

Panic in the Aisle:
Emotional and Cognitive Factors Underlying
Panic Buying During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Report for Qualitative Research Project

Dr. Dipankar Chakravarti

Richard Stuebi*

Jinyan Xiang*

Pamplin College of Business, Virginia Tech

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**Equal authorship, by alphabetic order of the last name*

Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic generated widespread observations of panic buying of various products, including items like toilet paper that offered neither prevention nor treatment of the disease. Why did such panic buying occur? What did consumers think and how did consumers feel about such panic buying? To answer these questions, we conducted a qualitative research project involving long interviews of eight informants about their observations and experience of panic buying during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in March-April 2020. Through these interviews, we obtained first-hand data on (1) emotional and cognitive reactions to observations of panic buying, and (2) emotional and cognitive states of mind when consumers undertook panic buying. Based on the qualitative data, we identified six cultural and analytic categories within which to organize our findings on the emotional and cognitive reactions and states of consumers in relation to panic buying. Our findings suggest that the concept of panic buying is not widely shared: while informants generally held negative views of panic buying and tended to declaim undertaking panic buying themselves, they nevertheless substantially increased the volumes of the goods that they purchased while shopping, thus conforming to definitions of panic buying that were developed in prior research. Cognitively, informants understood their panic buying to be a rational strategy to mainly minimize store visits for precautionary purposes – more so than a response to concerns about future availability of supplies -- and find several objective factors that affect consumer inclination to undertake panic buying. Emotionally, consumers found shopping to be significantly less satisfying, more commonly experiencing both anxiety and annoyance – and these negative emotions may increase the tendency to undertake panic buying as a compensatory consumption mechanism.

Project Objectives

Panic buying refers to a phenomenon in which consumers buy unusually large quantities of goods because they anticipate a crisis or crisis-caused price increase or shortage (Yuen et al, 2020). Consumers undertake panic buying prior to natural disasters such as storms and hurricanes (e.g., Kulemeka, 2009) or after wars (e.g., Stiff, Johnson and Tourk, 2015) and other civil crises such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the September 11 attacks (e.g., George, 2003). Not surprisingly, panic buying has been widely observed during the COVID-19 pandemic: lines of shoppers (outside the stores) were very long; toilet paper and paper towels were unavailable in stores; disinfectants, facial masks and hand sanitizers were in short supply; many store shelves were bare; and people were fighting for the few goods that remained.

Previous research has identified (1) several causes of panic buying, such as fear, scarcity, uncertainty, herding, coping and social influence, and (2) multiple consequences of panic buying such as disruption on demand and supply and harm on consumer's well-being. However, there has been relatively little research on consumers' emotional and cognitive processes when observing and undertaking panic buying (e.g., Arafat et al (2020), Sim et al (2020), Yuen et al (2020)). It is unclear what incidents of panic buying consumers observe, how consumers emotionally and cognitively react to these observations, why consumers undertake panic buying and what consumers think and feel when undertaking panic buying. These questions merit further exploration to understand panic buying more comprehensively.

Therefore, we conducted a qualitative research project based on long interviews to empirically study panic buying in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, in this research project, we aim to explore:

- Individual observations of panic buying

- Emotional and cognitive reactions to observations of panic buying
- Individual and situational factors that affect the inclination to undertake panic buying
- Emotional and cognitive states associated with panic buying
- New purchasing practices to ensure security of supplies during a civic crisis

Conceptual Background

Panic buying was initially documented over a century ago, when the sales of Vicks VapoRub (an OCT pain reliever ointment) tripled during the 1918-1919 global influenza pandemic (Burden, 2020). Since then, panic buying has been observed in many contexts, for many causes in many countries.

The phrase “panic buying” has sometimes been used interchangeably with “hoarding”. Hoarding refers to a phenomenon in which a consumer “moves quickly to acquire abnormal quantities” and “holds that abnormal inventory level” of a product due to the perceived potential of being deprived of additional supplies in the near-term (McKinnon, Smith and Hunt, 1985). Here, we review literature on hoarding and panic buying and use them interchangeably, acknowledging that an alternative definition of hoarding (i.e., compulsive hoarding) -- a disorder in which individuals excessively acquire objects and have persistent and extreme difficulty in discarding objects (Timpano and Shaw, 2012) -- is not relevant to our context.

Because panic buying affects economics and consumer’s well-being, researchers have studied the causes and consequences of panic buying from various perspectives. From psychological and social perspectives, panic buying is mainly driven by fear of unknown, scarcity, coping, and social influence and herding. (Yuen et al, 2020; Sheu and Kuo, 2020). From a socioeconomic perspective, demographic characteristics such as income, gender, education, age

and ethnicity influence the inclination to undertake panic buying (Bish and Michie, 2010; Pan et al, 2020). From an economic perspective, panic buying affects demand and supply, which affects consumer well-being (Stiff, Johnson and Tourk, 1975). From an operational perspective, panic buying disrupts supply chains, pushing retailers to change their operational strategies on sourcing (Zheng, Shou and Yang, 2020) and inventory management (Yoon, Narasimhan and Kim, 2018), and to set new policies such as fixed quotas (Shou, Xiong and Shen, 2011). Since we are studying panic buying from the consumer's standpoint, psychological, social and socioeconomic perspectives are of greatest interest and will be further investigated in this research.

Perceived potential for scarcity induces panic buying through multiple mechanisms. First, since consumers expect prices to increase due to future scarcity, they are motivated to buy greater quantities than normal to minimize costs (Stiff, Johnson and Tourk, 1975). Second, scarcity shifts attention focus and drives consumers to engage more deeply in the present, thereby leading to an overemphasis on the severity of the observed and upcoming supply-demand abnormality (Shah, Mullainathan, Shafir, 2012). Third, scarcity stimulates psychological reactance, which also triggers panic buying (Gupta and Gentry, 2015).

In turn, the perceived scarcity that drives panic buying is affected by a product's demand and supply. When directly or indirectly observed demand is high or surging or/and when directly or indirectly observed supply is limited, declining or unstable, perceived scarcity increases. However, perceived scarcity can be mitigated if consumers expect – based on their experience and knowledge – the duration of the abnormal supply or/and demand to be brief (Stiff, Johnson and Tourk, 1975).

Therefore, we expect (1) the local severity of the pandemic to affect perceived demand and supply, and (2) the breadth and depth of local supply sources to affect panic buying through perceived scarcity.

As is the case with many civic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic induced several stressors among consumers. Because the coronavirus is a new threat to humanity and the spread of the pandemic is highly speculative, many consumers experienced considerable uncertainty, fear and loss of control as COVID-19 emerged as a concern. Public health initiatives to lockdown and quarantine the population caused many consumers to sense heightened confinement and a loss of autonomy. Health and financial concerns caused by COVID-19 also posed existential threats to many individuals, with deep affective consequences.

In the face of this litany of stressors, people employ adaptive processes called “coping”, which involve cognitive or behavioral efforts to reduce stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). One way that consumers cope to alleviate negative emotions caused by the stressors produced by the COVID-19 pandemic (and other civic crises) is to undertake panic buying. Panic buying allows consumers to regain some measure of certainty, autonomy and control, thereby reducing the sense of existential threat (Yuen et al, 2020).

Therefore, we expect consumers who faced more stressors during COVID-19 are more inclined to undertake panic buying. Since panic buying is one form of compensatory consumption, and other forms can also compensate negative emotions (Tice, Bratslavsky and Baumeister, 2001), we expect consumers who cope with COVID-19 stressors in other ways than compensatory consumption are less inclined to undertake panic buying.

Moreover, as social animals, consumers are influenced by others when making decisions. Sheu and Kuo (2020) categorize two types of social influence: coercive (influence exerted by

governments) and non-coercive (influence exerted by peer consumers). Coercive social influence can mitigate panic buying, as the imposition of rules can alleviate the decision-making uncertainty that enhances panic buying behavior.

Meanwhile, non-coercive social influence, wherein individuals follow others' actions without deliberation, can result in herd behavior (Sheu and Kuo, 2020). A civic crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic amplifies human vulnerability to herd behavior: stressors add significantly to a consumer's cognitive load, thereby depleting deliberative capacity, while increased uncertainty drives increased reliance on others when making decisions. As a result, after directly or indirectly observing incidents of panic buying, consumers may be more inclined to follow others in undertaking panic buying, without much thought.

Therefore, we expect consumers who are more susceptible to non-coercive social influence – such as those who heavily use social media and those who directly observed vivid examples of panic buying – to be more inclined to undertake panic buying themselves. Conversely, we expect consumers who place greater trust in the government to be less inclined to undertake panic buying.

Another factor that may also affect panic buying during a civic crisis is whether a consumer exhibits a chronic inclination to hoarding. On one hand, consumers with this orientation can be more susceptible to panic buying, due to their stronger desire to maintain over-sufficient in-home stocks; on the other hand, these consumers may already have accumulated in-home stocks pre-pandemic sufficiently large to get them through the crisis – if the crisis was perceived to be relatively short in duration – without the need for panic buying.

Demographic factors are also likely to affect panic buying tendencies. From their meta-analysis, Bish and Miche (2010) find that older, female, more educated, and non-White consumers were more likely to adopt preventive behaviors during pandemics, due to higher perceived

susceptibility to diseases and higher perceived severity of the diseases. Also, Pan et al (2020) find consumers with higher household income stockpile more goods prior to civic emergencies due to their greater purchasing power, possibly further facilitated by greater storage space. Based on these findings, we expect consumers with these demographic characteristics are more inclined to undertake panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast to much of the above-noted research identifying psychological, social and socioeconomic factors that motivate panic buying, in this project we instead take one step back and seek to understand the individual and situational antecedents of those factors that affect the inclination to undertake panic buying. More importantly, we also seek to explore the emotional and cognitive states that consumers experience when confronting, considering or undertaking panic buying. This requires qualitative research to probe what consumers thought and felt while shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative Study Design

To directly obtain perspectives about the experience of panic buying during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to identify emotional and cognitive factors underlying the phenomenon of panic buying, we chose to conduct one-on-one in-depth interviews with adults living in the United States during March-April 2020.

Although some degree of abnormal shopping patterns likely still persist, we did not undertake participant observation, since the primary research interest related to consumer shopping experiences -- and their emotional and cognitive states while shopping, especially related to the phenomenon of panic buying -- during the height of the pandemic in March-April 2020.

Eight informants were interviewed -- four by each of us -- to ensure that richness and diversity of views would be obtained during data gathering. Interviews were designed to last up

to 60 minutes in length, using a structured (i.e., written) interview protocol to better standardize questioning across informants. Upon obtaining informant consent during the introductory section of the protocol, interviews were recorded to ensure that qualitative information was accurately collected for subsequent analysis. To elicit willing participation in hour-long interviews, prospective informants were offered a \$15 gift card to the retailer of their choice (defaulting to Amazon) as compensation for their time.

Because public health concerns stemming from the ongoing COVID pandemic severely mitigated the ability to conduct in-person interviews, all interviews were conducted via videoconference on Zoom.

We selected interviews over the other primary research approach for obtaining qualitative information about past experiences from consumers – focus groups – because open multi-party conversations about panic buying could more easily degenerate into dysfunction, with certain participants at risk of:

- Becoming offended and withdrawing as a result of being accused of panic buying because of its negative connotation.
- Refraining from fully offering their honest perspectives and experience, for fear of producing negative judgments from others.
- Dominating the conversation with their strongly held views, thereby shutting out others from expressing theirs.

Interview Protocol

Prior to conducting interviews, we developed a written protocol for use during interviews. The use of a standard protocol during qualitative research improves the consistency of topical coverage across interviews with eight informants as conducted by two interviewers.

The general structure of the interview protocol consists of four sections:

- An introductory statement, read verbatim to the informant, to appropriately set the context for the interview – including obtaining informant consent for the interview to be recorded.
- A set of open-ended questions – along with some prompts for the interviewer to optionally inject into the conversation to stimulate further reflection by the informant – written to unobtrusively surface perspectives about shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on matters related to panic buying.
- A set of basic factual questions (e.g., birth year, gender, occupation, annual household income, political/religious beliefs, etc.) to gather demographic information about the informant, to facilitate hypothesis development during analysis of qualitative data.
- A closing statement, read verbatim to the informant, to end the interview, thank the informant, and obtain direction from them on whether the informant wants (1) to be named in the final research report and (2) to receive a copy of it.

An early draft of the interview protocol is shown in Appendix A. We created the early draft by compiling questions of interest and placing them in an order that produced a logical flow of dialogue. The project's instructor, Dr. Dipankar Chakravarti, made several recommendations to improve the draft protocol, including:

- Narrowing the focus of the first introductory question down to the impacts of COVID-19 on the informant's life.
- Altering the sequence of questions pertaining to the differences experienced in in-store and online shopping venues.
- Shortening the list of questions, and reducing the number of potential prompts, to contain the interview to no more than 60 minutes.

We finalized our protocol by incorporating the above suggestions and other refinements. The final protocol (Appendix B) consists of a set of demographic questions and nine open-ended questions which are designed to probe 1) the impacts of COVID-19 on the informant's life, 2) pre-pandemic shopping patterns and experience, 3) shopping patterns and experience during the peak of the pandemic, 4) observations of panic buying and the emotional and cognitive reactions to these observations, 5) experience in undertaking panic buying and the emotional and cognitive states associated with panic buying.

The initial questions in the interview protocol were highly effective in causing the informant to defer commenting upon the experience of shopping during COVID-19 until first deeply reflecting upon both (1) shopping patterns and practices before the pandemic arrived and (2) the personal impacts that the pandemic caused. This "priming" helped informants draw clearer contrasts of their shopping experiences, particularly instances of panic buying, during COVID-19. These questions also set up a "baseline" of informants' shopping behaviors, which in turn helped interviewers to better understand informants' emotional and cognitive reactions to the pandemic and panic buying and their emotional and cognitive states when undertaking shopping and panic buying.

Also, the inherent design of the protocol generated a repetitive sequence of questioning when seeking to surface the differences between in-store and online shopping experiences during COVID. In certain instances, this caused a bit of confusion between informant and interviewer, although not to the extent of diminishing the quality of data obtained.

Field Work

Eight informants were interviewed for this research project. To be selected for an interview, informants were required to meet the following three criteria.

Over the age of 21. This research is intended to obtain insight into the shopping experience during COVID-19 for adults responsible for most (if not all) of their household needs, as opposed to younger persons that often rely upon others for supplying their provisions (i.e., dependents). Accordingly, all informants were born before 1999.

Living in the United States during March-April 2020. This research is intended to reveal panic buying patterns and reactions encountered in the grocery value chain of the US at the height of the COVID-19 crisis, as affected by media reports and other environmental factors (e.g., pandemic spread, public health response) prevailing in the US.

Lacking a prior relationship with the interviewers. It was important that the questioning and responses not be influenced by the interviewer's prior knowledge about the informant, especially since any prior discussions even tangentially related to the subject matter could bias data collection.

Using these three criteria, we – both of whom served as interviewers – reached out to our network of family and friends to identify individuals known to them that would likely be willing to be interviewed on the research topic for up to 60 minutes in exchange for a \$15 gift card to the retailer of their choice as compensation for their time. As a result of this indirect recruitment approach, interviews were scheduled and conducted with the following eight individuals (seven of whom consented to make known their identity; detailed demographic information is shown in Appendix C):

Name	Birth Year	Gender	Location	Source
X	1996	Female	New York, NY	Friend of interviewer's friend
Hannah Angel	1992	Female	Blacksburg, VA	Friend of interviewer's roommate
Sarah Shawver	1993	Female	Blacksburg, VA	Friend of interviewer's roommate

Grace Mark	1996	Female	Boston, MA	Friend of interviewer's friend
John Oberschlake	1994	Male	Suburban Cleveland, OH	Employee of interviewer's brother-in-law
Rebecca Miraglia	1963	Female	Suburban Cleveland, OH	Employee of interviewer's brother-in-law
Dee Paulsen	1956	Female	Sturgeon Bay, WI	Mother-in-law of interviewer's nephew
Jaclyn Fiola	1993	Female	Blacksburg, VA	Roommate of interviewer's research project partner

Each of the eight interviews were conducted on the Zoom web-based videoconferencing platform between June 23 and June 26, 2020. We each conducted four interviews. Interviews were recorded on Zoom (both video and audio) upon the informant's consent obtained during the introductory statement of the interview protocol.

To develop transcripts of each interview usable for subsequent analysis, the speech recognition software Otter was employed to produce an initial transcription of the Zoom audio recording. This initial draft transcript was then edited for accuracy and clarity by the interviewer, who compared the results from Otter translation to the original Zoom video/audio recording of the interview. Occasionally, the Zoom recordings suffered from brief lapses in Internet stability and communications bandwidth as the interview was being conducted, in which case best efforts were made to restate the original intent of the informant's comments made during these lapses.

The resulting validated transcripts averaged roughly 20 pages in length, in standard Q&A format (full transcripts are shown in Appendix D). The Q&A included in the transcripts is preceded by a statement of context, providing background on the informant's selection and on the circumstances under which the Zoom interview was conducted.

Findings

General Interpretive Approach

Once final transcripts were obtained from the interviews with the eight informants, we analyzed the statements that were made by informants in the interviews to surface emergent themes on cultural and analytic categories.

Two analytic approaches suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003) were used on the qualitative data (interview transcripts) to yield insights.

Word/phrase repetition (sample of coding materials is shown in Appendix E3). Interview transcripts were reviewed for identical (or nearly identical) words or phrases frequently used during interviews. Repeated mentions by multiple informants of the same word/phrase when responding to the same questions indicated a high degree of consistency of perspectives.

Thematic coding (coding scheme is shown in Appendix E1 and sample of coding materials is shown in Appendix E2). A list of 50 conceptual themes that frequently arose during interviews was compiled, and each of the 50 themes was assigned a coding number (from 1 to 50). This list was then categorized and organized under a hierarchy. Each of the eight informant interviews was scrutinized for statements that could be considered relevant to one or more of the coded themes. In the Word document containing the interview transcripts, comments containing the relevant numerical codes (1-50) were inserted into highlighted passages. Once all interviews were coded thusly, all passages from all interviews ascribed with the same code were grouped together, to facilitate comparisons of commentary pertaining to a given conceptual theme across all eight informants.

Upon reviewing the qualitative data obtained in the interview transcripts, we identified four cultural themes (i.e., cultural categories) and two analytical themes (i.e., analytical categories) and organized common responses by informants into the themes.

We defined cultural themes as themes directly surfaced from each informant's response, such as what they observed, what they experienced, how they thought, and how they felt. We defined analytical themes as themes we inferred from all informants' responses, such as the similarities and differences in informants' observations, their emotional and cognitive reactions and states, and potential causes and consequences of these similarities and differences.

Therefore, we minimized interpretations of informant responses when identifying cultural themes, whereas we proactively drew inferences from informants' responses when identifying analytical themes, based on the existing literature and our personal cultural experiences.

Emergent Themes: Cultural Categories

We identified four cultural categories within which to summarize the responses of informants.

Observations of panic buying

All eight informants acknowledged hearing about panic buying on social media or on TV, suggesting that outside information played a critical role in reinforcing the phenomenon of panic buying to average consumers. In contrast, only three (of eight) informants witnessed a shopper in the store undertaking panic buying activity. Since only three out of eight informants directly observed panic buying, the phenomenon might not be as prevalent as media reports would suggest.

All eight informants agreed that empty shelves or stockouts – especially of toilet paper, paper towels, facial masks, disinfectants and hand sanitizers – were commonplace, thus providing indirect evidence of panic buying. Informants were particularly surprised that toilet paper was the subject of panic buying, since the product offers neither prevention or treatment for COVID-19. Although less common, some informants also heard about or observed low display inventories of selected food items, such as chicken, eggs, dry beans and canned foods.

Most informants directly observed the imposition of quantity limits on certain high-demand products, such as toilet paper and canned foods. Although price gouging is thought to be a common consequence of panic buying, only one informant noticed price increases (on meat and other unspecified products).

Three informants recalled the duration of panic buying and offered speculations on the decline of panic buying. One informant recalled that panic buying was intensive from early March to April, dying down once stores lifted quantity limits and President Trump made an anti-panic-buying statement in mid-April. Another informant recalled panic buying was intensive from late March to early May, reverting to normal gradually as the overall situation improved. A third informant recalled that panic buying was most intensive from early March to late March, and eased because most consumers adopted a new regular routine of obtaining groceries.

Emotional and cognitive responses to panic buying

Most informants negatively evaluated panic buying as a general phenomenon: one informant thought it was emotional and irrational; another informant thought it was psychological; a third thought it was unnecessary (which made her angry); yet another thought it was stupid. Three informants suggested that panic buying was unfortunate because it prevents other shoppers of being able to satisfy their needs. However, one informant acknowledged that panic buying was rational (even if frustrating) and admitted to undertaking panic buying herself. This suggests that consumers who undertake panic buying are more likely to find the value in panic buying than those who do not – especially those who refrain from panic buying primarily to be self-consistent.

After observing panic buying, some informants became concerned about how long product shortages would last and how severe product shortages would become, while other informants did

not worry much because they simply thought they did not need to, had sufficient in-home stocks, or trusted the ability for stores to keep obtaining supplies in the future.

Reasons for/against panic buying

Only two informants explicitly acknowledged that they had undertaken panic buying: one panic bought canned foods and another panic bought various non-perishable food products. For both informants, their primary reason for panic buying was to minimize shopping trips and thereby minimize interpersonal contact to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19.

Concerns about future reliability of local supply were a primary driver for one of these two informants to undertake panic buying, but were explicitly not a factor for the other admitted panic buyer, who was confident in the local supply chain because of her knowledge of the food industry. One other informant who expressed strong negative sentiments about panic buying admitted that a sibling did undertake panic buying, ascribing the rationale to the fact that the sibling had limited choice among stores in their local area. These findings suggest that perceived capability of local supply affects the inclination to undertake panic buying.

As mentioned above, panic buying was often viewed in a negative light by informants because of the adverse impact on the common good that panic buying tends to produce. Several informants indicated that all shoppers should take into account the needs of others when making their consumption decisions, concerned that panic buying could deprive other consumers of what they fairly and justly require. Implicit in this rationale is a substantial degree of moral judgement.

New purchasing practices to secure supplies during the pandemic

Although most informants reported that they did not engage in panic buying, all informants developed new purchasing practices to secure their supply of foods and household goods in a safe way during the pandemic. The most common practice was to plan ahead more in assessing their

current needs, under the assumption that fewer trips to the store would be made, and it would be longer until the next shopping trip would occur. Some informants developed planning habits from scratch, while others strengthened their planning habits, although one informant stopped strict planning and instead switched to a more random shopping pattern involving flexibility in selecting items to purchase based on what was available. This latter example was replicated by other informants, who also became more flexible on product choice based on availability.

Another common practice was to buy larger quantities of products at each store visit, increasing inventories to reduce the number of shopping trips. There were two approaches for buying products in larger quantities to reduce the need for shopping trips: to buy a larger number of items (e.g., buy three loaves of bread rather than one loaf) and to buy items in larger packages (i.e., bulk purchasing, such as 12 roll pack of paper towels rather than a 6 roll pack).

To ensure shopping safety, most informants selected stores with better mitigation practices (e.g., frequent disinfection of carts, hand sanitizer stations, social distancing markings, one-way aisle markings, mask rule enforcement), with wider aisles and with fewer crowds. They also shopped faster to reduce exposure to others. In addition, some informants switched to or relied more on online shopping for either groceries or household goods, either to access a broader selection of products or to minimize in-store shopping time.

