted by the Consumer Affairs Agency for "Research on changes in consumer behavior due to the spread of COVID-19." The survey targeted people in their 20s to 70s nationwide, and quota sampling was conducted according to age group and regional block in relation to population share, with 3,938 respondents participating.

The results of the structural equation modeling clearly showed that more excessive buying was associated with more consumer problems. This relationship was particularly pronounced among men in their 20s and 30s, who are more likely to use online shopping when engaging in excessive buying. Overall, the tendencies that led to excessive buying were "higher household income," and psychological ones such as "greater anxiety about shortage of goods," and "receptiveness to authority." The fact that factors such as economic conditions, psychological trends, and resource management had little direct impact on consumer problems suggests that avoiding excessive buying is the most important factor in preventing problems during emergencies.

No direct impact of managing life resources, such as money and material goods, was found on excessive buying or consumer problems. However, "management of belongings and space" was significantly negatively associated with anxiety and vulnerability to influence, psychological factors that lead to excessive buying. This result indicates that the more people tidy up their surroundings by selecting only items they need, the less likely they are to be influenced by anxiety and authority, and the less likely they are to engage in excessive buying. The results were

particularly clear among men in their 20s and 30s, who were strongly associated with both excessive buying and consumer problems.

The above results suggest that the following two points are important for consumer education to prevent confusion in emergency situations. The first point is to provide information to deter excessive buying. Providing information that makes people aware of psychological tendencies that could lead to excessive buying will also be required as an emergency response to prevent consumer problems. The second point is consumer education that provides specific knowledge for managing belongings and space, such as the proper amount of daily necessities and appropriate locations for them, as well as the importance of selecting and choosing what is necessary. Proper management of living resources can not only help prepare for emergencies by avoiding excessive buying, but also prevent consumer problems in normal circumstances.