Emergent Themes: Analytic Categories

We organized our inferences from informant responses into two analytic categories.

Commonality and Variations in Panic Buying

Although all informants observed panic buying, their observations show both commonality and variation.

All informants heard about panic buying on social media and TV, suggesting not only the role of media in promoting panic buying through non-coercive social influence, but also the potential for media to mitigate panic buying through coercive social influence, such as government-led education (e.g., public service announcements) to ameliorate panic buying.

All informants observed empty shelves and quantity limits for toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectants and hand sanitizers, while some informants observed those of other products as well. This suggests that stockouts of toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectants and hand sanitizers are common nationwide, but stockouts of other products are location-specific (more common in areas with higher risk and with larger population) and time-specific (more common in the afternoon or evening than in the morning).

Three informants observed panic buying in person, and the nuances in their observations suggest that only certain consumers (e.g., women with a large number of children) were inclined to panic buying in areas where the pandemic was less severe, whereas panic buying was prevalent across all groups of consumers in areas where the pandemic was more severe.

Similarly, there are nuances in the duration of panic buying identified by three informants, suggesting that consumers from different areas reacted to the pandemic asynchronously, probably because the pandemic started and peaked asynchronously across the country.

Even from within the same area, consumers reacted differently. As one informant observed, some reacted aggressively, rushing to the stores early in the morning during the peak of the pandemic to hoard everything they could (even perishable foods); however, some consumers reacted more passively and slowly, seemingly content with picking up whatever was left in the store. This observation suggests that – except for objective factors such as location and income –

personality plays a critical role in the reactions to the pandemic, especially including shopping behaviors such as panic buying.

Factors affecting the inclination to panic buying

A primary goal of this research project is to identify emotional and cognitive factors that might affect the inclination for a consumer to undertake panic buying.

First, as expected, local severity of the pandemic seems to affect the perceived demand and supply of critical products, and the capability of local supply seems to affect the inclination for consumers to undertake panic buying. The informant who lived in New York, where the pandemic was most severe during March-April 2020, was most uncertain and worried about the surging demand and the unstable supply of products important to her. Among all eight informants, she undertook the most panic buying, probably because her perceived scarcity was more salient and more severe than was the case for other informants (although we did not explicitly ask her perspective on perceived scarcity). The sister of one informant who lived in a rural area also panic bought, because store alternatives were limited in her area, causing her to question the capability of local supply.

Second, the relationship between stressors and stress-caused negative emotions and panic buying is more complex. Although all but one informant experienced a litany of negative emotions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – uncertainty, stress, frustration, isolation, anxiety and others (such as “being cooped up”) – there appears to be no relationship between the magnitude or intensity of negative emotions and the inclination to undertake panic buying. This suggests that stressors alone are not sufficient to trigger panic buying. However, there is evidence that panic buying can be mitigated if other coping mechanisms are effective. Informants who coped with

stressors in other ways – such as cooking, developing new hobbies, and purchasing clothing and hedonic products – were less prone to panic buying.

Third, as expected, a chronic inclination to hoarding appears to affect panic buying in both directions. The parents of two informants were reported to be hoarders: yet, one did not panic buy because in-home stocks were deemed sufficient, while the other panic bought toilet paper and paper towels despite their already sizable in-home stocks. The orientation towards hoarding may be correlated with storage space: consumers who have a greater volume of storage space are more likely to have the inclination to hoarding. The lack of storage space also prevented at least two informants from panic buying.

Fourth, the criticality of the product in question to a consumer's life makes it more subject to panic buying. This phenomenon is most vividly illustrated by toilet paper. It appears to be widely (if not universally) shared among consumers that toilet paper is a product that cannot be lived without for even the briefest durations. For virtually everyone, there is a strong negative affect attached to the thought of being without toilet paper, and no expense is spared to ensure its availability at all times in the household, even though the product does not directly address any individual and societal priorities to mitigate COVID-19.

Lastly, we speculate that household size plays a critical role in panic buying. Consumers responsible for making purchases to support a larger household appear to be more inclined to panic buying. For example, the panic buyers observed by two informants were with several children, suggesting they were buying on behalf of a large household. Similarly, the sister of one informant was said to have undertaken panic buying, and she took care of her parents in addition to shopping for a large household with several children. One informant's parents panic bought not only for themselves, but also to accumulate provisional supplies for their daughter and parents. This

positive relationship between household size and the inclination to panic buying may be rooted in a mental multiplication. As mentioned, consumers started planning ahead their consumption needs farther into the future in order to reduce their shopping trips; as a result, instead of shopping to obtain baseline needs for one week, they had to purchase two or three times more than baseline needs to last three weeks until the next shopping trip. For large households, the implied volumetric increases associated with this mental multiplication became very large, thereby making the implications of potential scarcity more salient to these consumers and increasing their motivation to panic buy “just in case”.

Integrated Interpretation

By strict application of the definition of “panic buying” borrowed from prior research (Yuen et al, 2020), all eight informants indicated that they undertook panic buying of groceries and household goods during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every informant acknowledged purchasing greater volumes of certain products during March-April 2020 than their normal consumption patterns would suggest. However, deviations from normal purchasing behavior were generally not attributed to concerns about future product shortages: only two informants admitted to any form of “panic buying” as it is commonly expressed or perceived as a means of hoarding. This finding suggests that the definition of panic buying should be re-evaluated.

Instead, increases in consumption bundles during the peak of the pandemic were mainly attributed to public and personal health preservation: in order to minimize the probability of catching and then spreading COVID-19, all informants sought to minimize contact with strangers that typically occurs during in-store shopping. This was mainly accomplished by reducing the number of shopping visits to stores, thereby creating the need to plan consumption farther ahead into the future and accumulating larger stocks of goods on each of their fewer shopping trips.

The experience of shopping during the pandemic – including and beyond the topic of panic-buying – is fraught with much more emotion than is typically the case for shopping excursions. This drives a high degree of moral judgements by consumers on “what is right and what is wrong” in how others undertake their shopping. This is especially manifested by judgements that other shoppers often (1) lack adequate consideration for others when buying what is seen to be “more than necessary” and (2) are indifferent or inattentive to following social distancing guidelines.

Between heightened avoidance of contact with strangers and increased distrust of others, the shopping experience has become more impersonal and less pleasant. The desire to spend time in stores browsing items or socializing has significantly declined, replaced with a preference to quickly enter and exit the store in minimum time. Conversely, on-line shopping with delivery or curbside pickup has increased. Although rarely a favorite activity and often viewed as a nuisance before the pandemic, shopping has now become a set of risks to be mitigated. Correspondingly, stores seen to be better managing the pandemic have become preferred – even if some convenience and economic savings must be sacrificed.

Lastly, information from outside sources critically shapes consumer attitudes about panic buying. Panic buying may only be infrequently observed directly, but instances of panic buying gain wide circulation in news reports, social media, and word of mouth. In turn, narratives about shopping during COVID-19 – some of which may be apocryphal – dominate the actual shopping experience. From these narratives, virtually every consumer has predispositions and already-set notions of what to expect before beginning a shopping event. While certain consumers generally accept these narratives and may thus act in ways that tend to reinforce outcomes associated with panic buying, many consumers hold strongly negative assessments of panic buying and panic buyers that tend to drive them to overtly reject these narratives and seek to act differently.

However, even consumers negatively inclined to panic buying nevertheless do increase their purchase volumes above normal levels.

Discussion

This qualitative research project to investigate the emotional and cognitive factors associated with shopping during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic has generated the following findings.

From a cognitive perspective, shoppers were more concerned about staying safe and healthy relative to COVID-19 than they generally were about future availability of supplies due to surging consumer demands. Therefore, increases in purchase volumes -- sometimes leading to inventory depletion of certain goods -- were driven more by the desire to reduce the number of trips to the store and thereby minimize interpersonal contact with strangers than the concern that supplies would run out sometime in the near-future. Acknowledged decisions to undertake panic buying appear to be related to several objective factors: the number of dependents for which the shopper was responsible, the severity of the pandemic in the local area, and the relative dearth of store options in the area. To the extent that shoppers observed someone buying inordinate amounts of a product, such behavior was generally viewed dispassionately as illogical or overemotional.

From an emotional perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a range of negative emotions to the day-to-day shopping experience. Not only were consumers annoyed by stockouts and panic buying deemed to be unnecessary, but were stressed by increased needs to plan further ahead their consumption requirements, maintain social distancing and sanitary practices, reduce time spent in stores, change their shopping behaviors to avoid lines and crowds, and be more flexible about product selection to accommodate shortages. Reports of panic buying incidents via news, social media and word of mouth were critical in heightening these negative emotions that

consumers newly brought to shopping during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is possible that panic buying occurred as a compensatory consumption mechanism to alleviate some of these stressors. Since it does not offer any prevention or treatment for COVID-19 but yet was the preeminent target for panic buying, toilet paper must hold a very high emotional stature in consumer hierarchies of perceived need.

These findings suggest some further potential in reconceptualizing panic buying, beginning with reevaluating the basic definition of the phenomenon and developing new distinctions within the overall phenomenon.

First, does panic buying refer to an individual behavior or to a collective phenomenon? In previous literature as well as in our report, the term “panic buying” refers to both. However, it is important to distinguish between the two because their causes can be different. For example, we find herding plays no role in individual panic buying but previous literature suggests herding drives collective panic buying, leading us to speculate that herding drives collective panic buying but not individual panic buying.

Second, should panic buying be defined by intention or by outcome? This question can be boiled down to the qualification of panic buying: whether consumers have to be panicked and aware of their abnormal buying behaviors are induced by their panic or not. Clearly, the definition we adopt from the previous research and use in this project is outcome-based and the key criteria to qualify panic buying is whether consumers purchase “unusually large quantities of goods” despite their panic level and awareness level. Our interviews suggest a calibration problem with criteria: how much “more than usual” is considered as “unusually large”? This calibration problem may also explain why most informants declaimed their panic buying behaviors: they had trouble quantifying “unusually large”. It is critical to solve this issue in future qualitative research, or there

could be consistent misunderstanding between informants and researchers when “panic buying” is used in conversations.

These findings also open several new possibilities for future research on panic buying. First, we find the chronic inclination to hoarding can affect the inclination to undertake panic buying in both positive and negative directions. This suggests there are potential moderators that drive some consumers with a chronic hoarding orientation to undertake panic buying but prevent others from panic buying.

Second, we speculate that the positive relationship between household size and the inclination to undertake panic buying is rooted in mental multiplication and heightened perceived scarcity; however, experimental studies are necessary to test this proposed mechanism, and large scale empirical studies will be helpful to enhance the external validity of this finding.

Third, although we assume that the local severity of the pandemic and the capability of local supply affect panic buying through perceived scarcity, there can be other alternative mechanisms that drive panic buying. For example, if local pandemic severity is high but local supply capability is low, consumers will be more likely to feel uncertain, stressed and loss of control, and this emotional state -- rather than a cognitive logic pertaining to ensuring adequate stocks in the face of unpredictable supply/demand balances -- may drive panic buying as a coping strategy. Future research can aim to tease apart and test the different mechanisms involved in the relationship between the panic buying and the confluence of the local severity of the pandemic and the capability of local supply.

Lastly, further research should explore whether panic buying is indeed a compensatory consumption mechanism. As noted above, a civic crisis like COVID-19 induces a plethora of negative emotions among the base of consumers. Does buying large quantities of certain goods

alleviate these negative emotions? And, can different types of panic buying address different negative emotions? For instance, buying large quantities of toilet paper probability eliminates the risk -- and perhaps the corresponding dread -- of needing to manage life without toilet paper, while buying a large quantity of a highly-desired food item (e.g., “comfort food”) may be intended to introduce a source of pleasure and satisfaction into an emotional state beset by higher degrees of sadness, annoyance, anger and frustration.

Naturally, these findings are only indicative, and intended to generate hypotheses for further research. Because of the small sample size (eight informants), the proportionality or frequency of these findings should not be assumed to apply to the general population of shoppers in the United States during March-April 2020. In addition, since all of the eight informants lived in the northeastern quadrant of the United States, seven of the eight informants were female, and six of the eight informants were under the age of 30, it would be interesting to gather qualitative data from informants in underrepresented segments of the overall American population to see if response patterns are broadly similar or reveal certain specific differences.

Moreover, we did not explore other nuances associated with panic buying, such as the factors that drive the timing and magnitude of panic buying, or how the decision to undertake panic buying subsequently affects consumer’s emotional and cognitive states after the purchase. Further research in these areas may better enable the discovery of “nudges” -- actions that can be taken by either retailers or government agencies that can mitigate panic buying.

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Appendix A Original Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is _____ and I am a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business.

I am working with Prof. Dipankar Chakravarti and a fellow student on a research project for a Ph.D. marketing course that aims to explore and understand the consumer experience of shopping for household goods during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are currently interviewing a small number of consumers like you, so that we can draw on your experience to help us understand the nature of panic buying during a civic crisis – how consumers affectively and cognitively feel and experience before, during and after shopping during a crisis, what strategies consumers adopt for shopping during a crisis, and as a result why panic buying happens.

By asking you to speak with us, we are not suggesting that you undertook panic buying, though you may have observed or experienced the effects of panic buying by others. We are most interested in your personal views and opinions on this topic as they reflect your own individual experiences.

Before we start, we want to assure you that your identity will be held in confidence and will not be revealed to anyone other than my fellow team member and Prof. Chakravarti. Your opinions and views will be shared only in aggregate form and will not be attributed to you by name in any report of the study, which is being conducted for course credit and not for general publication. Upon completion, we will be happy to share our report, if you are interested.

Although we will take notes during the interview, it will be very helpful if we have your permission to video record this conversation so that we accurately capture your opinions and input. We will remove all personal identifiers from the recording and will follow Virginia Tech's institutional policies on the safe keeping of this material. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the course of this study, including now.

(Use a video recorder or laptop-based auto-transcriber if permission is granted. Otherwise hand-record your notes).

QUESTIONS

Q1: To begin the interview, we would like to know a little bit more about you in general terms. Please take 5 minutes to talk about yourself.

Elaboration Probes:

- What kind of person would you describe yourself to be?
- How would you describe your life story until now?
- How would you describe your current life situation?
- What does a typical day for you look like?
- What matters the most to you?

This question is designed to elicit individual differences that might contribute towards an informant's shopping patterns, his/her reactions to panic buying and panic buying behaviors (if s/he engaged in panic buying).

Time check: 5 minutes

Q2. Think back in time to before the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss how you typically shopped for groceries and other household goods.

Elaboration Probes:

- Objective of shopping (e.g., for family, for self, for roommates)
- Typical shopping experience
 - Typical frequency: x times per week, weekly, monthly, quarterly
 - Typical state of mind: rushed/relaxed, enjoyable/nuisance
 - Typical amount of money spent per shopping trip
 - Typical time spent during each shopping trip
 - Items usually/frequently purchased, and amount of these items purchased in each shopping trip
- Shopping channels: online vs. in-store vs. both;
 - Online: Amazon, Target.com, Walmart.com, others
 - In-store: big box (e.g., Target, Walmart), high-end supermarket (e.g., Whole Foods), supermarket chain (e.g., Kroger), dollar stores (e.g., Dollar General, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar), convenience stores (e.g., 7-11, Circle K), local grocery stores
- Shopping approach: shop when needed (more random) vs shop as planned (more organized); shop as part of other errands; shop with/without discounts/coupons

This question is designed to depict the informant's pre-pandemic shopping patterns to serve as a baseline in identifying the specific impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q3. Now think about mid-March when the pandemic became a severe issue in the United States. How did your shopping patterns change?

Elaboration Probes:

- Life experience during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Impacts on day-to-day life
 - Stress and concerns: overall stress level, health concerns, monetary concerns
 - Feeling, emotion and moods: distracted, anxious, uncertain
- Nuances or changes in shopping behaviors (compared to pre-pandemic shopping behaviors)
 - Change in what to purchase (i.e., typical items purchased)
 - Change in how much to purchase (i.e., number of typical items purchased)
 - Change in how often to shop (i.e., shopping frequency)
 - Change in where to shop (i.e., shopping channels)

This question is designed to help informants to recall their daily life, shopping experiences and their thoughts and feelings while shopping during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparison with the answer to Q2 should yield differences in shopping caused by COVID-19.

Time check: 20 minutes

Q4: Did you hear or read about what is sometimes called “panic buying”? Did you observe any “panic buying” during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what have you heard or read about? What have you observed? What were your thoughts and reactions?

Elaboration Probes:

- Explain what panic buying is to the informant if s/he is not familiar with the term (but they should have heard of or observed the phenomenon)
- Source of knowledge regarding panic buying
 - Media coverage
 - WOM
 - Personal observation and experience
- Evidence of panic buying
 - Empty shelves
 - Other shoppers buying unusually large amounts
 - Other shoppers fighting for the limited goods
- Thoughts about and reactions to his/her observations:
 - Thoughts: rational vs. irrational; fear-inducing; uncertainty-inducing, surreal
 - Reactions: cautious, wait and see, objective, following
- Different thoughts and reaction compared to panic buying occurred in other prior emergencies experienced (hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes)

This question is designed to explore the informant's knowledge and observations regarding panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic and his/her thoughts about and reactions to them. It is also designed to help the informant be familiar with the key research phenomenon.

Q5: When shopping in a store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buying or actually buy an unusual amount of an item “just in case”? (if YES, skip Q9; if ONLINE ONLY, skip to Q7; if NO, skip to Q9)

This question is designed to identify whether the informant was a panic buyer during the pandemic.

Q6: Tell us more about the time(s) during an in-store shopping experience when you considered buying, or actually bought, more than you needed of an item. What did you think about and how did you feel at such time(s)?

Elaboration Probes:

- Decision-making process
 - What did you end up deciding: buying more or not?
 - What was your thought process: emotion-based or reason based?
 - How did the (real or perceived) behavior of others affect your thinking?
 - What was different about that shopping experience relative to others when you didn't buy more?
- Strategic considerations
 - Which items and why these items
 - How much more and why this much more
 - Where to buy and why choose one over others (e.g., choosing Target over Walmart because of the better mitigation strategies taken)
 - When to buy and why this (these) time(s) (e.g., shopping in the morning because of the small number of shoppers)
 - What tricks and how the tricks are figured out (e.g., refreshing at midnight on Amazon for restock)
- Cognitive state: readiness, distraction, consciousness, certainty, confusedness
- Affective state: distress, calmness, alertness, confidence, anger
- Emotion and mood

- Influence of shopping environment and other shoppers
 - Shopping environment: mitigation strategy, store layout, home atmosphere
 - Other shoppers: choice, behavior

This question is designed to dig into the informant's decision process and actual experience of panic buying when in stores.

Time check: 45 minutes

Q7. Tell us more about the time(s) you considered buying, or actually bought, more than you needed of an item online. What did you think about and how did you feel at such time(s)? How were your thoughts and feelings different from in-store shopping (for both online and in-store shoppers only)?

Elaboration Probes:

- Decision-making process
 - What did you end up deciding: buying more or not?
 - What was your thought process: emotion-based or reason based?
 - How did the (real or perceived) behavior of others affect your thinking?
 - What was different about that shopping experience relative to others when you didn't buy more?
 - Why did you start shopping groceries and household goods online (if they did not do this before the pandemic)?
- Strategic considerations
 - Which items and why these items
 - How much more and why this more
 - Where to buy and why choose one over others
 - When to buy and why this (these) time(s)
 - What tricks and how the tricks are figured out (e.g., refreshing at midnight on Amazon for re-stock)
- Cognitive state: readiness, distraction, consciousness, certainty, confusedness
- Affective state: distress, calmness, alertness, confidence, anger
- Emotion and mood
- Influence of shopping environment and product information
 - Shopping environment: product page design, website ads, home atmosphere
 - Product information: price, limited quantity, stock information, consumer reviews
- Difference between online and in-store experiences of panic buying

This question is designed to dig into the informant's decision process and actual experience of panic buying when on-line.

Time check: 60 minutes

Q8: Back to today, have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between? Why?

Elaboration Probes:

- How long did your pandemic shopping patterns last (if the informant has returned to pre-pandemic shopping patterns and has not engaged in panic buying anymore)?

- How long do you expect the pandemic shopping patterns will last (if the informant is still in pandemic shopping patterns and continue to engage in panic buying)?
- Would you say you have adapted to some new hybrid shopping patterns and how long do you expect these hybrid shopping patterns will last (if the informant is in between)?
- How the current situation is similar to or different from the peak? When did the difference start becoming apparent (if the informants suggest the difference)?
- How did your shopping patterns change when that difference became apparent?

This question is designed to assess whether (and to what degree) the informant thinks that the need for panic buying has diminished – and if so, what has specifically reduced perceived risks since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q9: If you didn't engage in any panic buying, tell us more about your thinking about panic buying.

Elaboration Probes:

- State of mind during the decision-making process
- Reasoning

This question is designed to explore why the informant did not engage in panic buying.

Q10: Before we close for today, would you like to add any other comments related to panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic that we have not covered yet?

Elaboration Probes None

Time check: 75 minutes

WRAP-UP

Thank you for your time today. My professor, research partner, and I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your views with us. As a token of our appreciation, please accept this gift card for your enjoyment.

We would like to reaffirm our original assurance of confidentiality. Would you object to us thanking you by name in our finished report (without attributing any opinions)?

Record response: ☐ Yes – feel free to thank me by name ☐ No – do not identify me

Finally, if you are interested, we will be very pleased to provide you a copy of our final report, which should be completed by the end of August. Are you interested in receiving a copy?

Record response: ☐ Yes – please provide me a report ☐ No – do not send a report

Once again, thank you so much for your time and your perspectives.

Appendix B

Final Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is _____ and I am a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business.

I am working with Prof. Dipankar Chakravarti and a fellow student on a research project for a Ph.D. marketing course that aims to explore and understand the consumer experience of shopping for household goods during the COVID-19 pandemic. We wish to understand how consumers think and feel before, during and after shopping during a civic crisis.

We are most interested in your personal views and opinions on this topic as they reflect your own individual experiences.

Before we start, we want to assure you that your identity will be held in confidence and will not be revealed to anyone other than my fellow team member and Prof. Chakravarti. Your opinions and views will be shared only in aggregate form and will not be attributed to you by name in any report of the study, which is being conducted for course credit and not for general publication. Upon completion, we will be happy to share our report, if you are interested.

Although we will take notes during the interview, it will be very helpful if we have your permission to video record this conversation so that we accurately capture your opinions and input. We will remove all personal identifiers from the recording and will follow Virginia Tech's institutional policies on the safe keeping of this material. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the course of this study, including now.

(Use a video recorder or laptop-based auto-transcriber if permission is granted. Otherwise hand-record your notes).

QUESTIONS

Q1: To begin the interview, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?

Elaboration Probes:

- How has your typical day changed?
- How have your priorities changed?
- How have your thinking or feelings changed?

Time check: 5 minutes

Q2. Think back in time to before the COVID-19 pandemic and describe how you typically shopped for groceries and other household goods.

Elaboration Probes:

- Objective of shopping (e.g., for family, for self, for roommates)
- Typical shopping experience

- Typical frequency: x times per week, weekly, monthly, quarterly
- Typical state of mind: rushed/relaxed, enjoyable/nuisance
- Typical amount of money spent per shopping trip
- Typical time spent during each shopping trip
- Items usually/frequently purchased, and amount of these items purchased in each shopping trip
- Shopping channels: online vs. in-store vs. both;
 - Online: Amazon, Target.com, Walmart.com, others
 - In-store: big box (e.g., Target, Walmart), high-end supermarket (e.g., Whole Foods), supermarket chain (e.g., Kroger), dollar stores (e.g., Dollar General, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar), convenience stores (e.g., 7-11, Circle K), local grocery stores
- Shopping approach: shop when needed (more random) vs shop as planned (more organized); shop as part of other errands; shop with/without discounts/coupons

Time check: 15 minutes

Q3. Now think about mid-March when the pandemic became a severe issue in the United States. How did your shopping patterns change?

Elaboration Probes:

- Life experience during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Impacts on day-to-day life
 - Stress and concerns: overall stress level, health concerns, monetary concerns
 - Feeling, emotion and moods: distracted, anxious, uncertain
- Nuances or changes in shopping behaviors (compared to pre-pandemic shopping behaviors)
 - Change in what to purchase (i.e., typical items purchased)
 - Change in how much to purchase (i.e., number of typical items purchased)
 - Change in how often to shop (i.e., shopping frequency)
 - Change in where to shop (i.e., shopping channels)

Time check: 25 minutes

Q4: Describe what you may know about what people sometimes call “panic buying”.

Elaboration Probes:

- Have you observed it?
- Do you have any thoughts and feelings about it?

Time check: 30 minutes

Q5: When shopping in a store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buying or actually buy an unusual amount of an item “just in case”? (if ONLINE ONLY, skip to Q7b; if NO, skip to Q8b)

Q6: Tell us more about the time(s) during an in-store shopping experience when you considered buying, or actually bought, more than you needed of an item. What did you think about and how did you feel at that time(s)?

Elaboration Probes:

- Decision-making process

- What did you end up deciding: buying more or not?
- What was your thought process: emotion-based or reason based?
- How did the (real or perceived) behavior of others affect your thinking?
- What was different about that shopping experience relative to others when you didn't buy more?
- Strategic considerations
 - Which items and why these items
 - How much more and why this much more
 - Where to buy and why choose one over others (e.g., choosing Target over Walmart because of the better mitigation strategies taken)
 - When to buy and why this (these) time(s) (e.g., shopping in the morning because of the small number of shoppers)
 - What tricks and how the tricks are figured out (e.g., refreshing at midnight on Amazon for re-stock)
- Cognitive state: readiness, distraction, consciousness, certainty, confusedness
- Affective state: distress, calmness, alertness, confidence, anger
- Emotion and mood
- Influence of shopping environment and other shoppers
 - Shopping environment: mitigation strategy, store layout, home atmosphere
 - Other shoppers: choice, behavior

Time check: 40 minutes

Q7a: How were things different during the time(s) you considered buying, or actually bought, more than you needed of an item online?

Elaboration Probes:

- How different from in-store?
 - Different time of day
 - Different weather
 - Different item(s)
- How has online buying changed since pandemic?

Q7b: Tell us more about the time(s) during an online shopping experience when you considered buying, or actually bought, more than you needed of an item. What did you think about and how did you feel at that time(s)?

Elaboration Probes:

- Decision-making process
 - What did you end up deciding: buying more or not?
 - What was your thought process: emotion-based or reason based?
 - How did the (real or perceived) behavior of others affect your thinking?
 - What was different about that shopping experience relative to others when you didn't buy more?
 - Why did you start shopping groceries and household goods online (if they did not do this before the pandemic)?
- Strategic considerations
 - Which items and why these items

- How much more and why this more
- Where to buy and why choose one over others
- When to buy and why this (these) time(s)
- What tricks and how the tricks are figured out (e.g., refreshing at midnight on Amazon for re-stock)
- Cognitive state: readiness, distraction, consciousness, certainty, confusedness
- Affective state: distress, calmness, alertness, confidence, anger
- Emotion and mood
- Influence of shopping environment and product information
 - Shopping environment: product page design, website ads, home atmosphere
 - Product information: price, limited quantity, stock information, consumer reviews

Time check: 45 minutes

Q8a: Back to today, have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between? Why?

Q8b: Back to today, based on your observation, have other people's shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between? Why?

Elaboration Probes:

- How long did your/people's pandemic shopping patterns last (if the informant has returned to/thinks people have returned to pre-pandemic shopping patterns and has not engaged in panic buying anymore)?
- How long do you expect the pandemic shopping patterns will last (if the informant is still in/thinks people are still in pandemic shopping patterns and continue to engage in panic buying)?
- Would you say you/people have adapted to some new hybrid shopping patterns and how long do you expect these hybrid shopping patterns will last (if the informant is/thinks people are in between)?
- How the current situation is similar to or different from the peak? When did the difference start becoming apparent (if the informants suggest the difference)?
- How did your shopping patterns change when that difference became apparent?

Time check: 55 minutes

Q9: Before we close for today, would you like to add any other comments related to panic buying that we have not covered yet?

WRAP-UP

To complete our survey, allow us to collect some basic demographic information, which we will keep anonymous.

- Year of birth:
- Gender:
- Education:

- Occupation:
- Annual household income:
- Marital status:
- Household definition:
 - Type of family (e.g., nuclear, single)
 - Number of kids / age of kids
 - Size of household
- Religious beliefs:
- Political beliefs:

Thank you for your time today. My professor, research partner, and I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your views with us. As a token of our appreciation, please accept this gift card for your enjoyment.

We want to reaffirm our original assurance of confidentiality. Would you object to us thanking you by name in our finished report (without attributing any opinions)?

Record response: ☐ Yes – feel free to thank me by name ☐ No – do not identify me

Finally, if you are interested, we will be pleased to provide you a copy of our final report, which should be completed by the end of August. Are you interested in receiving a copy?

Record response: ☐ Yes – please provide me a report ☐ No – do not send a report

Once again, thank you so much for your time and your perspectives.

Appendix C
Informant Characteristics

	Location	Education	Occupation	Gender	YOB
Fiola	Blacksburg, VA	Bachelor's	PhD student	Female	1993
Miraglia	Cleveland, OH	MBA	Risk Management	Female	1963
Oberschchlake	Cleveland, OH	Bachelor's	Risk Management	Male	1994
Paulsen	Sturgeon Bay, WI	Master's	Retired Teacher	Female	1956
Angel	Blacksburg, VA	Bachelor's	PhD student	Female	1993
Shawver	Blacksburg, VA	Master's	PhD student	Female	1992
Mark	Boston, MA	Doctorate	Unemployed	Female	1996
X	New York, NY	Bachelor's	Advertising	Female	1996

	Marital Status	Religious Belief	Political Belief
Fiola	Single	Agnostic	Democrat
Miraglia	Married	Catholic	Republican
Oberschchlake	Married	Christian	Republican
Paulsen	Married	Christian	Neutral
Angel	Single	Atheist	Democrat
Shawver	Single	Christian	Democrat
Mark	Single	Unsure	NA
X	Single	Christian	Liberalism

	Household income	Household	Shop for
Fiola	\$33k	with one roommate and a cat	self and cat
Miraglia	\$160k	with husband and a 16-year old daughter	self, husband and daughter
Oberschchlake	\$120k	with wife	self and wife
Paulsen	\$100k+	with husband	self and husband
Angel	\$18-20k+	with roommate	self
Shawver	\$33k	live alone	self
Mark	NA	with two roommates	self
X	\$60k	with boyfriend	self and boyfriend

Appendix D

Interview Notes and Transcripts

INFORMANT: Jaclyn Fiola

INTERVIEWER: Richard Stuebi

DATE: June 25, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is the roommate of the Interviewer's research partner for this project, based in Blacksburg Virginia.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes. Interview was originally scheduled for 9:30 am ET on a weekday, but at late notice, Interviewer requested 30 minute delay due to a personal matter that urgently needed to get resolved.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER:

So to begin, how has the COVID pandemic affected your life?

INFORMANT:

So, the biggest thing for me was I'm not supposed to go to campus or spend as much time in my lab or do my job. And so most of my work has become online, like literature reviews and stuff like that. I spend way more time in my apartment than I ever have before. And I haven't seen family and friends in months now, so I'm calling them and checking in on them.

INTERVIEWER:

You haven't seen -- we broke up for a second -- you haven't seen what for awhile?

INFORMANT:

My family or friends.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

INFORMANT:

Yeah, other than through Zoom or something. Because my family lives all over the country and I'm down here in Blacksburg. So that's definitely been different. But I have a roommate and a cat. So we keep each other company.

INTERVIEWER:

Would you say that your -- how would you say that your day to day life has changed? I mean, if you've been, if you could describe the course of a typical day, before the pandemic and now.

INFORMANT:

Yeah, so a typical day before the pandemic, I would get up -- not always on time -- but I would get up, eat breakfast, go to campus, and I would usually spend about half my day at my desk, answering email. just working on my dissertation. And then the other half of the day, I'd spent either in the lab working on my lab projects or like out in the field or working on classwork or something like that. Versus now, I get up and get on my computer and try to focus all day on just computer work. So again, literature reviews, answering emails -- part of my project is totally changed, and now I'm doing a modeling project, which is all computer software. And so that's really different. And I feel like I spend more time on like -- I spend more time on my computer than I would have if I was going to campus

and I had a set like "I'm on campus, now I can work and I'm going to leave at five or six." Versus now, I'm always here and so you know, it's nine o'clock at night, and I'm still working,

INTERVIEWER:

Would you -- you said you'd go back and forth to campus. Were there any other places that you would go?

INFORMANT:

Not really. Sometimes a few of us from my grad student office would go work at Polos at the coffee shop, or just outside on one of the picnic tables. Or we walk and get lunch and then come back. But generally stayed on campus all day.

INTERVIEWER:

Would you say your priorities have changed in any way during the pandemic?

INFORMANT:

Not really. I've definitely tried to be, to talk to my parents more than usual. I mean, I feel like usually I would call them once a month, maybe, now I try to call them at least every other week, same with my grandparents and my brother, and trying to stay in touch a little bit better because I know they're cooped up, too. But in general, not too much has changed.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Let's start focusing in on the subject of shopping. So, think before COVID now, so late last year say -- how would you describe your typical shopping habits and behaviors for groceries and household goods back then?

INFORMANT:

So, probably about once every two weeks, I would get groceries. I like going to Aldi, because they're cheap. So that's about a 15 minute drive. And so usually I would alternate between like Aldi and Kroger and if at all possible, I would use the online order for Kroger and then pick up in the parking lot online pickup thing...

INTERVIEWER:

This was even before COVID?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, even before, because I like getting all the coupons and sales and they're easy to see on the website, because all the sales are listed together so I can just click on them. And so I would do that even before the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER:

Hmmm. So it was as much a cost-saving strategy as it was time-saving or convenience?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, mostly cost saving, I think. I would usually wait around for the free pick up promo codes and then use that. I also realized that, if you place your order on one day, and then it switches to a new week of sales, you can also get those sales. So sometimes I would double-dip on those.

INTERVIEWER:

So you mentioned you'd go about every couple of weeks. Was that always to Aldi, or alternating between Aldi and Kroger or you do Kroger in between the Aldi two week run?

INFORMANT:

I'm pretty much altering or alternating I would say, just because Aldi doesn't have everything I always need. Like, if I need something specific, Aldi doesn't always have it. And so I mainly go to Aldi for produce and bulk things like flour and sugar that are cheaper there. And then I go to Kroger for, like, chips that actually taste good. And stuff like that. So, it's mostly brand stuff.

INTERVIEWER:

I see, okay. How about for household goods like paper towels and laundry detergent and soap and aspirin and things like that?

INFORMANT:

Um, I would get whatever I could at Aldi, usually I'll get toilet paper and paper towels and things like that at Aldi and like multivitamins, and then whatever I can't get at Aldi I usually just order on Amazon. Like laundry detergent, I always order on Amazon, mostly because I don't like Walmart or Target, and so...

INTERVIEWER:

But you do it on Amazon as opposed to either Aldi or Kroger because it's cheaper or more convenient? What reason?

INFORMANT:

Oh it's more convenient because a lot of time, you know, like laundry detergent, I used it up and I'm like "Oh, shoot, I need laundry detergent now, and I don't want to go to Kroger." I just order it on Amazon and get the two-day shipping.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh, so in that particular example, "now" doesn't mean immediately -- you're doing laundry and you're out of detergent? You can usually see ahead a couple days?

INFORMANT:

Usually, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. And so who do you shop for?

INFORMANT:

Just me, my cat.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And, do you like the process of shopping? Would -- how do you view shopping?

INFORMANT:

Normally, I dislike it. I mean, especially now, but even before the pandemic, I just -- because I was spending all day on campus at work, the only time you could go shopping was when everyone else was shopping, and I don't like standing in line and waiting around and waiting for carts and things. So generally, I don't like shopping.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, so it's a time issue?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, mostly. And, I keep a shopping list, but as soon as I go shopping I come home and I'm tired so I don't want to deal the shopping stuff so I end up ordering food or just ordering stuff on Amazon.

INTERVIEWER:

The -- how long would you say a typical trip to the grocery store would take?

INFORMANT:

Probably 30 to 40 minutes.

INTERVIEWER:

Inside the store? Or is that including driving there and parking and all that?

INFORMANT:

No, that's inside the store.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, yeah.

INFORMANT:

So Aldi's a little further away, driving wise. Probably, if I'm going in Kroger or Aldi, it's about the same: 30 to 45 minutes. Because I'm pretty thorough when I'm shopping, because I have a list I'm following and I'm looking for sales on staples and things that I can get.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you have your shopping list and you know how the stores are organized. You just -- are you very focused and go right to the aisles where you need to go? Or, do you browse for new things and new ideas or things that you might have forgotten?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I browse, especially at the smaller stores. So the Kroger I go to is the smaller Kroger -- there are two Kroger's in Blacksburg. Smaller, and I prefer that one because I, the big one, I just get lost in because I try to go down every aisle to make sure I didn't forget something or to find sale items. The same with Aldi. Actually, it was it was funny: my boyfriend was visiting a couple weeks ago during the pandemic, and Aldi only allows one person per household in the store at a time, and so I was sending him to get groceries and I know the layout of Aldi so well that I drew a map. I'm like "This is where muffins are, go here."

INTERVIEWER:

Got it. Okay. You mentioned you used online shopping for the occasional -- I don't know how you'd call it -- household goods, consumables. What things would you buy on-, would consider buying online versus not, you wouldn't entertain it at all?

INFORMANT:

Um, well at this point, I'm willing to buy anything except for quickly perishable goods online. I also try to support brands that I think are decent, they give high quality products that also are environmentally friendly. I'm an environmental scientist. Like when I'm buying toilet paper, I really try to buy the toilet paper without the cardboard tube in it, because I think it's wasteful. And so that's something I usually buy on Amazon: I follow one brand that has that specific toilet paper without the tube and just buy that whenever I'm out.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And a typical shopping excursion, how much would you spend approximately?

INFORMANT:

It depends. Grocery shopping for groceries and household goods at Aldi, I consistently spend \$60 to \$100, but Kroger, it's all over the place because usually when I go to Kroger, it's to buy specific things for like a recipe. Or, you know, I'm out of syrup or something like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. Now let's fast forward. That discussion was about pre-pandemic. Now let's think to the peak of the pandemic, maybe March, I guess. How did your shopping patterns change when the pandemic became a pressing issue?

INFORMANT:

I moved online almost entirely. I again did the Kroger either delivery or the online pickup. I still went to Aldi a couple times when I really needed produce, because I don't like the Kroger employees' choices of the produce and stuff that I would order. But, generally everything else -- you know, toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent -- everything else, I bought online.

INTERVIEWER:

Mainly through Kroger? And they would deliver?

INFORMANT:

Oh, no through like Amazon or Target or Walmart.com.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, but I thought that maybe I misheard you. Did you say that you also used Kroger's delivery service as well?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I did. Mostly for like, groceries and perishables.

INTERVIEWER:

I see. Okay. So canned goods, soup, things of that nature.

INFORMANT:

Mmm-hmmm.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. And the other more generic-slash-bulky stuff, you would get through Target or Walmart or Amazon?

INFORMANT:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And what should, what was the, what were the driving factors: Walmart, Target, Amazon?

INFORMANT:

Whichever had free delivery at the time. So, I have Amazon Prime, and most things on Amazon are free delivery. But Target and Walmart have minimum purchase in order to get the free delivery. And so...I remember I was trying to get vitamin C, pills or gummies or whatever. And they were all sold out on Amazon. People wanted the vitamin C, I guess for the pandemic. And so I got those at Amazon. Because, it was \$15 for the bottle of vitamin C tablets, and then I had to get up to the \$25 minimum. So just adding random stuff to my cart, pretty much things that I could potentially use.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you change what you bought during the pandemic, and/or because you were online?

INFORMANT:

Probably. Like I said, to get up to that \$25 minimum. I think I did. So I started stocking up on vitamins and things like body wash and toothpaste just because, not necessarily to afford them, but because I know I will use them at some point and I had to get up to that minimum for the free shipping. I also have gotten into a couple hobbies since the pandemic hit. I started painting, and so I bought art supplies online, which I had never done before. Before this, I would have gone to Michaels or something, but now I've bought everything online, mostly on Amazon.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you -- have you changed how frequently you shop, given that you're mostly shopping online now?

INFORMANT:

I think I have. I think I shop more often because I like getting packages. And so...

INTERVIEWER:

You enjoy, you get enjoyment from actually having a delivery?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I like getting letters. And I've also been, you know, sending funny surprises to my friends. Usually from Amazon or from some other website. One friend, I made a sticker of her dog, and had it mailed to her because it was funny. But I do like the gratification of getting a package. And so instead of, I feel like pre-pandemic, I would have bought everything at once. I would have made a list and then did one Amazon order so that everything comes at once and you know, better for the environment and less gas, less packaging. But now I'm like, just I want that package every day. And so I order everything separately.

INTERVIEWER:

A related question: do you think that you shop at different times now than you used to? When did you use to shop? Was it on weekdays, weekends, nights, mornings, midday?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I used to shop after work, so in the evenings and weekends, and now it's just whenever something pops into my head, and I'm here, I'm on my computer already. And so, anytime during the day, I think of something.

INTERVIEWER:

Even if you're working late at night, one o'clock in the morning and working on something, something comes to mind, you buy it then?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, for sure.

INTERVIEWER:

And previously you would have just taken out your shopping list and written it down?

INFORMANT:

Mmm-hmmm.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How have your moods or thinking about buying groceries and/or household goods changed during COVID? What you said earlier, it was something that you thought was, you weren't crazy about doing it, it was time consuming. Does it still feel that way? Or is it somehow different?

INFORMANT:

I think, so a lot of the grocery stores right now are offering free delivery and free pickup. And so I enjoy that I'm, I have a positive experience with that kind of grocery shopping. I like it better than going in the store. However, I really extraordinarily dislike going in the stores right now. I avoid that as much as I can. You know, a lot of the stores have one-way aisles, and people don't follow them, and it drives me crazy. And I want to tell them sometimes "There's a big arrow, why don't you follow the arrow?" And, so it's just really stressful right now, going to pick up some produce, I hate it now.

INTERVIEWER:

That's an interesting observation. Are you more upset by people who aren't following the guidance? Or are you more worried about becoming sick?

INFORMANT:

I think a little of both. I think I'm mostly upset that people aren't following the guidance. And not just the guidance, but people aren't wearing masks or they're touching their mask or they're on their cell phone while wearing a mask. It just gives me anxiety. And, I also don't want to get sick, but I also know that I'm pretty low risk even if I do get sick.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you feel -- it's just, if I remember correctly, you said you went to Aldi's a couple of times, not Kroger but Aldi's. Is that correct?

INFORMANT:

Mmm-hmmm.

INTERVIEWER:

And is Aldi's the only place you've gone for shopping? Did you go to Target or Walmart or anything?

INFORMANT:

I went to Walmart once very early, before the lockdown and stuff -- it was during the pandemic, though Virginia hadn't imposed any restrictions yet. But since Virginia imposed restrictions, I've gone to Aldi several times. I think I popped into Kroger once or twice because they couldn't fulfill everything on my online list and so I had to get -- I don't know, whatever it was -- so, I just ran into the store, grabbed that one item and checked out. But Aldi's is the only place I've gone in and browsed.

INTERVIEWER:

What's your sense of the cleanliness and sterilization practices?

INFORMANT:

Aldi's been pretty good. I think they're starting to become more relaxed, which I don't like. But at first, I was pretty impressed. They had a person outside devoted to just sanitizing the carts, which I appreciated, and they had the wall, the plexiglass wall thing, between the cashier. And they instituted the one-way aisles and things like that, which, again, I appreciate, but then people don't follow it. And they had the rule about only one person per household, which people didn't really follow, but I did.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they have any rules about or guidance on masks and social distancing?

INFORMANT:

I think they required masks. I'm not sure, they didn't seem to be enforcing it, regardless. And they definitely have social distancing signs up throughout the store. And also, I prefer -- one of the reasons I've been in Aldi browsing, not Kroger's, because Aldi has wider aisles. And so you can stay six feet apart from somebody in the same aisle versus at least the small Kroger, the smaller stores and vice versa. Aisles were narrow, and so if you get stuck behind someone, I don't feel comfortable passing them, versus at Aldi I don't mind passing and going around them.

INTERVIEWER:

Mm-hmm. You mentioned that you thought that Aldi's maybe was getting a little more lax. Say more about that. What are you seeing?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, so I was at Aldi this past weekend, because I was totally out of fresh fruit and vegetables. And so I went and previously, like I said, they'd had a person, an employee outside sanitizing the carts. And I went at...it was like Sunday afternoon, which usually is a pretty popular time and there were a lot of people there. But no one was enforcing social distancing or the aisle ways. No one was sanitizing the carts. And so Aldi has the, you're supposed to put in a quarter to get the cart. But during, I guess, the height of the pandemic, they had quarters in all the carts already and so you didn't have to do like the transfer and you didn't have to touch multiple carts, which I liked. But now, they're back to normal with the cart thing.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What comes to your mind when the phrase or words panic buying is spoken?

INFORMANT:

Toilet paper!

INTERVIEWER:

Did you see panic buying happening during the pandemic?

INFORMANT:

Um, I didn't see -- I definitely heard about it, specifically from my friends. Who, I guess, didn't panic buy and they....one of my friends ran out of toilet paper. And she was texting me, she's like, "Hey, do you have any extra? I can't find any, anywhere." And my other friend started using paper towels as her toilet paper because she ran out. And I know, there was no toilet paper at Aldi, or they had limits on the number of individual toilet papers you could buy.

INTERVIEWER:

When did those limits start appearing? Do you remember? Or was there -- was it before panic buying happened, or is it after the fact and was too late, or...?

INFORMANT:

I think it was a little too late. Because I remember ordering online from Kroger and just looking at the toilet paper and they had the limit imposed but there was none available. There was zero, that you couldn't put in your cart. And I also I was, I've been ordering groceries for my grandparents, because they don't know how to do online things at all. And so they ran out of toilet paper almost immediately. And I was trying to find toilet paper for them. And it was pretty, it was pretty early on it was probably at mid March, and I couldn't find it anywhere that was available to be shipped. I tried Walmart, Safeway -- they don't have Kroger where they live -- but all sorts of different grocery and other department stores and I couldn't find any that you could ship to them. Amazon was out.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think causes people, some people to panic buy and not others? What do you think causes people to panic buy some things and not other items?

INFORMANT:

I'm not sure, because I thought it was kind of ridiculous that people were panic buying toilet paper specifically. And I think one of the problems is social media. And so one person says, "Oh, no, people are panic buying toilet paper!" And immediately, everyone else who sees that buys toilet paper, just in case. And so I think some of them weren't actually panic buying due to the pandemic, they were panic buying in response to panic buying. I don't know. But I didn't notice, like I said, with the vitamin C and zinc, that those were less available than usual. And so that seems like a kind of relevant panic buy. That's more what I would have expected people to buy: sanitation supplies and vitamin C and things that could actually help with sickness versus toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER:

Hmmmm. So did you actually see anybody buy a large quantity of anything? Personally?

INFORMANT:

I did. I went to Walmart, before the lockdown or any other restrictions. And I remember seeing a woman with the giant things of toilet paper and she had two of them in her cart. It was one giant thing of toilet paper, and there was one giant thing of paper towels.

INTERVIEWER:

And obviously, that person is unknown to you and will be unknown to me. Do you have any -- did you have any thoughts or reactions or opinions? Did you draw any conclusions about them from that? Do you draw any correlations to, you know, how they were dressed, what they were, what they looked like?

INFORMANT:

I mean, it was a middle-aged woman, as far as I could tell. So my initial reaction was, "Oh, come on, like really? Like with the toilet paper?" But then, as I'm thinking about it, maybe she has like, seven kids or something and she needs the toilet paper. I don't know. I guess I shouldn't judge her, but still taking all the toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, I'm not looking for judgments but I'm trying...maybe if you had any speculations on what caused that particular person to be doing it more so than other people? I don't know if there was anything that stood out about her that made you think, "Oh, she's more likely to be x or y or z."

INFORMANT:

Not really, just because...while I was at Walmart that same day, I had checked the toilet paper aisle and there was very few options. And so I feel like I would have judged her -- well, not judge her but I would have made more assumptions about her had there been more options available. Because the options in the toilet paper aisle were either one or like 50 in a bag. And so I feel like she was just going with what was available. But I do generally think that people who panic bought the toilet paper a little more susceptible to, again, the social media, the panic, not just social media, the news media too. Like "Everyone's buying toilet paper, so you have to go buy toilet paper too."

INTERVIEWER:

Was the first awareness that there was a run on toilet paper for you, was it first from social media or the news? Or did you first hear or think about it by observing it directly?

INFORMANT:

I definitely heard about from social media. Because I don't watch the news. I don't have cable and so...I might have gotten it from a news source, but I definitely saw that source on Facebook or Instagram or something.

INTERVIEWER:

But you saw it on social media before you actually saw it in person. You actually, you went into a store one day knowing that you were likely to encounter that, because you'd heard about it. You weren't surprised by it when you saw it in a store the first time?

INFORMANT:

I was not surprised. My brother's in New Zealand. And apparently they've just been making fun of Americans, and so I knew even before going to the store and seeing it myself that New Zealanders were making fun of Americans for all the toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER:

And so, toilet paper is the example that's been frequently commented on publicly in media and things like that. And you mentioned also your personal experience, you saw diminished supplies -- was it bare shelves of vitamins C & D or was it just dwindled supplies?

INFORMANT:

So I didn't see that. I saw that on online. I was buying those online, I didn't see it in the store. But I did notice like, in the canned good aisles that stores were limiting the number you could buy.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you personally ever think about buying more of something, just in case?

INFORMANT:

I stocked up on canned goods. I did.

INTERVIEWER:

And when you say canned goods, what do you mean by canned goods? Or what kind of things?

INFORMANT:

Like soup and fruit specifically, because I couldn't get the vitamin C for awhile, so I was like, "I'm gonna buy a bunch of canned mandarin oranges. That will be fine."

INTERVIEWER:

Can you explain your thought process as to why you did that? How, why, which items you bought more of, and how you decided to buy -- is it twice as much as normal or five times as much normal?

I mean, how did you think about that?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I think I bought at least twice, probably more than twice as much as normal, of canned fruit specifically because -- and canned vegetables and frozen fruit and frozen vegetables -- just because I both didn't want to go produce shopping as often. And I was afraid to go produce shopping especially during that the height of this area's pandemic, and so it's like "I can get by on canned fruit and canned vegetables for months, if I need to."

INTERVIEWER:

Were you worried about lack of food supply? Like the fruit and vegetable supply to the stores wouldn't be there?

INFORMANT:

No, I was more worried about going and being exposed to people. I didn't think that the supply chain would break down, but I just didn't want to go to the store, physically go and buy produce -- and like I said, I don't. Whenever I order produce from Kroger they always get, they're hand choosing tomatoes and stuff for you and they always choose overripe ones or underripe ones and I don't like their choices. Because again, I'm an environmental scientist and so I'm very connected to the food system. And I want fresh good food.

INTERVIEWER:

Did your strategy change based on what you thought other people were doing? Did you think that other people might want to stock up on canned vegetables and fruits, and so you started doing it preemptively?

INFORMANT:

Maybe a little bit. Not too much, because the stores were enforcing the limits on canned food. Both Kroger and Aldi were, and so I was ordering online, mostly from Kroger and so it, the cart would

automatically enforce the two cans of each thing. And so I wasn't too worried about it. I was more just trying to have a stock available to get me through a month of no fresh fruit if I had to.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned you went to online pretty quickly, did you -- you went a few times in person before converting mostly to online, is that right?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, it is.

INTERVIEWER:

And what -- since you had prior experience with online shopping anyway -- what, why didn't you immediately go to online shopping, would you say?

INFORMANT:

Um, I think mostly the produce thing. I wanted to choose my own produce, specifically.

INTERVIEWER:

And your concerns were borne out in the sense that, the few times you did it, you weren't satisfied with what they selected?

INFORMANT:

Mmm-hmmm. I'm still like that.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm sorry?

INFORMANT:

Even after ordering online for several months, I still don't trust them to choose my produce.

INTERVIEWER:

Yep. Have you, so do you think you -- have you discovered any tricks, as it were, that allow you to get things that other people might not be having success in getting?

INFORMANT:

Umm....I followed a couple coupon email lists, things, which I think is, I didn't really follow before. Like when I was specifically looking for vitamin C supplements, I found there's a website called Slick Deals where you can follow a specific search term. And so whenever vitamin C was available, it would email me and it would be like, "Hey, Amazon has vitamin C gummies, and they're in stock." And so I would get it as soon as they became available.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh, so I wasn't aware of this. There's a service that you can sign up for that tracks when a product becomes available on different websites? And tells you, "Go shopping now because it's available."?

INFORMANT:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

That's handy. What's the name of that service again?

INFORMANT:

So, the one I was using was Slick Deals. S-L-I-C-K, Slick Deals.

INTERVIEWER:

Deals, D-E-A-L-S?

INFORMANT:

Yes, and so mostly it's sales and things, but during the pandemic, it was also doing -- just there's availability, there's stock of something on this website.

INTERVIEWER:

And it was all web-based retailers? It didn't say that if you went to the Kroger on Main Street, they have it available now?

INFORMANT:

I saw that... Yes, Slick Deals was mostly web based. Sometimes you would get an email about someone who saw an ad in a newspaper or something. But mostly it was online retailers. I am, and I follow a couple Facebook groups, for the town of Blacksburg or Virginia Tech, and people would post on the Facebook group: "Hey, I was just at Kroger on South Main Street, and they have toilet paper." So I did see a couple of those. I didn't respond or do anything about them, but I remember seeing them.

INTERVIEWER:

Mm-hmm. That's interesting food for thought. Do you think your shopping -- so now it's late June now -- do you think your shopping patterns have returned to pre-pandemic? Or are they more or less the same as they were in the middle of the pandemic? Or are they somewhere in between?

INFORMANT:

I think I'm still in pandemic mode. The grocery stores are still offering the free delivery and free pickup. And so I'm gonna stick with that until they have a vaccine, I think. I don't think I'm going to get any more lax.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think that even after a vaccine you'll continue shopping in this way?

INFORMANT:

I think it depends if it's cost effective. I would -- I prefer shopping this way. But if they start, you know, charging exorbitant fees for delivery and pickup, then I'll probably reevaluate it.

INTERVIEWER:

So right now, there, you determined that the fees are either zero or acceptable?

INFORMANT:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

You don't see any evidence of an increase in price for the actual products themselves?

INFORMANT:

Not that I've noticed. No.

INTERVIEWER:

So, from a pocketbook standpoint, you don't think you're spending more this way now than you were before the pandemic?

INFORMANT:

Um, not on groceries. I think I'm spending more on frivolous things.

INTERVIEWER:

On frivolous things?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, like I said, I enjoy the gratification of getting the packages. And, so things like painting supplies and wine. I've been buying a lot of wine online just because I can and I'm here and it pops into my head and then I have to buy it.

INTERVIEWER:

I definitely understand that, I respect that totally. Yeah, we're just limiting ourselves to groceries and household goods, but you don't think from -- just, the stuff you eat and the stuff you use on a daily basis -- you don't think you're either spending more on a per unit basis -- i.e., price -- or volumes, you don't think you're changing that much either?

INFORMANT:

I don't think so. The canned goods I bought, I bought more volume than I typically would. And I think I'm using them more than I typically would as well. I'm eating more canned fruit than I ordinarily would.

INTERVIEWER:

Was storage space a consideration? Do you have room?

INFORMANT:

I'm storing canned goods in my room. Which I normally wouldn't do either.

INTERVIEWER:

I mean, was that even a -- was it a constraining factor? Did you buy up to how much you could actually store? Or that really wasn't a factor?

INFORMANT:

No, I figured I'd put it somewhere. I mean, we're in a small apartment anyway. And so we use part of our dining area for storage, because we just have limited storage space in general. And we don't have a pantry. And so we have food stored all over the place. So no, I didn't buy up to my constraint. I just figured I would find somewhere to put it.

INTERVIEWER:

You didn't buy up to your spatial constraint, you didn't buy up to a budgetary constraint either? It was just sort of a judgment call? "I'll buy this many, because beyond that, I won't -- I don't know if I'll need them after that"? Or....

INFORMANT:

Yeah. And the main constraint, I think, was the limits imposed by the store.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever think about going to multiple stores back to back, so you'd buy two here and then two there and two there?

INFORMANT:

I did think about it. Yeah. But I think by buying, by the diversifying canned goods I was buying, I met my imagined need or suspected need, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Refresh, thinking back to that time, how far in the future did you think you needed to plan?

INFORMANT:

So generally, with groceries, I plan about a week, week and a half ahead in terms of meals. During the pandemic, I tried to plan further, definitely at least two weeks, if not more, especially with the fruit and vegetables, I suppose.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes, but I'm specifically focusing on the canned fruit and vegetables for a moment. When you bought that large quantity of it, you were thinking, "This will hold me for a month or two months or three months or..."?

INFORMANT:

I was thinking that it would hold me a month beyond whatever length of time the fresh vegetables would. So the fresh veggies and fruit would last me, you know, a week and a half or two weeks, and then after that I would have a full month if needed of canned goods.

INTERVIEWER:

And given the state of the pandemic now and your comment about waiting for a vaccine before you feel totally safe, are you still kind of maintaining that month forward stock level?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I'm probably not quite at a month. I'm looking at my shelf of canned fruit. Um, I'm probably not quite a month, ready. But certainly close to that. And I will probably maintain that for a while.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. If the pandemic worsens again, if there's a quote/unquote, second wave, or if it gets back to the way it was in March or even worse, do you think that you're -- do you think that you will change again, your shopping patterns even further?

INFORMANT:

I, so, I've thought about this already, because when Virginia Tech came out with the plans for the fall semester, they're trying to do as much in person as possible. And so to me, that means there will be a second wave here. Like, I'm already assuming that when the students come back, they're going to bring COVID back to Blacksburg, which I'm not happy about. And so my plan is to stock up on everything right before the students come back, in like early August, and have enough for at least a month, right at that point so that I can be away from grocery stores and all stores for at least a month.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you expect that there'll be another wave of panic buying like we saw in March?

INFORMANT:

I don't, I don't know. Um, the second wave I'm talking about is just from students coming back, but I know, virologists think there might be a second wave in the fall around like Thanksgiving. And so there, I think there might be another panic wave of people stocking up on holiday supplies and gifts, during the Black Friday thing, just in case. But I don't know. I'm not a virologist or pandemic expert.

INTERVIEWER:

I just wondered if you feel like you learned something from the past couple months. And, so I guess it's a variation on what I asked before, so maybe I'll ask it again in a slightly different way: once the vaccine is found, do you think you'll keep buying things this way?

INFORMANT:

I've learned that I can't trust people. There are signs in the grocery store that says one way, and they don't follow it. And I don't like that, and so if there is a second wave, I don't think they're going to heed those warnings any more than they are now. Same with the masks and things like that. And so yeah, I think I'll keep up some of these habits even after there's a vaccine, because there's still diseases, flu and things that you can get, that I'd rather not. And so if I can keep up, using hand sanitizer every time I get in my car, and washing my hands thoroughly after getting home from the grocery store, I think I'll keep those habits up.

INTERVIEWER:

Mmm-hmm. Okay, before we close today: do you have any thoughts or further reactions, comments on the subject to panic buying that we haven't discussed yet?

INFORMANT:

Well, my parents did. They panic bought.

INTERVIEWER:

What did they buy?

INFORMANT:

Toilet paper and paper towels.

INTERVIEWER:

How much?

INFORMANT:

I don't know, they have a storage basement, and so they probably bought a lot.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you find out about it? Did they tell you or you asked them?

INFORMANT:

They offered to send me some. They were like, "How are you doing on toilet paper?" I was like, "I'm fine. I don't, I didn't have to panic buy, I have plenty more." They're like, "Well, just let us know. We can ship it to you. We have, we bought lots of toilet paper." And they eventually, they ended up bringing the paper to my grandparents, who couldn't find any. So that's how that problem was solved. Which was weird.

INTERVIEWER:

And was it just toilet paper or other things that they had?

INFORMANT:

I think it was toilet paper and paper towels, mainly. I think my grandmother wanted, my grandmother's into homeopathic remedies and stuff. And so she was looking for some homeopathic something. But I don't think my parents had that. I think my grandmother just really wanted that and couldn't find it anywhere. But I forget what it was.

INTERVIEWER:

So did you think at first your parents were irrational by buying so much but then after your grandmother needed it, did you realize "Oh, that was actually a good thing they did that."?

INFORMANT:

My parents have always sort of been like that, kind of like trying to be one step ahead of the general population in terms of being prepared for whatever happens, some hoard of gold for some reason, not quite preppers, but bordering on preppers. And so, yes, it was useful that they could get my grandparents the toilet paper when they needed it. But also, I'm sure they bought way more than they should have, in terms of allowing other people who also needed toilet paper to get it.

INTERVIEWER:

Mm-hmm. Did you ever talk to them about it? Or was this, as you were growing up, you observed this and developed your own impressions of this pattern that they have?

INFORMANT:

I mean, I've talked to them about it. And I mean, my mom really thinks that, if the dollar crashes, that she'll be able to get by with her gold stash. And, I don't know what it is. They're sane people. They're both scientists. They're both highly educated and really smart, but they just are over prepared, I think.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think they just have a different perspective on risk, and risk and reward?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I think they have a different perspective on that, and they are much more individualistic, they care a lot less about other people and the common good. They are, will support their family and their immediate friend circle, and they don't care about anyone else.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER:

Very good. Thank you. So, to complete the survey, allow me to collect some basic demographic information, which again we'll keep confidential. Year of birth?

INFORMANT:

1993.

INTERVIEWER:

Repeat that please.

INFORMANT:

'93.

INTERVIEWER:

'93. Gender?

INFORMANT:

Female

INTERVIEWER:

Education?

INFORMANT:

I guess my highest level was bachelor's, but I'm a PhD student now.

INTERVIEWER:

Occupation?

INFORMANT:

I don't know...I'm a grad student. I'm sort of half a student and half a research assistant. So I'm a full time employee, also a full time student.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Annual household income?

INFORMANT:

For just me, or me and my roommate?

INTERVIEWER:

Well, those are related questions. So how do you define who you buy for?

INFORMANT:

I buy for myself and my cat. And so...

INTERVIEWER:

So household income for you and your cat, then?

INFORMANT:

Okay, 33,000

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, marital status?

INFORMANT:

Single.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Religious beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Agnostic.

INTERVIEWER:

Political beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Democrat.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Well, thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: Rebecca Miraglia

INTERVIEWER: Richard Stuebi

DATE: June 24, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is an employee of Interviewer's brother-in-law, based in suburban Cleveland Ohio.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes.

Interview was scheduled at 8 am on a weekday. Interview had to be rescheduled from prior day, as Informant encountered a late-arising work-related conflict that took precedence over interview.

Interview began about 8 minutes later than scheduled start time due to technical glitch with Interviewer's microphone, which needed to be resolved by rebooting computer.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER:

To begin, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?

INFORMANT:

I think the biggest effect has...boy...it's brought me home to work, working out of the home 100%, which I enjoy. It has slowed down my life, which I'm actually very happy about. Not as many "gotta run here, got to run there, gotta do all this" type of stuff, which I'm very happy about. It has been frustrating at times with the new rules. Vacations had to be canceled. Upcoming vacations are potentially being adjusted. So it's been....for the most part, it hasn't been terrible. I've become more aware of cleanliness in terms of hand washing, disinfecting, staying away from sick people, if I'm sick -- which I haven't been thankful -- keeping myself away from people. So, a better awareness of general health and sterilization, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER:

If you think about what your priorities used to be before COVID-19 and now, do you feel like what's important to you, what matters to you has changed at all?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I think my...you know, I'm a Catholic, practicing Catholic, pretty involved. And I wasn't able to go to Mass. So that had a big effect on me. You know, that's become...it always was a big priority, but when you have it taken away, it becomes -- when you can't do it, it became a bigger priority now that things are opening back up. Other priorities: I think...my family has become more of a priority. Again, not that they weren't important, but I was gone a lot. I was running: always, I was always going somewhere. So, you know, this sort of forced me to stay here, be present -- again, even with work -- so that was good. Other priorities? I don't know that anything else but...my health, I'm working out now...It's kind of a sensitive thing: we realize how quickly we can get sick, so we want to stay healthy. So that became a better, bigger priority in my life.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, so think now back in time, back to late last year, before the COVID-19 pandemic and describe how you typically shopped for household goods and groceries back then.

INFORMANT:

Went to the store. Walmart, Target, the grocery store. I would go in and out multiple times during the week. Yeah, that's how I shopped. I had tried online...two years ago with Walmart. It was great. It was convenient but I didn't always, wasn't always able to plan, so I just continued to go to the store. That was how I shopped.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you mentioned Walmart, Target, other grocery stores. Were there certain things, certain items you went to one store versus another for?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, usually all the household things. So, toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, any non-food items -- that was mostly Target. Now, once in a while, I'd get it at a Giant Eagle or a Heinen's if I happened to be there and I knew I needed something, but rarely, it was almost always Walmart, sometimes Marc's. But never, I didn't really shop...and then the opposite would occur. Any type of produce, meats, most grocery items would be at the grocery store. Sometimes, I would buy food at Walmart. But they were non-perishable stuff, rarely did I buy perishables at Walmart.

INTERVIEWER:

Are you using Walmart and Target interchangeably? Or, do you go to one versus the other?

INFORMANT:

Well, I have a Walmart very close to me. So, I'm pretty much always at Walmart. When I worked and I was at the office, Target was close, I would go there. But, really, it's Walmart.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then of the grocery stores. Is there a particular one...?

INFORMANT:

I'm a Giant Eagle, my husband's a Heinen's -- he used to work at Heinen's. So, we like the meat at Heinen's, we like the produce at Heinen's, fish -- if we're going to get any kind of seafood or stuff like that, we would go to Heinen's. Any specialty food, we would go to Heinen's. But Giant Eagle just has everything I need, they have a very large selection, so I tend to go there. I'm minimal at Marc's and I never go to Aldi's because of the grocery stores in my area.

INTERVIEWER:

So, it sounds like is it more a function of selection that leads you to Giant Eagle more so than either price or quality?

INFORMANT:

Yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

It's the comprehensiveness? Or, the location?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, that's the thing for me. Giant Eagle's close, and yeah, the selection, everything. If I want something, I'm pretty much guaranteed it's going to be there.

INTERVIEWER:

And how many times a week -- again, this is before COVID now -- how many times a week would you guesstimate that you would go to the store?

INFORMANT:

At least once. Sometimes, you know, sometimes two or three times if I pick up small things, but we would try to make one big shopping trip in a week.

INTERVIEWER:

And would that be weekday, weekend? Morning, evening?

INFORMANT:

I would say -- well, my husband's retired, so even pre-COVID he started doing more of the shopping, so he was doing more Heinen's and it was usually during the week. But when I go, every couple of weeks, I would go make a big trip. It would be on the weekend.

INTERVIEWER:

So, actually, it sounds like while you would go at least once a week, there'd be one week during the month where it was a bigger shopping experience then?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, yeah. I'd say two weeks out of the month was a big shopping trip.

INTERVIEWER:

And how much would a typical spend be on a big shopping trip?

INFORMANT:

A big shopping trip is \$150 to \$200.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And the kind of the run of the mill weekly shopping trip would be...?

INFORMANT:

About \$100.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. And how long -- for both the standard weekly versus the big weekly -- how much time would you estimate you spend in the store during those shopping events?

INFORMANT:

You know, it always seems to be about an hour. If it's a really big trip, it'll go an hour and a half.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, that's door to door?

INFORMANT:

Door to door.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, and so excluding the commute and parking part, how much would be in the store?

INFORMANT:

So, probably 40 minutes on a normal -- nothing, you know, too crazy, you know? An hour, an hour and 10 minutes, an hour 15 minutes for a big trip.

INTERVIEWER:

Is the...when you go out and purchasing groceries, is it is it mainly for you and your husband, or do you have a bigger...?

INFORMANT:

And daughter. Yep, there's three of us. And then we entertain a lot. So, a lot of times, we'll purchase big shopping trips for, you know, for dinners or something like that. But, for the most part, it's the three of us.

INTERVIEWER:

And did you...do you like shopping? I mean, what's your typical frame of mind?

INFORMANT:

I don't like to grocery shop. I'm not, it's not one of my favorite things to do, grocery shop. I don't...I'm much happier if my husband goes. So yeah, it's not one of my favorite things to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Are you a very targeted shopper, like you know what you need and you go just down the aisles that you need to go down? Do a shopping list? Do you have a shopping list?

INFORMANT:

I do have a shopping list. But I always I still do every aisle like, "Oh yeah, I forgot that, I need to get that too", so I use it as a way of, you know, remembering things in case I forgot anything. Or "Maybe I'll get this and we'll have this for dinner one night." But, definitely, we definitely make a list.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. So with that as background, now think forward to let's say middle of March when COVID-19 really emerged as a major concern. How did your shopping patterns change then?

INFORMANT:

So, we limited our, initially to...we still went to the store and we went once every 10 days, maybe every two weeks, tried to get everything we could and that would be it. We really, we ate what we had if we

ran out of something, it'd be like, "Okay, well, let's try something else until we can get to the store again." So that's...and then -- I don't know if I'm jumping ahead -- we eventually did go to online. So we went to Instacart. And that came on...probably May timeframe.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Well, we'll definitely come back to that. That's definitely a topic of interest, but we'll get to that. So you talked about reducing the frequency of your shopping to once every 10 days or thereabouts. Did you change what you bought? Did the types of things that you bought, the bundle of goods that you bought, did that change?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, a little bit. We bought more eggs because we're...we knew that we could eat them pretty much for every meal. More pasta...more things that were easy. We did, we loaded up a little bit -- meats, because we weren't going to be going back to the store. So, we didn't...we weren't big on prepared foods beforehand, so we didn't really change that. But I would say just, those three things -- pasta, meats and eggs -- were a lot more. We would buy fruit, but nothing you can't buy too much because it would go bad. So, we didn't...we bought the normal amount, and when it was gone, it was gone.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. You mentioned going to Instagram, and we'll get back to that in a minute. Are there, were there any other, were there any new stores that you introduced to your mix, or...?

INFORMANT:

Nope.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you encounter wait times or lines to get into any of the stores?

INFORMANT:

No. My husband being retired, he would go in the morning or early afternoon and it was, it would be busy, he would be surprised that it was busy. We went together one time in the evening, early in COVID, because we wanted to get in and get out and kind of divide and conquer our list so that we weren't in the store too long. But really, no, we didn't go to Walmart as much. We really stuck with the grocery stores. We had plenty of paper products. So we didn't really run into Walmart that often.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that a conscious choice or just an outcome of the fact you had plenty of the paper goods...?

INFORMANT:

That was kind of a conscious choice. We were trying to limit exposure as much as possible. So...

INTERVIEWER:

Did you consolidate your shopping trips, then?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah, so we didn't...we had supplies of, pretty much health and beauty and paper products, things like that. So we were pretty good on that. And so we really just focused on having food, and pretty much stuck with mostly Heinen's at that point because my husband was doing most of the shopping. And, I would go one once a month, maybe, but I'd try to shy away.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And did you notice any changes in the way your mind worked in terms of what you felt, or what you were thinking about when you were in the store? Were your emotions or moods different?

INFORMANT:

Yes, absolutely. The very first time I went into a grocery store, I wanted to get out of there as quick as possible. I was conscious of, I didn't want to be around people too much. I remember that trip: "Oh, I can't wait to get out of here." I...there were lines. It was on a, I forget, it was like a late Saturday morning at Giant Eagle in Bainbridge and I just wanted to like....I had a pretty hefty list, and

I had to get it done. We needed things. And it was...I did not...my mood was not good during the time. I didn't like it at all.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, all right. And social distancing and masks was...

INFORMANT:

I wore a mask the first couple of times, but I don't do well with masks: I'm very, I get claustrophobic, I overheat, my glasses fog up, I feel like I'm eating or taking in carbon dioxide...So I stopped wearing masks. I wore gloves for awhile. I don't anymore. I wore gloves and I immediately, it was always antibacterial, but I did wear gloves for the first few shopping trips.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What do you know, or what do you think of, when people talk about the concept of panic buying?

INFORMANT:

You know, initially the thought is, it's like: "If everybody just bought their normal usage, we wouldn't have it." It seemed kind of stupid. My sister is a Costco shopper, so right before all of this broke out early March, I said, "Hey, while you're there, get me their big roll of paper towels and their big roll of toilet paper. That's all, just get me that and that'll be fine." I'm usually pretty stocked up, I buy big quantities of that stuff, just on a normal basis. I only buy...I won't...I don't want to shop for it all the time. I don't want to run out, so I always buy the big roll, the big size and I put it in the cupboard and when I'm about halfway down -- a little bit, you know, a third left -- I buy another big one and stock up. So I just, it was crazy to me that people were...I get it, I understand it, they're afraid, you know, "gosh, if I can't get to the store, because we're locked in our homes, if they are not going to allow us to go to the store..." But I just never thought it would get to that. I mean, I have friends in Italy, so I knew that they were allowed -- one of the worst hit places in the world -- I knew they were allowed to go to the store, so I didn't subscribe to the panic buying,

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you ever observe it, directly or indirectly?

INFORMANT:

Other than empty shelves, no. I never saw anybody with a load of like...I've seen pictures of carts of eggs and toilet paper and stuff like that, but no, never, other than on the news, I never saw personally, just empty shelves.

INTERVIEWER:

And what were the shelves empty of?

INFORMANT:

Toilet paper, cleaning supplies. That was the biggest thing. Toilet paper, paper products, paper towels, cleaning supplies, obviously any kind of Lysol, any kind of antibacterial. I couldn't...I still can't get a thermometer, the kind that you scan, still can't get one of those, because we do have meds so I did go to the drugstore once a month. But yeah, I couldn't. Those were the big things. Eggs were, eggs were also, I noticed that there was a run on eggs. And we are big bottled water drinkers both in the gallon jugs and -- I forgot about that -- that was a big impact for me because we couldn't, we were limited in how much we could buy, and we go through it a lot. We're always grabbing a bottle for the car, we're always...I drink out of the jug at night, during the day for drinks. I don't like the taste of our water, so I was alwaysthat was an impact to me.

INTERVIEWER:

So how did you manage around that? Let's, I mean, we could talk about the others as well -- the paper products and Lysol and all that but -- let's talk about the water. How did you manage around that?

INFORMANT:

So before it hit, before the quarantine hit...again, I was always pretty stocked up on water. It's just because we...so I always buy water when I went to the store. I'll buy water, no matter what, and we always bought one case of 24.

INTERVIEWER:

So, and was that -- did you do that before COVID? Or just during COVID?

INFORMANT:

Yes. So that was always. So when it hit, and we'd always have a little bit extra, but that was, but I just it was habit, I just would always be like, "Well, I'm out my big trip, I'm going to buy for, even though I don't need it, because..." I just, I don't know, if I'll forget it the one time or, we have people over we want to whatever. So, when I, we got close to running out, I was able, you were allowed a couple of trips so I was able to maybe get, I think you were allowed two. So, that's, you just you ran out. No drinking... maybe iced tea and mix up iced tea, you know, with tap water. But for the most part, I was always pretty...we always had just enough. I think we only ran out of water once or twice.

INTERVIEWER:

So, was that because of deliberate rationing? Or did you cut back or manage your consumption more?

INFORMANT:

No, no, it was deliberate rationing. If I could only get two jugs and then I ran out of those two jugs, then it'd be like, "Okay, do you want to go back to the store? We need water." So, you'd say, "Okay, let's get a list together and figure..." That was kind of when we started to do a little bit of the online.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, we'll still get to that. So, the times that -- was there ever any time when you absolutely needed something and it wasn't available at one store and you had to drive around to another store and to another store to find it?

INFORMANT:

I don't think so, Richard. I don't think so. I think, like I said because, I was never in a, not having toilet paper or paper towels. No, there was really, I was always, my store would have it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And did you ever, you know, think about what other people were doing and then think whether or not you should change your decision or your strategy on what to do based on what everybody else was doing?

INFORMANT:

Um, the only thing was is, right before we went into quarantine, my sister was a very prepared, you know, "You got to do this, you got to do this..." So she's the Costco shopper, and I said, "Why don't you grab, why don't you get for me the giant roll -- it's like 48 rolls of toilet paper, even though I have one -- why don't you get one of those, and why don't you get me a paper towel?" But other than that, I would say no. I went to the store, my husband went to the store -- I know people that haven't left the house, you know didn't leave the house -- but I...No, I didn't really let that affect me too much.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And pricing or limits on quantities. Did you see any major changes happening?

INFORMANT:

I saw prices. Yes, for sure. Absolutely saw prices on meats go up. I saw prices on dairy go up. Yeah, I...those specifically stick in my mind, but I remember thinking, "Man everything just seems more expensive."

INTERVIEWER:

Did that change your decisions at all? Or...?

INFORMANT:

No, not really. You know, we're not fancy eaters, but we still buy chicken, we still buy a couple steaks on occasion, or beef, stuff like that but no, no it didn't. But I noticed it for sure.

INTERVIEWER:

And did you find that certain stores were managing things better than others and therefore you started to trend more towards them?

INFORMANT:

I thought Giant Eagle did a better job than Heinen's.

INTERVIEWER:

In terms of what?

INFORMANT:

Cleaning products, there were....my Heinen's was completely bare, bare, there was nothing. I will tell you another thing that I realized: like, Heinen's had no flour. We were going to be baking before Easter, they had no flour anywhere. Giant Eagle had flour, Marc's had flour. So I found that Giant Eagle probably did a better job of things. There wasn't a lot, I mean, and they limited what you could buy but again, it felt like a short period of time. It didn't feel like it went on forever, like the bare shelves went on forever. It just felt like a month, six weeks, and then things started to get back on the shelves.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you figure out any tricks? Like, "Whoa, I think I've got an idea here on how to do something that other people haven't figured out!"

INFORMANT:

Well, now, my husband is, because he used to work for Heinen's, he knew all the people that worked there. And I'll never forget one day he was talking to somebody, she goes, "Oh, yeah, I'm just getting ready to get some antibacterial soap and bring it out." And he's like, "Oh, okay, make sure you let me get one. I'll wait around." So, there was that, but we only have one, that's enough for our family, we didn't stock up and, you know, grab 20, or "Give me five of these" or whatever.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. So, now let's shift to the online. I guess first and foremost: which online platforms do you use? You mentioned Instacart -- is that the only one, or are there others as well?

INFORMANT:

Instacart. Yeah, that was the only one. Yeah, that's the only one I use. And I think I did Walmart online for specific things that...We were in the market for a small TV and like, "Well, just get it delivered." I had a few special specialized things that I...we were doing some things around the house and I was like, "Well, just order it online and get it delivered instead of having to go into the store." So we did Instacart, but it's expensive. I tried it again, just recently I did it again, but we've only done it twice...

INTERVIEWER:

And when you did those two times, what triggered you to do it? Was there a specific...?

INFORMANT:

Well, I had gotten some positive feedback from my sister who said "The Instacart was really nice", and I said "All right, well let's try it." So, we tried it, was very convenient. It was great, because I hate going to the store and my husband was, if he could avoid it, that would be great. He avoided it. Especially like in the April May timeframe. So, we used it and like I said it was okay. It's okay.

INTERVIEWER:

But you only used it a couple times?

INFORMANT:

Yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

Why not more?

INFORMANT:

Well, the stores in our area that they have is Heinen's, they didn't have Giant Eagle. If they had Giant Eagle, I'd probably do it more. I think Giant Eagle may have a delivery service, but I will tell you I...the first time we used it, there were a couple things like "Ehh, I dunno." So, we started to go back into the stores, when later May came around and we started going back in the stores, things were opening up and so it's like...So I tried it again, probably early June, just out of convenience to see if I like, "Okay, well let me just," and, , again, I got a couple of the wrong things and I thought, "Oh, this just isn't worth it." If I'm going to get my groceries now, for very specific brand things -- it's not meat, it's not produce, to do a pickup or something like that -- those are great. Those are great. I did that pre COVID and if I'd be a better planner, I would do it all the time. That I really liked.

INTERVIEWER:

Are there certain things that you would think about stocking up on more via using online platforms like this versus, you know, when you go to the store?

INFORMANT:

I guess I really haven't thought about it....I haven't really thought about it too much.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there anything that you did buy a whole lot of using this method, as opposed to doing it in the store?

INFORMANT:

No. It was the first time, we just, it was a normal trip, we were running out of stuff. And I said, "Let's make a really good list." And we went online. I mean, it's nice, but it's not every item. Do you want to substitute? No, and so you don't know what you're going to end up getting. So I just, I didn't like it as much as I, and I'm an online shopper in general, for....Amazon and different things like that. So, you know, I've bought online a lot before but, I don't know, it's just the groceries just didn't seem, you have to sort of plan for it, you got to sort of....there were no appointments available for awhile, so, it was...I would try, I wanted to try it sooner but I can't get an appointment for, you know, like three or four days, but we need stuff now. We need some food now, we need milk, we need eggs, so we'll just go to the store. That's how it was.

INTERVIEWER:

So you mentioned a few minutes ago that, as May or June rolled around, the stores were opening back up. Have your shopping patterns -- so think to today now -- have your shopping patterns returned to more or less as they were before the pandemic?...

INFORMANT:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

....Are they the same as they were at the peak, or somewhere in between? What's different?

INFORMANT:

Nothing. Nothing really, we're back to normal. We go to Walmart when we need stuff. I still have enough toilet paper. I mean, there's only so much we use. I was pretty stocked up. I bought that one extra roll from Costco and I forget how big they are. It's like, "Oh, wow, I forgot how big that is." But, yeah, no, I'm, we're back to normal. You know, we get, I haven't even, I don't have an alarmist type of mentality like, "Oh, this could happen again in the fall. Maybe I should start stocking up, and..." I just haven't gone that route.

INTERVIEWER:

That's an interesting comment. And if another significant wave happens in the future and conditions returned to kind of what they were like in March, will you do anything differently this time than you did?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I will. I mean, I'll prepare in advance if I'm going to do online stuff, to say, "Okay, I know I can't get an appointment for another week, so let me let me go ahead and do that -- let me put that order in now." Knowing I'm going to need these things in a week. Because then you can always adjust them. I would say, I can see myself, probably -- you know, this is making me think about it a little bit more -- like "Oh, maybe I should just buy some extra water just to store and then leave it in our basement and just then buy at my normal patterns." I could probably see that happening, you read about, "Are they gonna have this second wave, and is it going to shut people down?" But, I'll make that judgment probably in the later months of summer.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So going back to the comment that your patterns are more or less as they were beforehand. How -- were there any indicators along the way that allowed you to get more and more back to normal? What caused, what evidence or instances caused you to rethink and allow yourself to go back to your normal patterns?

INFORMANT:

Well, I think, people I knew were not getting sick. There were not a lot of people around me, there was no one, no one got sick around me. I was healthy, I was taking care of myself, I wasn't getting sick. The stores were doing things to help you social distance, one way aisles and the checkout lines, keep your distance at checkout lines, which was good. And I think I, I believe that people have realized "If I'm sick, I'm staying home. I'm not going to go out, I'm not going to spread things." I realized that I have to be aware of that, and I think I trusted the fact that people are smarter about this. People probably look at me -- I don't wear a mask -- they probably look at me, but I see a lot of people wearing masks. So it's, well...people are being careful and cautious and smart -- I think being smart about it, about going out --so I don't...I think we have to build up our immunity. We got to get out there; we got to live.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think that most people have returned back to normal, their pre COVID....?

INFORMANT:

I don't know if I would say most. I know a lot of people that, at least half the people in my circle are still very cautious. They still don't go out. They don't gather in groups. They don't go to Mass. They really stay socially distant. So I would, I have a friend who still doesn't go to the grocery store, she won't go. She does, you know...so I'd say about half of the people, in in my everybody I know everybody, I deal with are still pretty cautious.

INTERVIEWER:

To clarify, you said your shopping has pretty much reverted back to pre COVID levels. Is that, so that, when you say that, is that mainly about what you buy and how frequently you buy and where you buy it? Or for instance, are you still are you behaving differently in the store than you did back then? In terms of social distancing? Going one way down the aisle? Using hand lotion? And all those things?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I try to be very cautious of, more in deference to other people and to not crowd people and things like that. So, like, if you're shopping and, it used to be if two people were looking kind of in the same area, you would just reach in and grab something. Well, now I kind of stand back and wait for them to finish their area, and then I go when they exit on that lane or whatever. That's about the only thing, is just not crowding people, and I would say now working from home -- and again, my husband's retired, so we're planning a little bit better and shopping at less crowded times, so I don't do as much on the weekends now. I don't do that. With having a freer schedule, it's easier to "Hey, let me do a short trip after work", or maybe at lunch, a late lunch, a short trip to the grocery store. So that changed a little bit. But that's more of a function of, I'm home getting things a little bit more organized and stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Given that so many people are also working from home and their work lives have changed, do you see traffic patterns at the stores have changed?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, you know, I will say that I noticed. I went on a weekend - it was about two or three weeks ago, normally what would have been a very, very busy time -- and it wasn't as busy as it used to be pre-COVID, and I remarked to myself, I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, this is kind of nice!" Usually, the parking lot's jam packed, and now it's pretty good.

INTERVIEWER:

Hmmm. Good. Okay, so we're coming up on 55 after the hour and I want to get you back on schedule, and let you go by nine. So, before we close for today, are there any other comments you'd like to make related to the topic of panic buying?

INFORMANT:

I mean, I wish people would just be smart about things, and just buy at your normal patterns. And stock, things would remain as they were. Just buy at normal patterns.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think that some people are more or less inclined to that behavior?

INFORMANT:

Huh...I'm sure there are groups of people that are more inclined to that. I don't know if I've identified who they are. I don't, the elderly? I don't think they are, because financially, they probably don't do that, they can't do that. They probably don't, they're living in smaller spaces probably, so they're not doing that. So I'd say maybe it's probably those, younger to middle age generation. That's...I don't know, I don't know who it is. But I'm sure that there's a group of people that are more inclined to do that. I don't know that I could speak to that.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Well, thank you. So let me close with another prepared statement here, just to wrap things up. To complete our survey, allow us to collect some basic demographic information, which to remind you, we'll keep anonymous. Year of birth?

INFORMANT:

1963

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, gender?

INFORMANT:

Female.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, education?

INFORMANT:

Master's degree in business.

INTERVIEWER:

Occupation?

INFORMANT:

Marketing Risk Manager for National Risk.

INTERVIEWER:

Annual household income?

INFORMANT:

160.

INTERVIEWER:

Marital status?

INFORMANT:

Married.

INTERVIEWER:

Household definition? I mean like how, how many people are there? Who do you buy for?

INFORMANT:

Husband, wife, child.

INTERVIEWER:

And you said your daughter is how old?

INFORMANT:

16

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Religious beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Catholic.

INTERVIEWER:

Political beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Conservative, Republican.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Well, thank you again for your time today.

INFORMANT: John Oberschlake

INTERVIEWER: Richard Stuebi

DATE: June 23, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is an employee of Interviewer's brother-in-law, based in suburban Cleveland Ohio.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes.

Interview scheduled for 10 am on a weekday. Informant was in the middle of his workday, and was about 5 minutes late to join interview, due to a work-related phone call running long.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER:

To begin the interview, how has your life been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, with everything surrounding COVID, it was primarily impacted in that...you couldn't just go to the store and get whatever you wanted. I mean, there was a limited supply of goods, especially in the grocery stores. And you're obviously not going to go out as much with places being closed, so you're pretty much forced to stay in and cook in the kitchen or order on like Amazon or something like that. And go towards a more digital experience in that regard.

INTERVIEWER:

How did your typical day change?

INFORMANT:

Day by day, with work specifically: it went to a remote environment as opposed to going into the office, which had pros and cons. I didn't have to worry about a commute, spending significantly less on gas. And then after work, as opposed to maybe going to a bar for happy hour or restaurant for dinner, I stayed home. From morning, when I woke up all the way until I went back to bed, I was at home.

INTERVIEWER:

Did your priorities change in any way?

INFORMANT:

I wouldn't say that priorities changed. I woke up and got to work from eight to five, and after that I did a lot of housework and different projects – I guess in that regard, maybe? But specific priorities, I wouldn't say much.

INTERVIEWER:

And in terms of your mental state -- your attitude, thinking and feelings -- any significant changes in that?

INFORMANT:

Well, I like getting out and being social. So being cooped up in the house, I'd say that that got a little bit frustrating, especially by May. But just hanging in there and being patient like everyone else.

INTERVIEWER:

Great, understood. Thank you. So, transitioning now into shopping. So, think back in time, before COVID-19, and describe for me in general terms how you typically shop for groceries and other household goods before the pandemic.

INFORMANT:

Well, groceries: we would go to the local grocery store, Giant Eagle, frequently. My wife likes to go to Aldi, Heinen. Typically, just grab what we need, we would plan out, maybe for a few days, maybe

for an entire week or a couple of weeks, if you will. And grab what we need for a specific set amount of days. If we need something general for around the house, just go to Walmart or Target. Rarely, we would go on Amazon or anything like that. Typically, we go in store.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you often or usually prepare a list, or did you mentally keep things in mind what you needed and then kind of randomly walk around the store?

INFORMANT:

Both. We would figure out what meals we wanted. And from there, just have an idea in our minds what each meal would consist of and what we would need to get for that. And go about it that way.

INTERVIEWER:

Is the household you're buying for -- you mentioned your wife -- is it just you and your wife? Are there other...

INFORMANT:

Just my wife.

INTERVIEWER:

And when you went to a store: you mentioned, you would go for a couple with a couple days in advance. So how many times a week would you say you went shopping?

INFORMANT:

Maybe a couple, two. Maybe three, rarely.

INTERVIEWER:

And how long would a typical shopping experience in the store be?

INFORMANT:

An hour, hour and a half, right around that range.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Any items that were almost always or usually in your bundle of what you bought?

INFORMANT:

Eggs....beer....um....chicken. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you find shopping to be an enjoyable experience? Or just a necessity, or a hassle? What's your typical mindset when you go grocery shopping?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I mean, it's one of those things that you have to get out and do it. I wouldn't say that I dislike shopping, but I wouldn't say it's my favorite thing in the world. It's just one of those things you have to do, and you do it.

INTERVIEWER:

When during the course of the day do you tend to go, or did you tend to go, and we're talking about before COVID now.

INFORMANT:

Yeah, evening after work.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. And that was it? Was the store usually pretty crowded then, or pretty empty?

INFORMANT:

It varies. So the Giant Eagle I would say is usually busier. If we go to like Aldi or something like that, it fluctuates quite a bit, I'd say more often it wouldn't be that busy. It's a pretty small one in town, so...

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned going shopping after work, normally. Does that mean that most of your shopping you did during weekdays? Did you ever go on weekends?

INFORMANT:

Usually not, usually went out to restaurants on weekends.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. What was a typical spend approximately when you would go out and go to a grocery store?

INFORMANT:

All so dependent on the store. So, if we were getting everything from Giant Eagle, we would spend quite a bit more, I would say \$120, \$140. And if we were doing everything at Aldi, I mean we'd get away with \$50, \$60.

INTERVIEWER:

So going back to some of the earlier comments you made: generally speaking, Giant Eagle was your primary store, Aldi you would use for other types of purchases, and Heinen's you would use for other types of purchases?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, so if we were wanting like fresh produce or meat, typically that'd be Giant Eagle, also dependent on who was doing the shopping. So, I prefer going to Giant Eagle and Heinen's, I think it's a little more fresh, whereas my wife prefers to be more frugal and go to Aldi's and things like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You mentioned also that occasionally you use Amazon; so you have used, you did use online online purchasing or shopping for...?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, not for groceries but...

INTERVIEWER:

For?

INFORMANT:

More like consumer goods. So, the most recent would have been a submersible sump pump and that's harder to find in the store.

INTERVIEWER:

Sure. But in terms of, not necessarily edibles, but consumables like detergent and paper towels and things like that....?

INFORMANT:

No, we usually just do that at the grocery store.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, so now let's transition. Let's fast forward to the middle of March. The pandemic is becoming highly conscious in people's minds. How did your shopping patterns change?

INFORMANT:

Well, at first, we weren't wanting to let it affect our shopping patterns too much, until we noticed that people were -- I don't want to say going crazy, but when they started buying in bulk, to the extent that nothing was on the shelves, at that point, we started wanting to plan ahead. That way we didn't get into a situation where we needed like a loaf of bread or toilet paper or something like that and there'd be nothing on the shelf. So, we would find ourselves going if I was there and we were running short we just got it regardless of if we needed it or not to last us three, four weeks. That way, we don't have to worry about it and go from there.

INTERVIEWER:

Were there certain products -- you mentioned bread and toilet paper -- are there other kind of products that fell into that category where you would plan ahead further?

INFORMANT:

Not really, the toilet paper was the big one. Paper towels, maybe. Chicken, chicken was the other one.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, say more on chicken. Well, I'd like to hear your thoughts on toilet paper too. But say more why chicken you planned ahead for more.

INFORMANT:

Well, it might be specific to us, because my wife enjoys meals with chicken. That's probably her favorite food, outside of cheese. But when we found ourselves going to Giant Eagle or Aldi, there were quite a number of times – two or three, especially at the beginning – where we would go and everything was gone. There wasn't any chicken, except maybe the big pouches of 30 chicken breasts, but that'd be too much for us, so that didn't really work.

INTERVIEWER:

How many times did that happen?

INFORMANT:

I would be, I mean...

INTERVIEWER:

Approximately.

INFORMANT:

Oh, two to three maybe that I can recall.

INTERVIEWER:

And so when you saw that, when you observed that -- I'm assuming you were there, or you heard your wife talk about it? Was that your direct observation?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I was there.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What ran through your mind? What were your thoughts or your reflections on that?

INFORMANT:

I was just thinking that was pretty crazy that because, especially with Giant Eagle, they put it in these big bins and just completely filled to the brim typically. And so, seeing it completely empty, it kind of shocked me that that the store wasn't able to replenish that and that it was being sold at that high of a rate to where it couldn't be replenished.

INTERVIEWER:

What did that make you think about the crisis itself, about COVID?

INFORMANT:

I wouldn't say it changed my opinion about the crisis itself as much as it did about my opinion on reactions people were having to it. In that people were...getting such an emotional response from everything going on to where they felt they needed to buy in bulk to the point where it was impacting what others were able to buy.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think that those reactions were rational or irrational?

INFORMANT:

I mean, I don't want to say that they were irrational. But I think that people....I think it was definitely driven by an emotional response. And fear, if you will, that people were going off of.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you change how frequently you shopped during that time?

INFORMANT:

Yeah. Well...yes. So, since we were planning more ahead, especially knowing that once restaurants started to close and we knew that we wouldn't be going out as much, we started buying for the entire week or even the next two weeks. That way, we wouldn't have to go as frequently, and if we went the

first time and we know that we have what we need and if there was something we weren't able to get at that time then at that point, we would have gone out again to get it later on.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you change where you shopped? Or was it the same stores?

INFORMANT:

It's pretty much the same stores.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever encounter wait times to get into the store?

INFORMANT:

Um, we didn't have a wait time to get into the store at grocery stores. The only time we had to wait to get into it was at Lowe's. That was about the only time that I can think of.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned about people wearing masks, social distancing. What were your thoughts on that?

INFORMANT:

I mean, I can understand the social distancing, and I wanted to be cautious. Obviously, there were several people that didn't wear masks, like in the grocery store, for example. I mean...giving people their space and maintaining that six feet. I understood why. I got it, abided by it. I didn't always wear a mask though.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you saw empty shelves and empty bins and things of that nature. Did you see people actually buying like, you know, 10 chickens or a large number of goods, more than they would normally buy? Did you actually see that happening?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, there's a couple....There's a lady that I can think of that was buying three big packs of toilet paper. I'd say that's the only example that I physically saw of someone buying in bulk like that, but...

INTERVIEWER:

Odd question, but I'll ask it anyway: was she social distancing? Was she wearing a mask?

INFORMANT:

Um, yes. Yeah, she was wearing a mask. And she had a couple kids with her, if I'm remembering correctly, that they had the masks and they were very cautious where other people were and trying to adjust accordingly.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you draw any other conclusions or generalizations, or did any thoughts come to mind when you saw her with the three big stacks of toilet paper?

INFORMANT:

Well, and I think it was driven primarily by that emotional response and there were other people in the store that were obviously looking for toilet paper. So, I mean, I guess this is a personal opinion: I don't think anyone should have been able to buy that much, knowing that there is going to be a need for other people and I mean...

INTERVIEWER:

Did you see evidence of any limits, like "Limit: Quantity 2" of anything?

INFORMANT:

No, not at that time. There were signs put up later and into everything I want to say July – not July, April.

INTERVIEWER:

A broad question: when someone says the phrase "panic buying", what do you think or know about panic buying?

INFORMANT:

I think, when I hear that phrase, the idea that comes to mind is people who are buying goods out of fear that they won't be able to or that don't need it down the road, even though they might not have needed that much or needed that specific item previously.

INTERVIEWER:

And during this period of time, would you say you saw directly or indirect evidence of panic buying?

INFORMANT:

Oh, yeah. Especially with the bulk buying at the beginning.

INTERVIEWER:

And did that change over time?

INFORMANT:

Um, I think later on, when the stores started to put limits and things like that, and I recall at one point Trump even made a statement that people shouldn't be buying for months ahead of time. I think once things progressed, people started to think "Hey, stop that!" and start to buy things the way they normally would have, or at least in the quantities that they would have. That would have been April. But before that, I really saw that change.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you talk about these occurrences or observations with anyone?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, with my wife as we were in the store. Or if coworkers, for example, were talking about it. I just mentioned how there's nothing on the shelves when we were there and that that was really the extent of it.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it ever a topic on either social media or media or whatever TV you watch, or you know, wherever you listen to, was it ever brought up as a topic and talked about?

INFORMANT:

Well, sure, especially at the beginning, even on the news, they would show the empty shelves everywhere. And I mean, there are a few occurrences that that I saw on social media where people were fighting over different goods because it was the last one in the store, so on and so forth. Or someone was trying to buy in bulk and another person needed the same item and is trying to take it out of the cart. But...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Speaking about you or your wife specifically, do you feel that during the time of the pandemic – during this March timeframe – did you ever actually buy or consider buying an unusual amount of an item "just in case"?

INFORMANT:

No, and I mean....both my wife and I like to think that we're more level-headed in avoiding that type of buying. I mean, we're going to grab what we need, and that's it. We're not going to sit here and sit there and buy such high amount of products that we won't even use it all within the next few months.

INTERVIEWER:

So you didn't even entertain or think about it?

INFORMANT:

[Shakes head]

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. The examples you mentioned, of seeing examples on social media and the news and co-workers and so on talking about it. Did that get you to change your thinking at all? Or, you kind of pretty much stayed the course?

INFORMANT:

I pretty much stayed the course. I mean, with anything there's going to be extremes and people are gonna...there are always gonna be people gravitating towards those, whether it's out of an emotional response or, or whatever it might be. And so, although I didn't agree with it, I understood why people were doing it, but it wasn't something that I would have ever done.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you talk to friends or family or acquaintances to see if they had done it and compare notes?

INFORMANT:

Oh, like my sister and family who lives up in Michigan, that they were buying in bulk when they could. Especially with toilet paper, I wouldn't say so much with food, but...

INTERVIEWER:

This is a good example, if I may follow up on that. So obviously, your sister you know pretty well. Why do you think she made different decisions than you did?

INFORMANT:

There were more people in her house. She lives right down the road from our mom. So, I know that my mom was looking for different supplies. So, when she got to the store and saw them, I think she was providing for not only her house but also for my mom, and she also has kids in the house. So it's, there's more people there, so that there's a higher need.

INTERVIEWER:

Did she ever talk to you about it? I guess you found out about it somehow, so you must have talked about it...

INFORMANT:

Yeah, she just sent a picture of her cart with all of this. It was toilet paper specifically and that's probably why I'm gravitating towards that specific good. She just had this big stack of toilet paper, two of the big value size packs.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you know anything more about her shopping habits in terms of where she tends to shop? And, how frequently she shops.

INFORMANT:

Yeah, it's a lot more limited up there – she lives in Traverse City. A little bit more limited. Outside of Meijer, you really only have one other local spot, which really doesn't have that much. So, most of the time, she finds herself going to Meijer out of default. But if there is something that she knows is at that smaller spot, because it's a lot closer, she'll go there, but being that it is a smaller grocery, it's...they were frequently running low on supplies.

INTERVIEWER:

I don't remember what the weather conditions were like this winter. Did snow or other weather factors can come into consideration for her, or for you?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, for them, it doesn't really matter. I mean, it's always gonna be snowing in March up there. So they're used to that.

INTERVIEWER:

How about for you here in the Cleveland area? I don't know what the weather conditions were like in the Cleveland area this winter. Was it pretty bad in March? Was it not bad? Did weather affect your thinking about this at all?

INFORMANT:

No, I'm the type of person who'll go out into a blizzard or go out...the weather really doesn't bother me too much.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. I think you mentioned, but I just want to confirm it: you've done online buying in the past, but generally speaking not for any of these items. Did you shift to more online buying during this period to mitigate risks?

INFORMANT:

Are you saying specifically with like groceries or like the curbside pickup things like that?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, I mean, not the submersible pump, but, you know, toilet paper, paper towels, detergent, things like that. Or even like canned goods like soup or canned vegetables, things of that nature.

INFORMANT:

No, we just stuck to it, with going into the grocery store and...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Oh, did your time of day or day of week change when you went to the grocery store?

INFORMANT:

Um...no, usually still during the week. My wife's a teacher, so we are still both of us working remotely in virtual setting, so that our hours didn't really change. And in that regard, we found ourselves still going pretty much in the evenings.

INTERVIEWER:

So in your case, you said you work eight to five normally, so during the pandemic, you were working eight to five and then after that you would think about going out to the store.

INFORMANT:

Correct.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

INFORMANT:

I think there was maybe once that I went to the store during my lunch break, but that would have been it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. So, that was we were talking about, you know, primarily during the peak of the pandemic, which was probably around mid-March. So now fast forward to today. Have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak? Or, have they have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between?

INFORMANT:

Now that things are opening up, I would say that we're starting to return more to the way we purchased things before the pandemic. While just keeping in mind, the social distancing, and just trying to respect other people's personal boundaries, especially since there are still people that have firewall concerns. But we're going less and we're going out to restaurants now.

INTERVIEWER:

So you say you're mostly if not fully, all the way back to where things were?

INFORMANT:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Other than the social distancing?

INFORMANT:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And what if you were to look back at the past three months between then and now, what has caused you to move back toward normal buying patterns? Is it something about what you've read or

heard or understand about COVID? Or, is it what you've observed or seen about the state of...the stock of the stuff on shelves and what people are buying?

INFORMANT:

Well, I think as things progressed throughout the entire pandemic, people started to gradually buying things and in their normal quantity, so there wasn't that scarcity of goods as much and the empty shelves. So knowing that, we weren't as concerned with going to the store and not finding something that we're looking for, with restaurants and everything opening back up. Knowing that we're going to go out to eat maybe two or however many times a week, we don't see any need in getting more than that and just evaluate....what we need at that point.

INTERVIEWER:

Is there any time where you see any bare shelves and still think, "If I could find this, I'd buy it"?

INFORMANT:

Um, no, I think things now are starting to get to the point where everything is stocked on a regular basis, especially with everything starting to open back up and normalize. Yeah, we haven't run into that.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there any kind of sea change in your thinking or behavior, or has it just been kind of gradual?

INFORMANT:

Can you repeat that?

INTERVIEWER:

Was there an instance or an incident that caused you to change your behavior back to the old ways, or has it just been a gradual evolution?

INFORMANT:

Just seeing how things progress and evolve, and just go from there.

INTERVIEWER:

And looking back on that peak era, March say, what do you take from that experience? Do you think that was a once in a lifetime phenomenon? Or do you think, "This could happen again, and I'll remember that in the future," if something like that ever happens.

INFORMANT:

Well, if there's rumors, especially with the second wave potentially looming, if that happens, just keep in mind that there are going to be people out there that have that fear, if you will, that leads them to buy in bulk and, and that's gonna happen and try to get out in front of it, if you can. Make sure you have what you need – not for months at a time -- but that way it's there and.... Everyone reacts differently.

INTERVIEWER:

That's actually a very interesting observation. So, if there might be a second wave in the fall that could be comparable in severity, will you preemptively change your buying patterns to get out in front of it?

INFORMANT:

Um, yeah, I mean, if we have a spread, especially with basics, not so much with food, we'll go out and make sure that we're, we have a supply here in the house...that we would normally want to buy new goods outside of a pandemic setting. That way, not to worry about it, be worried about having empty shelves when we actually need it. But I think people would end up reacting the same, just out of the fear, it's a second wave, it's going to be slightly different than the first wave. And I mean, that's what you saw in the early 1900s with flu, the second wave ended up being worse. So I'm sure people are going to have that mindset and...have that instinct.

INTERVIEWER:

Obviously, health considerations aside, are you worried that a second wave, if it happens in the fall, will cause the shopping conditions to revert to what they were in March? And, would you view that as unfortunate?

INFORMANT:

I would view that as unfortunate. I think if the first wave teaches anything, it's that it isn't needed. And it'd be a shame to see people revert back to that. And I don't wanna say not learn anything, but yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

I take it from your answers that, aside from that the direct health concerns or considerations around COVID, from just purely from a grocery and household good shopping standpoint, you're not terribly worried about a second wave? That's not a major concern for you?

INFORMANT:

No. I mean, I think at the end of the day, we'll be able to get what we need. It just might require a couple extra trips here and there if shelves start to empty out. And if they do and people are buying in bulk again, then that would be disappointing, but I think it's gonna be a reality.

INTERVIEWER:

This reminded me: did you ever have to go far afield for -- you really needed something and you couldn't find it? Did you have to go to two or three or four stores to get it?

INFORMANT:

Between Giant Eagle and Aldi, I would go between those two stores frequently. There was an instance where we went to Walmart once.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember what that was for?

INFORMANT:

I want to say....I don't know. I'd be guessing.

INTERVIEWER:

So last question. Is there anything else you'd like to say related to the notion of panic buying that we haven't covered yet?

INFORMANT:

No, I mean, just that it's an emotional response and I think it's inevitable that some people go that route.

INTERVIEWER:

Any thoughts on how it could be mitigated as a social phenomenon?

INFORMANT:

If you're able to enforce limits, there's always going to be some people that try to work the system, if you will, and get around that. But if there is a limit in place, and that's being enforced, I think directly that that's going to do the job right there. And beyond that? Yeah, I think that really would be the only thing that I can think of. And that worked this time around in April once they started doing that, so...

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, well thank you for your time to complete the survey. Again, another prepared statement here, allow us to collect some basic demographic information which we will keep anonymous. Year of birth?

INFORMANT:

'94

INTERVIEWER:

Gender?

INFORMANT:

Male

INTERVIEWER:

Education?

INFORMANT:

Bachelor's

INTERVIEWER:

Occupation?

INFORMANT:

Insurance

INTERVIEWER:

Annual household income?

INFORMANT:

About....\$120 [thousand].

INTERVIEWER:

Marital status?

INFORMANT:

Married

INTERVIEWER:

Household definition: how do you define your household?

INFORMANT:

Um, you mean like filing status?

INTERVIEWER:

No, not so much filing status. Like when you go shopping, you buy for just yourself and your wife?

INFORMANT:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Religious beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Christian

INTERVIEWER:

Political beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Republican.

INTERVIEWER:

Thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: Dee Paulsen

INTERVIEWER: Richard Stuebi

DATE: June 24, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is the mother of the Interviewer's nephew (brother's son), based in Sturgeon Bay Wisconsin. Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes. Interview was scheduled at 5 pm (CT) on a weekday.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER:

To begin the interview, how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect you personally? In your life?

INFORMANT:

Well, I was supposed to stay in Florida through April, and I came back March 24, because my family was insisting that I come back to Door County. They were worried that I was going to be sick and they'd have to come down and take care of me. So that was depressing for me because I like to be in warm weather. And it helps to be in warm weather because I have Parkinson's disease and I do a lot of activity outside. So that was unfortunate. And then, just to be hunkered down in the house, I have to say I learned to be a really happy homebody, which is kind of funny. My grocery shopping habits changed: we didn't want to just go right into the grocery store, so we'd go to the store that would take our order the day before we'd come and pick it up, and they would just put the groceries in the back end of our car and there was no touching of hands or exchanging of any kind of words. But I read a lot and I, yeah, actually a lot of TV. Watched a lot of news. caught up with my movies. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you feel like you're -- well, let's start with a simpler question? What, how did your day to day life change?

INFORMANT:

It slowed down a lot. Yeah, because we were hunkering down. Yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

Do you feel like your priorities changed at all during that time? Like what mattered to you? What was important to you?

INFORMANT:

Mmm-hmm. I discovered that I really love going out to eat in restaurants, which I haven't done for months. Yeah, I don't, well, I mean, my family's always -- I've always treasured my family, not being able to see my son and his family in Minnesota was really hard, is really hard. And I'm a hugger, I'm a big hugger, so not being able to hug people is just about pushed me over the edge.

INTERVIEWER:

Hmm. And your thoughts and feelings during the past three or four months, would you say that your attitude and emotional states changed at all?

INFORMANT:

Um, I think I wouldn't necessarily say that. I think again, just being at home more, cleaning out closets, figuring out dinners -- we've cooked more at home in the past three or four months than we have in practically our whole marriage -- those are all enjoyable things -- well, not cleaning out closets -- but those are all things that I had time for and I wanted to do. Yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

Good. Well now, switching gears to shopping. Let's rewind before COVID-19. Think back to December, late 2019, and describe how you typically shopped for groceries and household goods before the pandemic.

INFORMANT:

Well, if I needed something, I'd just go out and get it. I wouldn't just shop once a week or once every two weeks, I would just go get it. And then once COVID hit, I kind of accumulated a list of things and we'd go once a week to the grocery store. The other funny thing to me is, because we were feeling the pinch -- Eric's office was closed for a fair bit of time -- we put our credit cards kind of on hold and tried to pay cash for everything -- and I found that I wasn't so easy for me to let go of my cash, as it was just to pull out my credit card. So that was an interesting thing. I mean, it limited my spending.

INTERVIEWER:

And it's interesting you mention that. A lot of the establishments that I frequented -- not that there were many -- but most of the establishments went to all credit cards. They wanted to get away from cash. You didn't find that to be the case?

INFORMANT:

Except for the groceries, yeah. The groceries, we had to use our credit card. But, you know, if I was going to be...I don't know. I didn't shop online -- I know a lot of people did more shopping online, and I just didn't do that...So yeah. I don't know, it's kind of funny.

INTERVIEWER:

So, we'll get to COVID in a minute. But again, before -- we're trying to set a baseline here, what, and understanding how you used to do things before COVID. So, you said you would go out whenever you needed something. How often did that tend to be? How many times a week was that?

INFORMANT:

Hmmmm. Gosh, I would say, gosh, maybe four or five times a week, depending on what I needed for recipes or whatever I was doing. Yeah, I would say four or five times a week. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And was there one store you always went to, or different stores for different items? What...?

INFORMANT:

Well, we usually shop in Sturgeon Bay at a large grocery store. But once COVID hit, I was a little concerned about their practices there, their sanitary practices, sanitizer types of practices, whatever you want to call it. And we have a grocery store that's about 20 minutes away in northern Door County, and they were advertising for "Send us your grocery list one day, tell us the time the next day that you'll come and pick it up, and we'll have everything ready for you." So, we took advantage of that, which was really nice -- and plus it got us out of the house, which was really nice.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay, well we'll definitely get back to that. That sounds very interesting. Again, prior to COVID, you would go just as you needed items. Was it mainly for that day's meal? Or was, did you have any patterns or habits, you know, like "Every Tuesday I would go and meet somebody there"? I'm just trying to get a sense....Was it was a totally ad hoc?

INFORMANT:

It was just, yeah, I think it says I'm not a very good planner, a very good meal planner, because I would just pick something the morning of and figure out....Or, if we were having friends over -- this is before COVID. Having friends, we're going to friends' houses. Yeah, I just kind of planned on the fly....

INTERVIEWER:

Even when you planned on the fly, did you go into the store with a list on paper or a list in your mind, or did you go kind of freewheeling, saying "Well, let's see what looks good today."?

INFORMANT:

Yes to both. I sometimes had a list, and sometimes I would just go and see what looks good.

INTERVIEWER:

And how long would you spend inside the store, generally speaking?

INFORMANT:

Well, my kids never want to go in a grocery store with me, ever, because I talk to people. So probably, I don't know: 20, 25 minutes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, well, so tell me about the talking to people. These would be acquaintances, friends, neighbors that you knew from town, that you just bump into?

INFORMANT:

Right. Well, I used to teach so I know a lot of people, and my husband's an eye doctor, so we know a lot of people through the office. And I just, I don't know, I'm just a friendly person, and it's always nice to see people and have conversations. I guess I'm not one of those people who just rush in the store and rush out of the store. I do take my time, for something or talking with someone, or both.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you tend to wander around the store a lot? Like go down every aisle just to kind of get ideas? Or, do you have a sense of I need to go down this aisle for this, and that aisle for that, and that aisle for that, and I'm done?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I have a sense of where things are. So, I don't just go up and down the aisles. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you spend a lot of time browsing the produce or the meat or the seafood and seeing what looks good?

INFORMANT:

I wouldn't say I spend a lot of time browsing, just because I usually know pretty quickly what I want to get. Yeah...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Typical spend per trip?

INFORMANT:

Oh, man. Before COVID?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, yeah.

INFORMANT:

Oh, gosh. I would say anywhere from 100 to 150 dollars, you know, depending on what I was looking for. That seems kind of average for me.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And was there certain items that you bought most every time? If not every time?

INFORMANT:

Well, I always go through the organic aisle, and I get breads and frozen entrees and organic crackers, organic soups. So, I would say that's pretty frequent. Just about every time I go. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And just to be clear, we're also interested not just in edibles but consumables that you would need on a regular basis, like napkins and paper towels and laundry detergent and things like that. Are those, do you buy those at the same place too? Or do you buy them separately?

INFORMANT:

We buy mostly at the same place, a grocery store, but sometimes we pick things up at Target. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And when do you decide to go to Target versus the grocery store?

INFORMANT:

We usually go to Target if we're looking for some kind of...I love the cards there, so I go to Target for that. And what else do we go to Target for? We buy a lot of our over the counter stuff, ibuprofen and things like that. Over-the-counter drugs, etc.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, huh. Okay. In general, do you find the shopping experience pleasurable, a nuisance? Do you look forward to it? Do you dread it?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, I'm not a big clothes shopper. But, I really, I really enjoy going to the grocery store. I mean, I know a lot of the people who work both at our grocery store and at Target. Yeah, I enjoy that.

INTERVIEWER:

So it's the social aspect of the shopping experience as much as it is, what's on sale and what's available and new ideas that you come up with?

INFORMANT:

I think you hit the nail on the head there. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Good. So let's transition now to COVID. So think forward now, I guess probably around the time you came back from Florida, mid/late March, I don't know when COVID kind of reached its -- was accelerating most rapidly in terms of consciousness and awareness, but somewhere in that late March time period. How did your shopping patterns change as that was unfolding and becoming a very significant issue?

INFORMANT:

I'd just go once a week, if I went once a week. So, yeah, it curtailed the number of times I would go to the store.

INTERVIEWER:

And so it was at that time that you started being more cognizant and conscious of developing a list?

INFORMANT:

No, I have always had a list, but...I mean, I always take a list when I go to the grocery store. I shouldn't say always -- most of the time I take a list, but I think I was just much more aware of what we were eating and planning for meals. That made me more cognizant of what I'm buying, what we needed.

INTERVIEWER:

So didn't what you bought change, in terms of the types of things you bought?

INFORMANT:

Not necessarily, just that we would be cooking at home more often. It's usually recipes that we were familiar with, although we've tried a few new ones, but...

INTERVIEWER:

So your volume of purchasing increased, but it was more or less the same items, just more of it because you're going through more of it, because you're cooking more?

INFORMANT:

Right, exactly.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, and you talked about changing where to shop, you normally went to a big grocery store in Sturgeon Bay, and then you started going more what I would call a specialty shop. Is that accurate?

INFORMANT:

It's just a small grocery store in Egg Harbor. And the people who own it, as well as many of the employees, are patients of Eric's. So we were trying to support a business, a local business, in the time of the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So it was, I think you mentioned you were thinking that they probably also had better sanitary practices. So was it a two-fold rationale?

INFORMANT:

Say that again?

INTERVIEWER:

Was it a two fold rationale, to support some of your husband's patients that own that business as well as you thought that they would probably be a little bit more sterile?

INFORMANT:

Yes, I think that's true, and they seemed to have tighter policies for making sure things were clean and safe.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you continue to frequent the big grocery store? Did you completely stop shopping at the big supermarket in Sturgeon Bay or just reduced your frequency there?

INFORMANT:

We completely stopped for about a month and a half.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you would go to Egg Harbor you say about once a week?

INFORMANT:

Right. Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And do you think in aggregate, when you add up all the bills, do you think that going there increased your cost relative to if you just kept shopping at Sturgeon Bay?

INFORMANT:

I would say probably. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you said it was about a 20 minute longer drive each way?

INFORMANT:

20 minute drive one way. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

But in your mind, a significant, a non-trivial value was just getting out and about, driving around a little bit?

INFORMANT:

Well, that was just a lovely thing, really. But also, it made us feel good to support a local -- not that our big grocery store isn't local, but it's like Green Bay.

INTERVIEWER:

What chain is that?

INFORMANT:

Econofoods.

INTERVIEWER:

Econofoods, okay. The store at Egg Harbor -- did have everything that more or less you were looking for or would normally buy in Sturgeon Bay? Or was it a smaller selection?

INFORMANT:

I would say, yes. They pretty much had everything we needed, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

All right, and talk to me a little more about...you said they had a service where you could call them up a day in advance, they would bundle everything up and bring it out to your car and put it in the trunk. Did I catch that right?

INFORMANT:

It wasn't a phone call. We had to send an email with our grocery list on, and kind of group things like produce, meats, deli, additional things like that, and we had to kind of group them in our emails and say, "This is what I'd like to get. Can I come and pick this up at 11am tomorrow?" Or maybe usually it was in the afternoon, two o'clock in the afternoon. And they would just send a quick email back and say, "We heard from you. Yep, we'll see you tomorrow." And then we just pull up and give them a call and say we were in in the parking lot. And they would have someone bring out our groceries, and our hatch would be open in the back, and they would load up the groceries and say "Thank you!", and we drive away.

INTERVIEWER:

And how is the payment handled?

INFORMANT:

We had to pay with, they had to have our credit card on file.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. Do they charge an extra amount for that service? Or was that free?

INFORMANT:

No, they did not.

INTERVIEWER:

And, so you didn't have to go inside at all? You didn't have to touch a shopping cart?

INFORMANT:

No, I didn't.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you mentioned how important the social aspect of shopping was or how pleasurable it was. I'm assuming that was pretty much zeroed out during this period of time?

INFORMANT:

Right, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

And that was a trade-off you were willing to make?

INFORMANT:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it more for health and safety, or more for the "Let's support local business"?

INFORMANT:

I would say it's 50/50.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

INFORMANT:

Plus, our daughter's very adamant about being really conscientious about CDC guidelines. And yeah, so we just tried to show that we were obeying.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. So let me introduce a phrase that gets thrown about in common conversation occasionally: panic buying. What does that mean to you, panic buying? What do you think?

INFORMANT:

Well, when I go to the store and there's no toilet paper on the shelf, I think "Somebody's got something going on", I don't know. And when I was in Florida right towards the end, I mean, there were shelves empty in every grocery store, usually paper towels, hand sanitizer, cleaning products and toilet paper, did I say? Yeah, toilet paper and paper towels. Hand sanitizer. It was just crazy to me, like, completely empty shelves.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you actually observe anyone emptying the shelves by taking an inordinate number of items?

INFORMANT:

I did not.

INTERVIEWER:

Or did you, you just saw the after effect?

INFORMANT:

Right. Yeah. And I saw on TV, people who had their carts overflowing with things like that, but I never saw it in person? No.

INTERVIEWER:

Have you reflected upon it, to think about what caused people to do that? Did it make sense? And should you do that? Et cetera?

INFORMANT:

I never thought that I needed to do that. But I did think that, I mean, you just try to understand what people are thinking. And I think because their world feels so out of control, something they can control is making sure they have enough toilet paper or paper towels. It seems manageable for them. And I could be totally wrong. I'm just supposing.

INTERVIEWER:

Mm-hmm. Did you talk to any of your friends or relatives about this? Dinner table or cocktail party -- well, I guess there were no cocktail parties -- but you know, email or phone exchanges with friends, whatever, did it come up?

INFORMANT:

Just that we were all surprised that people were kind of in panic mode for some of these items.

INTERVIEWER:

Any evidence of panic mode for food items? Or was it all for paper products and cleaners?

INFORMANT:

Not for us, not for us. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, thinking now to about this timeframe -- mid/late March, early April, maybe -- when you shopped online. So I guess this is at the time when you were shopping entirely online with the store at Egg Harbor -- is that accurate?

INFORMANT:

Right. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Did you ever on that list, increase the amount of things that -- not the number of items that you're buying, but the amount of, the volume of any one particular item? Did you ever instead of buying one chicken buy two, or instead of buying two cans of soup buying six? Did you ever stock up on anything?

INFORMANT:

Not, not really. I mean....no, no. I mean, we have a pantry. So we put things in the pantry for future use. And I wouldn't say I ever bought anything in excess of what I would usually buy.

INTERVIEWER:

You normally keep an inventory at home of a lot of these items?

INFORMANT:

Not you know, just a visual look it over, "What do I need to replace?" Yeah, I don't keep an inventory per se.

INTERVIEWER:

I didn't mean a formal list, necessarily. But do you typically keep extra of many of the common items you use around, just in case?

INFORMANT:

Yes, that is true. That is true.

INTERVIEWER:

And what would those items be that you tend to keep a little bit of a surplus of?

INFORMANT:

Crackers, soups, cereal -- not necessarily the things that people buy tons of, but...yeah, we have a couple different kinds of meat in the freezer for future use, but not necessarily -- we're not stockpiling. It's just have it there for when we get hungry for them.

INTERVIEWER:

And the items that you saw shelves bare with respect to -- the paper towels and the hand sanitizers and toiler paper and all that -- you didn't feel the need to purchase any of those when you saw them?

INFORMANT:

I didn't -- well, no, that's not true. I did want to find a hand sanitizer, but I ended up not finding hand sanitizer, so...

INTERVIEWER:

Because it wasn't at the store, or because you didn't go to other stores to try and find it?

INFORMANT:

I didn't, actually I went to a couple stores when I was in Florida and it was not to be found. Yeah, but once I got home, we had plenty.

INTERVIEWER:

So, the hand sanitizer, not finding it even though you were looking for it: how did you feel about that?

INFORMANT:

Well, I thought, "My gosh, how much hand sanitizer can one person use?" It was surprising to me. But again, if people are feeling out of control, and that's something they have control over, maybe that's why they're buying so much.

INTERVIEWER:

And, this control issue that you're reflecting on, thinking about here: you didn't personally feel that way?

INFORMANT:

No, not really. I mean, I was just sad that this is affecting our whole country and our whole world. But I didn't feel out of control. I felt really lucky that we live in a nice house and I have a warm bed to sleep in and a roof over my head, and if I'm hungry I can go to the refrigerator and find something. So I didn't feel, no.

INTERVIEWER:

Other than the conscious choice to switch to Egg Harbor and then in the different modality of getting your groceries that way, did your strategy about buying things change at all, in terms of what to buy more of, what to buy less of?

INFORMANT:

I wouldn't say so. No.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned going to Target every once in awhile for over the counters and things like that. Did that change at all?

INFORMANT:

Um, well, initially we didn't go, but once we felt more comfortable with procedures and wearing our masks, we did right away. And seeing Target take extra precautions, they were just, we would go more frequently. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, so it was the evidence that Target was taking this seriously. And that reassured you, and after that you felt more confident of going there?

INFORMANT:

Yes. True.

INTERVIEWER:

And -- I don't recall if I asked you the question before, so I apologize if it's a repeat -- but how many, how frequently would you go to Target before COVID? Was that once a week, once a month?

INFORMANT:

Probably once a week.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And during COVID, during the peak, did that decline?

INFORMANT:

We didn't go for like a month and a half.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. In terms of, did you compare notes with other people, whether they were in your family or friends, on what they were doing shopping-wise?

INFORMANT:

No, I didn't. No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. When you were making your list and emailing it, how is that process different than your normal buying experience? You said that you would typically go in every couple days based on what you're planning for the next couple days, foodwise, and then you would have a list, both partially written and partially mental. The process of writing this email, much more formalized than what it used to be -- what that prior approach used to be. Did that provide you comfort? Did you find that to be a nuisance? Did you think this was fun? Or this this is weird?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, it was just a little annoying because I had to sit at the computer and think about how to group the things I wanted to get and come up with headings for the groupings and... Yeah, but I did say in one of my emails to them, I said, "You know, you must be getting some really interesting lists. You should put it together and think about a book, you know." They thought that was a great idea. And they said, "You can't believe the lists we're getting." I don't know what they're gonna do with that, but...

INTERVIEWER:

It was your responsibility to do the groupings, though? They didn't have a didn't have a form for you to fill out?

INFORMANT:

No, they did not.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. Let's see, just going through my list here. Any kind of exceptional shopping experiences one way or the other during this time?

INFORMANT:

Well, at this moment in time, it does surprise me to go into Econofoods and see people who aren't wearing masks, when it says on the door masks are encouraged. I know some shops in town, retail shops, say masks are required. But at the grocery store, it kind of just says masks are encouraged. So it surprises me to see people not wearing masks.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, we'll get back to that topic in a few minutes. So hold that thought. You mentioned also in passing that you haven't -- with the exception of this email exchange with Egg Harbor and then

sending the items out and you picking them up at the curb -- you haven't explored online options for groceries and household goods.

INFORMANT:

No. No.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that a conscious decision, or it just didn't make sense to you, or just didn't need to do it?

INFORMANT:

Just didn't need to do it. Didn't need to.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Were you aware that Amazon, Target and Walmart can do things like that?

INFORMANT:

Yes. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

And it wasn't appealing to you?

INFORMANT:

Just didn't feel the need to do it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. If the weather had been, I don't know what the weather was like, but if the weather had been bad or...

INFORMANT:

It was bad.

INTERVIEWER:

That didn't affect you?

INFORMANT:

Well, yeah, you know, if you can't get outside, that's certainly not the greatest thing. But that being said, I have plenty to do in my house between things I do on the computer and reading and watching movies, cleaning a closet. Had plenty to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. So now, think to today. Where would you, how would you characterize your shopping patterns today versus pre-pandemic and peak of pandemic? Is it back at pre pandemic levels?

INFORMANT:

Yeah, it's definitely pre-pandemic. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

And so you're going to Econofoods, not to the Egg Harbor place?

INFORMANT:

Right, right. And they've opened up, the Main Street Market in Egg Harbor, they've opened their doors. So if I wanted to go and get groceries, I could go in.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh, okay, so in Egg Harbor at the time you were, we've been talking about, their doors were closed. This was the only way, it was the only way they were selling product.

INFORMANT:

That is correct.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, whereas Econofoods was open the whole time, right?

INFORMANT:

Correct, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, you've decided to go back to Econofoods largely because of convenience? Because closer? Or more...

INFORMANT:

Convenience. I feel like I can take care of myself when I go in there, because I have my mask, I keep my hand sanitizer on me, they have wipes to wipe down the cart. Now, I usually just wipe down the handle. Yeah. I feel like I can take care of myself, not worry about -- just not worry.

INTERVIEWER:

What percentage of people would you say are wearing masks?

INFORMANT:

Um, depends on the day. Sometimes, it seems like half the people are not wearing masks, but other days -- and I don't have a sense of what day is what, but -- other days it seems like more people are more conscientious about their masks. Some people are just really obstinate about, not being, "You can't tell me to wear a mask" and I just think, "Oh, please, really?" Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Is there, have you ever seen conflict or tension at the store about that topic?

INFORMANT:

No, but I have a friend who works for a retail store downtown, and she confronted a woman who was trying to shop without a mask and...it was not, it was not pretty.

INTERVIEWER:

Interesting. Can you say more, or would you rather not?

INFORMANT:

No, she just, she explained to the woman that, if you're going to shop in our store, we have the signs on our doors: you must wear masks, you have to hand sanitize, we're happy to help you in any way we can. And she said, she pulled out a little poster out of her purse, and the poster said "I know my rights." And they got the store owner who came out and explained that "This is our store policy. This is my store. We would love for you to shop here. If you won't wear a mask, I'm sorry, we can't help you." And the woman stormed out. People are funny.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes. So, social distancing is that well practiced, would you say?

INFORMANT:

Yes, I would say so. Now that it's summer in Door County, there are some places that are not doing that, which is not a good thing.

INTERVIEWER:

Are there one-way aisles and are there markings on the floor? Or are there limits to the number of people who can go in, were there things like that at Econofoods?

INFORMANT:

No. No, I mean, they have signs up all over about social distancing and what six feet looks like, but there's no like traffic arrows or...

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. All right. Do you see, do you think that other people's purchasing patterns have reverted back to normal?

INFORMANT:

I guess so. I really don't pay attention, to tell you the truth.

INTERVIEWER:

When thinking about your purchasing patterns, and you say they're more or less back to normal, what, do you have any thoughts on when and how quickly those reverted back to normal, or what triggered them to go back to normal?

INFORMANT:

I think just that I felt like I can take care of my own safety with a face mask and hand sanitizer that...I mean, I still have friends who won't go into a grocery store because they don't think it's safe. So...

INTERVIEWER:

That opinion that you formed about safety and managing yourself with the masks and sanitizers and so on: did you come to that assessment from reading news reports or following COVID and trying to understand the disease?

INFORMANT:

I would say, I would say that's true.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And do you see any bare shelves now? Do you see any panic buying now?

INFORMANT:

I have not. I have not.

INTERVIEWER:

So, it was that panic buying that we discussed around the toilet paper and hand sanitizer that was mostly in Florida, right during the early days?

INFORMANT:

There were a few days here in April that Econofoods had -- according to my friends who shop there -- had bare shelves, but they seem to be well stocked now.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you're not worried that, you know, tomorrow when you go to the store, if you were to go to the store, you could get what you want.

INFORMANT:

I'm not.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you have any thoughts about a potential second wave? If this re-emerges in the fall, and things get back to more or less the situation that existed in March or April, what did you learn? Will you do the same thing you did this time? Will you do something different?

INFORMANT:

I think, for me, the trick is staying out away from crowds, and not eating in restaurants yet, being safe when I go into a store, wearing a mask and having my hand sanitizer.

INTERVIEWER:

Does that cause you to think about different times or days of the week to go to the store than you normally would to minimize crowds?

INFORMANT:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that because there really never are crowds there? Or...?

INFORMANT:

I would say that's true. It's a pretty big store at Econo, there really aren't...Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right. I think we've covered most of the main topics here. Before we close, though, is there anything else you'd like to add on the general theme or concept of panic buying?

INFORMANT:

No. I, you know, I just think, again, when people feel out of control, they're looking for what they can control. Seems kind of silly that it would be toilet paper, but...I don't know...

INTERVIEWER:

Any thoughts on which people would be more inclined to do that than others?

INFORMANT:

You know, I really do not know. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Any thoughts on how that social phenomenon could be altered?

INFORMANT:

Hmm, I'm not given that any thought.

INTERVIEWER:

Here's a specific question. Did you ever see any limits on how much you could buy of product x?

INFORMANT:

Oh, sure. Sure.

INTERVIEWER:

Which products were those?

INFORMANT:

In Wisconsin. Toilet paper. Paper towels. Hand sanitizer.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you see any changes in prices that were significant to the point where you thought maybe this is a way to discourage demand?

INFORMANT:

I did not, but I didn't pay close attention to that, either.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, so in general, did you notice any changes in price?

INFORMANT:

In general, I really didn't. I mean, it didn't change. I just didn't pay attention.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Well, thank you for your time. Before we close, I want to get some additional basic demographic information which again, to remind you, we'll keep confidential. Year of birth?

INFORMANT:

1956. I'm 63.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, gender?

INFORMANT:

Female.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, education?

INFORMANT:

I have my master's degree.

INTERVIEWER:

Occupation?

INFORMANT:

I'm retired. A teacher.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, annual household income?

INFORMANT:

It's over 100,000.

INTERVIEWER:

Marital status?

INFORMANT:

Happily married...most of the time.

INTERVIEWER:

How would you define your household when you go shopping? Who are you buying for?

INFORMANT:

Just for my husband and myself.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Religious beliefs?

INFORMANT:

Ummm, United Church of Christ, what is that? Christian.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, political beliefs?

INFORMANT:

I have never voted party. But I tend to be, tend to look at the qualities of an individual or decision-making or belief in caring about the country and caring for people. So I have voted both sides there.

INTERVIEWER:

Very good. Thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: Sarah Shawver

INTERVIEWER: Jinyan Xiang

DATE: June 23, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is a friend of the Interviewer's roommate, based in Blacksburg Virginia.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes.

Interview was scheduled at 3 pm (ET) on a weekday.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

All right, to begin with the interview, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?

INFORMANT

Aside from the obvious, I'm spending more time at home. And I'm not going out as much. I'm not eating out at restaurants as much. So, mostly just following the stay at home orders and guidelines.

INTERVIEWER

So would you say your typical day changed because of the pandemic, and how that is changed because of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Right. Um, so I'm staying at home, so I'm doing all of my work from home. And I'm starting my day later, because I don't have to get up, get dressed and then go to work. So I can just start work whenever I don't go out to parks as much just because I'm still trying to avoid the people who are at parks. But I would say I walk around my neighborhood more.

INTERVIEWER

Alright. How have your thinking and feelings changed?

INFORMANT

Can you say that again?

INTERVIEWER

How have your thinking or feelings changed, or how did you feel during the pandemic? How does the pandemic change your feeling and thinking?

INFORMANT

I would say I'm more worried about things in general. I pay a little bit more attention to what I have at home, and I'm just worrying that I'm going to run out of essentials like toilet paper again.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have like other feelings or emotions, other than concern or worries?

INFORMANT

Um, I would say in some parts. I have been grateful more for my status as a graduate student because I have job security where other people might not. Yeah, other than that and like just worry about like friends and family and their safety.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel more stressed during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

100%.

INTERVIEWER

So, what is the major source of the stress? It's the health concern, a financial stress, or any other type of stress, or just the overall stress?

INFORMANT

I would say, mostly stressed about health for myself, my family, but also stress from work, because I've been at home and I've been writing more, and having my actual research being put on hold is definitely a stressor.

INTERVIEWER

So because of the pandemic, you have to pause your research?

INFORMANT

Yes, because you cannot contact other people. Because I can't, we're not -- until a week ago, we weren't allowed to physically go into the lab to do the work.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. I see. So, think back in time to before the COVID-19 pandemic and describe how you typically shop for groceries and other household goods.

INFORMANT

Um, I would just stop by a grocery store on my way home from work a couple times a week and usually just pick up what I was planning to cook for dinner that night, or the next night, and maybe a few snacks. I definitely didn't do a lot of planning. I very rarely made shopping lists. So, if I forgot to pick up more contact solution or something, it wasn't a big deal.

INTERVIEWER

Did you buy any groceries and household goods from any online channels such as Amazon or just go to grocery stores?

INFORMANT

Primarily through grocery stores, I don't think I've ever bought groceries online; however, like household goods like toilet paper, generally no, not from online sources.

INTERVIEWER

Which grocery store did you usually go?

INFORMANT

Mostly Kroger and Aldi.

INTERVIEWER

Did you shop at Target or Walmart?

INFORMANT

Occasionally, if I needed more household goods and groceries, I would go to Target.

INTERVIEWER

So, you didn't really do planning for shopping?

INFORMANT

Very little planning.

INTERVIEWER

How frequently did you go shopping for groceries and household goods?

INFORMANT

Two to three times a week probably mostly because if "oh, I need something to make a meal", I'll just stop by and grab it on the way home. And then a couple nights later "oh, I'm going to make something else", I'll just run to the store and get what I need.

INTERVIEWER

How did you feel when you were in grocery stores for shopping? Did you feel relaxed, did you feel rushed or did you feel anything else?

INFORMANT

Before the pandemic, pretty relaxed.

INTERVIEWER

How much money did you usually spend each time you went to the grocery store?

INFORMANT

I would say about \$20 to \$30 usually.

INTERVIEWER

And how much time did you spend during each shopping trip?

INFORMANT

Half an hour to 45 minutes?

INTERVIEWER

What were the items you usually and frequently purchase?

INFORMANT

In terms of groceries or household products?

INTERVIEWER

Both.

INFORMANT

Oh. Household products -- I mean, your typical like soaps and shampoos and toiletries. For groceries, I would get a lot of produce and whatever was on sale, as far as like any routines.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean the discounts can really affect your shopping decisions?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah, or coupons as well.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you usually go to Kroger and Aldi?

INFORMANT

Aldi, because it's very very cheap, and Kroger because it's the closest grocery store, to my apartment and it's on the way home from work.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, let's just move on. Think about mid-March, when the pandemic became a more severe issue in the United States. How did your shopping patterns change?

INFORMANT

Um, I would say, I have been trying to plan ahead more and make a list and only go to the grocery store maybe once every week to week and a half.

INTERVIEWER

Did you change the items you usually buy?

INFORMANT

Not that much. Um, I would say I'm buying more fruits, but that's mostly because we're getting more into the summer season where fruits are in season, if that makes sense.

INTERVIEWER

Yep. So how about household goods? Did you buy any of the household goods, more than you need, compared to how much you bought before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I would say, I bought larger bulk of items. So, before the pandemic, I would just grab like one roll of paper towels, but then since the pandemic -- because it's been hard to find them in stock -- if I can find a big package of them and I'm kind of low, I will buy a larger package.

INTERVIEWER

How often did you shop during the peak of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Once every, like I said, week to week and a half.

INTERVIEWER

Did you still go to Kroger and Audi?

INFORMANT

I went more to Aldi, because they were taking the pandemic a little bit more seriously, and they had the one-way aisles that kind of helped reduce how much you were around other people.

INTERVIEWER

Did you go to any other channels, other than Aldi and Kroger?

INFORMANT

I thought about going to Amazon for toilet paper for a while. But luckily, I got my hands-on some, so I didn't have to rely on that.

INTERVIEWER

So you consider Amazon as an alternative option but, because you got enough from Aldi or Kroger, you did not really shop on Amazon for that?

INFORMANT

Right, yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Describe what you may know about what people sometimes called "panic buying".

INFORMANT

And so, I see that as people fearing that they're not going to be able to get their hands on something, or they're going to need a lot of it, so they buy as much as they possibly can, without regards for other people's needs.

INTERVIEWER

Have you observed that in store?

INFORMANT

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Personally?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I haven't seen people actually doing it, but I definitely...like, still it's very rarely come across, will have paper in stock at any of the stores I've been to.

INTERVIEWER

Observe -- most of the stores you went to the toilet papers were out of stock? But you didn't directly observe people grab so much toilet paper?

INFORMANT

Right. And I think part of the reason for that is the time I go shopping. I tend to go later in the day, and from anecdotally what I've heard is the panic buyers go as soon as store opens.

INTERVIEWER

Have you have you watched any news or read any news report about panic buying from any media resource? How did you feel about that? The news or reports or your own observations?

INFORMANT

It's frustrating. And I definitely felt angry about it, because the reason for the toilet paper shortage, it's like a self-fulfilled prophecy. People thought they wouldn't be able to get it, so they went out and bought it, and then it wasn't in stores anymore because everyone bought it.

INTERVIEWER

That's why you feel angry about that?

INFORMANT

Yeah, angry and frustrated.

INTERVIEWER

Because people who really needed could not buy it?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

What were your thoughts about it panic buying, other than feeling frustrated and angry?

INFORMANT

I thought it was unnecessary. Like, from what I've seen, there's been some disruption to supply chains, but for the most part essentials are still being able to be made and delivered to stores. So there wasn't really any need to go out and buy the entire stock.

INTERVIEWER

Did you think it was quite irrational to do panic buying?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

And why?

INFORMANT

Because, like, it was, still stuff is still getting made and shipped through.

INTERVIEWER

So, why did these people do panic buying, in your opinion?

INFORMANT

I think some people did it because they heard it was going to be a problem, and it was just kind of an in the moment thing, and I, I am pretty sure -- I don't know if it qualifies as panic buying -- but I know there's a price gouging aspect to it so people see that there's going to be a shortage so they went out and bought what they could so they could then sell it for a much higher price.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, you mean like resale of the stuff?

INFORMANT

Yeah. It's like, if you have seen with Nintendo switches. Since that production actually did get shut down for a while, people were buying them when they come in, and selling them for like \$200 over the market price.

INTERVIEWER

For average consumers who did not intend to resell this product, if they had more information about the stock information, do you think whether they would still do panic buying?

INFORMANT

I thought they might, but I think if there was better information out there, it would stop a lot of them from panic buying.

INTERVIEWER

When shopping in store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buying, or actually bought, an unusual amount of an item just in case? Like, did you ever participate in panic buying?

INFORMANT

I, I will say I considered it. Um, but I never did, mostly because the rational part of my brain told me I didn't need to. And also, by the time I found toilet paper, the stores had limits on how much you could buy, so it wasn't even possible to buy more than I needed.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you consider buying a usual amount of toilet paper or other household goods?

INFORMANT

Because I was running very very low on toilet paper at the time, and it had taken me a while to find some in store. So it was a combination of the relief that I finally found some in store and the worry that I wouldn't be able to find anymore than the pack that I found right now.

INTERVIEWER

So, when did that happen? Like in middle March? When did your toilet paper was really low and you needed more?

INFORMANT

It was late March by the time I was actually running out.

INTERVIEWER

During mid-March, when you might already see some people engaging in panic buying, but you were not low on toilet paper. So, during that period, you never considered panic buying?

INFORMANT

No, I would say -- like mid-March, no, I wasn't that worried about it. I was about to do my prelims for grad school at that time, so that was the only thing I had to worry about.

INTERVIEWER

After you made that prediction about what you would be going to use in the future and thought about how many you had during that time, you decided not to do panic buying. Can you elaborate more about your thought process? How did you make such a decision that you would not buy so many other than there was a restriction?

INFORMANT

So I was also seeing stories about people who were literally out of, had no toilet paper in their house and couldn't get any and just hearing how people panic buying was affecting others, that I think I'd say it's more of a compassionate feeling than knowing that if I take everything then the person behind me who might actually need it wouldn't be able to get any.

INTERVIEWER

So, if there were no limit restrictions, you're, you will not do, engage in panic buy, because the passionate part.

INFORMANT

That is correct.

INTERVIEWER

I think I asked you that question before: you still bought your household goods from Aldi and Kroger, you didn't buy anything for Amazon during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Correct.

INTERVIEWER

Can you talk about your store shopping experience during the pandemic a little bit more? How did you feel when you were shopping at Audi or Kroger?

INFORMANT

It was definitely very anxious and stressful, because I was simultaneously trying to check things off of my list to make sure I didn't forget anything so I wouldn't have to go back a second time. I was trying to be mindful of not picking up anything I wasn't planning on buying because I didn't want to spread anything for cross-contamination. I was trying to stay six feet away from everyone. And then there was also, like -- it definitely got frustrating, because we're trying to stay six feet away from people but then someone would be standing in front of what I needed to grab for a long period of time so.... definitely not an enjoyable experience.

INTERVIEWER

Because of the pandemic, you suddenly became a planner, instead of just grabbing the things randomly?

INFORMANT

Definitely becoming a planner. I was, I was trying to not go to the store unless I really needed to.

INTERVIEWER

Why didn't you consider other stores like Target, Walmart or any other stores?

INFORMANT

I generally don't like Walmart that much anyways. Um, and then just like the larger stores tended to be more crowded and I couldn't be sure that I would be able to maintain a safe distance in there. And those stores when I need groceries, they'd have a very limited selection of what groceries they carry in there

INTERVIEWER

Because you really buy groceries and household goods together, Target might not be the ideal option for you because there is very little produce?

INFORMANT

Right.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been influenced by the shopping environment such as the mitigation strategy the store takes, the store layout, the store atmosphere or other customers' behavior? Have you ever been influenced by these kinds of factor?

INFORMANT

Yeah, so that's why Aldi for a while was my preferred place because they were -- and they still are -- they have one-way aisles, they're sanitizing carts, they have hand sanitizer in the store, they're limiting how many customers are in there.

INTERVIEWER

During the pandemic, do you still feel that discounts affected your shopping decision that much?

INFORMANT

I would say it still affected what I bought, but not as much.

INTERVIEWER

Why wasn't it as much?

INFORMANT

Partly because, if I had coupons, I didn't want to have to force a co-worker at the store to come here for me to handle the coupons. Because when I was at Kroger, they had the self-checkouts, I was trying to do that so I could stay away from the people. So, there's a little bit of guilt of "If I use this coupon, I'm going to have to ask someone who's working for basically minimum wage to risk being exposed to me to come over here and deal with it."

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever tried a grocery pickup?

INFORMANT

I did once before the pandemic when I had a bad cold. Um, but I haven't done that during the pandemic, because I don't want someone else that I don't know handling all of my food.

INTERVIEWER

Although that can reduce your contact with other people, you still think you might have a higher risk?

INFORMANT

Right. And also, because the online ordering doesn't always keep up with what the store actually has in stock. And sometimes if you ask for something specific, they may exchange it with a similar item. And I'm kind of a picky eater, so I don't like that similar item -- it makes it a little bit harder to get what you want.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any other feelings during the in-store shopping?

INFORMANT

I would say I would get annoyed with people who weren't following the rules or the guidelines that the store had in place. And so, with Aldi, they have a one way aisle and their signs are very clearly at

eye level and there would be people just walking the wrong way down the aisle and it would be -- I would get annoyed and angry at them.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever try to stop them?

INFORMANT

No, because I didn't want to. I'm not a confrontational person. So I would just try to avoid them as much as I could.

INTERVIEWER

Has any store associate stopped them?

INFORMANT

Not that I saw. And with Aldi, they typically don't have a lot of workers stalking around the shelves.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever considered Foodlion? Because there are many Foodlions, and basically there are very few people in Foodlions?

INFORMANT

I don't, I feel like Foodlion is more expensive. And there isn't one close to me. So, you see.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe your cognitive state during the pandemic when you were shopping in any grocery store? Did you feel certain about everything, or did you feel confused, or any type of such feelings?

INFORMANT

I would say there is more just a feeling of uncertainty.

INTERVIEWER

About the stocks information, about the items, or just about the general situation?

INFORMANT

Pretty much the general situation.

INTERVIEWER

You feel uncertain about everything? It is not just about shopping or not about food, not about household goods, just generally?

INFORMANT

Yeah, uncertainty about how long everything's gonna last, whether stuff is going to run out again. And because, you never know who may be an asymptomatic carrier. Like, I just walked by someone I've been certain they have it and I just got exposed.

INTERVIEWER

So you said you went to the stores during perhaps evening, a later time when there were few people. And did you intentionally choose to do that?

INFORMANT

Not necessarily. I'm just more of a night owl anyway, so I'd never get up early and decide I needed to go to the store as soon as I wake up.

INTERVIEWER

So, before the pandemic, you were also kind of like a late shopper?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I'm generally just on my way home from work, whenever that was.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any tricks that could help about how to get the stuff you want?

INFORMANT

Um, in terms of making sure I got it when it was in stock?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

INFORMANT

Um, not really. I just tried to have kind of a backup plan for if I couldn't find exactly what I wanted, to make whatever meal I was planning, if there was a substitute item, I could use for it.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that others' behavior affected your thinking? Like other consumers in the store, did their behaviors affect how you think?

INFORMANT

In terms of...? I'm not sure what you're asking, like in terms of how I think about?

INTERVIEWER

Like, what you should and how much you should buy. Like, your general shopping decisions. For example, when you observe other people buy some item, would you consider buying that as well? Something like that.

INFORMANT

I would say probably not.

INTERVIEWER

So you just stuck to your shopping list, went to the grocery store and shopped what you need. Did you do impulsive consumption during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I still do impulsive buys. Like, if I'm walking by something and I think, "Oh, that looks good!", I have more of like snack foods I impulse buy.

INTERVIEWER

Because you mentioned you try to limit the exposure to others, but again you just came across something you really think that was good and you would still buy?

INFORMANT

Yeah. And you said you never did online shopping for household goods during the pandemic?

INTERVIEWER

And back to today: have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the pandemic, have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between?

INFORMANT

I think they're still pretty similar to what they were during the peak of the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

INFORMANT

We still have cases in the area. It hasn't gone away as much as some people may think it has, and I still -- people are wearing masks in stores. So there is a little bit more of a feeling of safety than when people, when most people weren't wearing masks, but there's still concern.

INTERVIEWER

How long do you think this shopping pattern will last?

INFORMANT

Probably until at least a few more months, until we actually see numbers actually go down

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel the current situation is quite different from the peak of the pandemic, or they're still quite similar?

INFORMANT

I would say it's a little bit different, just because we have more information on how it's, on how the virus is spread, so there's some better practices in place in a lot of stores, especially with the mask order being in effect.

INTERVIEWER

So you feel people and grocery stores became more cautious?

INFORMANT

Some of them. Like, I know there's still people who don't think it's a big deal or don't really want to follow the rules or wear a mask. But in general, I'd say people or at least are aware of how they can avoid spreading it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any other comments you're related to panic buying?

INFORMANT

Uh, no, I think I expressed my feelings on that pretty long.

INTERVIEWER

We've had a pretty quick interview, because you don't have the online part and we have some questions about online. Do you have any general feelings about the pandemic and your overall consumption experience during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I need to quit buying snack food. It's not good.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER

So to complete this survey, I will just ask you a few demographic information and then will keep anonymous. First is, what's your year of birth?

INFORMANT

1993.

INTERVIEWER

What's your education?

INFORMANT

I am currently working on my PhD.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, which year are you in?

INFORMANT

I'm in my third year. Well, going into my fourth now.

INTERVIEWER

And apparently your occupation is student?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your annual household income?

INFORMANT

33,000.

INTERVIEWER

And what's your marital status?

INFORMANT

Single.

INTERVIEWER

And how would you define your household? Are you living alone?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

And what's your religious belief?

INFORMANT

I am an atheist.

INTERVIEWER

And what's your political belief?

INFORMANT

Democratic

FOLLOW-UP

INTERVIEWER

Do you want to say anything about the topic, or do you have any feedback to the questions we have?

INFORMANT

No.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think we need to ask more like some other aspects about panic buying or about the consumption during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

No, I think you covered the topic pretty well.

INTERVIEWER

I think we're pretty done today, but it's quite early. I'm trying to come up with some other questions, but I don't think we have any other questions, because I guess we already covered most of the questions. Interesting that most people do not really buy household goods from any online channels.

INFORMANT

Yeah, I mean, I -- there's always a worry if you're buying on Amazon, unless it's a well known brand of something like -- there's always that little bit of worry of like, maybe it's not going to be good quality.

INTERVIEWER

How about well-known brands, like Bounty?

INFORMANT

I mean, if you like it. The only thing I would have bought online would have been toilet paper. And when I was starting to get desperate, the only stuff I could find online was like industrial, like what you would find in a public bathroom which -- if I if I had an option to go to -- anything other than that really crappy toilet paper. It's not, not good.

INTERVIEWER

So actually Amazon or other online channels are always the secondary option to you, compared to the in-store groceries?

INFORMANT

Yeah. I mean there's definitely also a patience factor. Because if you buy online, you have to wait for it to get to your place.

INTERVIEWER

And before they pandemic, how many did you usually buy for toilet paper? Just as much as you just need -- like, you never do over-planning?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I would probably buy a medium sized pack and that would last me for a really long time. I would never buy the super huge ones, because I don't have room in my tiny apartment to store that much, and it would last me way longer than I would probably be living in this place, so...

INTERVIEWER

So, if you could have a larger apartment or a larger house with a basement, would you buy more in general?

INFORMANT

I mean, living alone, probably not. Because I just don't go through it that fast with just one person.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: Hannah Angel
INTERVIEWER: Jinyan Xiang
DATE: June 23, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is a friend of the Interviewer's roommate, based in Blacksburg Virginia.
Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes.
Interview was scheduled at 5 pm (ET) on a weekday.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

To begin with the interview, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life? That is the first question.

INFORMANT

Okay, well let me think for a second. I would say, from an emotional standpoint, the feelings of being isolated and not having my normal work environment and so...so life has created more feelings of isolation and anxiety, especially anxiety in terms of the fact that we're independent, and it's really related to my family getting sick and whatnot, so there's been more anxiety, from an emotional standpoint. Those are the cons. The pros are: it's a little bit easier to have my own schedule, I guess. I'm, in terms of, I don't have to be anywhere physically, so it's a little easier in those senses. I don't have to, I guess, try as hard in terms of getting dressed. So those have been some pros. And although time management is a little bit harder, even though I can be a little more flexible, you have to be more rigorous in your self-discipline and your time management. Physically, I would say I'm just at home a lot more. So, the transition, not from working in the building from working at home, has lowered productivity quite a bit. And so just getting, being distracted by things such as cleaning my house, online shopping, taking walks -- those are some things that the distractions may have lowered productivity, and then add on top of that some anxiety. I would say there's been more cons, because of this, than pros. But I think overall, I'm adapted pretty well, as most people have. So, yeah. Anything specific from that?

INTERVIEWER

So, how has your typical day changed, like your daily routines?

INFORMANT

I would say, I go, my daily routine. Um, let's see. I definitely go to bed a little later. I go to bed a little later in the day, and I wake up a little later in the morning. And I eat. I'm eating primarily food home, so my roommate, my roommate and I, since COVID started....Can you hear me okay? It said my internet was unstable?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, the picture is not good, but the sound is always good.

INFORMANT

Okay, so we eat at home a lot more, and we go to the store. I would say we go to the grocery, when we were going to a grocery store, about once every week to week and a half. So, I would say, when we went to the store, we would buy more groceries, a larger volume of groceries. And so, my roommate and I just started doing things a lot more from home, like cooking. Because of that, the house, it's dirtier quicker. So, we, I find myself wanting to clean a lot more of the work. And then on top of that, we have to adjust to working at home with animals, and the distraction that the animals bring. But I would say a typical day looks like me starting a little later, which is about instead of 8am, it's about

9:30, and then going to bed, much later, like 1130 in the night. And then throughout the day, I'm working on my computer. And recently, I would say, a little later after COVID began, like a month or so after COVID, I did start going into the lab, maybe once or twice a week, to start doing lab work at my building, because they allow that. So I started going out a little more to do some lab work. And so that, in my opinion, helped my schedule, helped my productivity, by just getting out of the house and working somewhere else. I've been at home a little more recently, because of this virtual conference, but other than that I would say, I'm about 50-50, at home and in the lab at school.

INTERVIEWER

Just like this month, I guess? Not like during the peak of the pandemic like the mid-March. Like, during the mid-March, did you also do half and half?

INFORMANT

No, it was all at home. So I was taking, because -- that was weird, the spring semester, I was at home every single day, other than taking walks and going to the store. I was taking classes, finishing up my classwork, and then teaching soils lab, which is a lab based class, and so we transitioned that on to Zoom, and so I was on Zoom a lot more, sitting down a lot more. And then my weekends, I tried to just be outside a lot, taking walks. That's what my life looked like about March through early May, and then about around early May, mid May, that's when I started going into the lab a little more.

INTERVIEWER

How have your priorities changed? For example, perhaps before the pandemic, the priority was the job, the work, or the teaching? But then, during the pandemic, your priorities shifted to health or something like that? Do you think that your priorities changed during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

It's actually really funny because, with the whole hand washing and contamination aspect of it. It didn't, it didn't really. But it's really interesting, because I suffer from contamination OCD, I'm not diagnosed with OCD but I have, I already have this weird OCD -- not weird, OCD-like tendencies around washing my hands a lot, so when this COVID thing happened, I would say, I was very aware of the concept of getting glitter on your hands, and if you touch a surface, you're now contaminated: you have glitter on your hand, and then you touch someone else, you have glitter on that surface. So I think that I got that concept really well, and I would say that it wasn't a major priority at first to wear a mask and wash my hands constantly, but then I think once Virginia and other states put in the mandates that you have to..."we're encouraging you to wear a mask" and the social distance and then the hand washing, I started to take it a little more seriously when we were being told to by the government. You know what I mean? So I think that it didn't really -- and even then it didn't really necessarily raise my anxiety and fear because -- I mean, I don't want to get sick and I am, you know, going by the protocol, but it's not like -- I'm more fearful and anxious about somebody I love getting sick more so than myself getting sick. So I would prior...so I've just, I'm already a relatively healthy person and health conscious, so it didn't really change that perspective. If anything, it just makes me... that anxiety and fear is more so coming from the people I love getting sick.

INTERVIEWER

How have your thinking and feelings changed, other than like feeling uncertainty, something like that?

INFORMANT

Yeah. And so you're asking to my uncertainty?

INTERVIEWER

No, I am asking -- like you just said, you were feeling more anxious during the pandemic. I mean, do you have any other feelings or thinking, because of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Um, I, I am thinking. Let's see, short term thinking. I guess I'm just, you know, trying to get by and do the right thing in terms of what we're supposed to do. You know all the mandates and whatnot,

how that's affecting the longer term, I guess I'm trying to think about visits going home, and I guess when this thing is gonna blow over, and it's gonna take longer than I guess I thought, it's gonna take a little longer for it to blow over, so I'm thinking about like how it's gonna affect my time here, is it going to delay my field work? Am I going to be able to visit my parents at Christmas time? So I am thinking about how long...in essence, how long the virus is going to stick around and my...it's not something that we're going to eliminate, it's...so I guess I've been thinking about how we deal with the, I don't know...

INTERVIEWER

The situation?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel more stressful during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I would. Yeah, I think, I would think it's additional stress, and it's a different kind of stress. But generally, I'm coping with it I think, pretty well. If I was a lot busier and I had a lot more responsibilities this summer -- like in the spring I was really stressed because I was taking classes, I was teaching, I was studying. And I think that when I have more on my plate, it stresses me out more. I think right now, with summer I'm only dealing with a couple of things. It is just an additional stress, for example. I can't focus so much on my research now because I have to funnel a lot of my energy and time into preparing for the course I teach in the fall, which is soils lab again. And that has to be a lot more different preparation because we're going to have to do a lot more things online, and so preparing for that is a little bit stressful just because in some ways I do have to reinvent the wheel. And that's, time consuming in that I -- this summer, I was hoping to get ahead more on my research, now I have to, because of COVID, I have to redo a lot of things that was, that was already in place for that course I had to make new labs and stuff. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

So basically, what you're saying is your stress is mainly caused by your work and by your study. It is not because of the health issues or health concerns. It's just about the situation creates a lot of extra burden for your work, and that stresses you out?

INFORMANT

Yeah. But I will say that, that it adds a little bit more stress. In terms of my physical -- what I physically have to accomplish, where my time management goes, but also it does stress me out because I don't want to get a bit, I don't want my parents -- more than anything -- to get COVID because they're very at risk. So that's an enormous amount of stress. So definitely both those. And then, yeah, so I know we're, Blacksburg is a pretty low risk area, but still it's just like being the wrong place at the wrong time, you know.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, I see. So let's just move on. Um, please think back in the time to before the pandemic and describe how you typically shop for groceries and other household goods. Before the pandemic, what were your shopping patterns or shopping behaviors?

INFORMANT

So because I, before COVID, I would go into school, go into my building at least five days a week. I would be driving or I would be...I was mostly driving, I wasn't taking the bus a lot in the spring semester, I started to park with parking pass. So because I was out more using my car, I would, if we needed something...if I went to lunch or if I wanted to stop and get like coffee or shop, particularly coffee because often I would go to Starbucks or go to a coffee shop and work a little bit. I cut that out, so I was purchasing a lot less small snacks and drinks here and there, I stopped that. And as far

as groceries go, if we needed something, if I needed to pick up something, I would stop at.... So I mentioned this before, when we needed groceries, it wouldn't be, "Oh, I'll pick up some almond milk, or some salad, like three to four items, because I'm already out in town and I'll just pick it up." It was now "We're going to the grocery store, only like once to get, once every week and a half, every week usually was about a week, and we're gonna get everything we need." And so we had a lot more bags at one time versus like little items that I just picked up while I was running errands, or going coming home from work.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, so now we are actually talking about your shopping before the pandemic. So before the pandemic, you actually just did the pickup from Kroger or other grocery stores?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Did you frequently do the in store shopping, before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Before that, it was pretty much all in store. Sometimes I would buy cat food, and vitamins, on Amazon, but that was about it. So there's mostly Kroger, sometimes Starbucks, and then Annie Kay's, which is a little natural food store right down the road -- it's on the way to and from work.

INTERVIEWER

How about the household goods rather than groceries and foods? Like toilet paper, paper towels and cleansers? That type of household goods? How did you buy them before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

So before the pandemic. I mean I would still make trips to Kroger when the house was dwindling with certain things like rubbing alcohol which... I do buy rubbing alcohol frequently. Floss, paper towels, so I would go the store and have a longer list of things that I got before the pandemic. So that was probably, maybe that was a little spaced out a little bit, so maybe once every two weeks I would do that because I was also making additional stops to get certain things, as I needed them, because it was, it was a little bit more -- it was okay for me to go to the store and be "Okay, I'll get this this this, and if I forget something that's okay because I can just go the next day and get it and pick it up because I'm already out in town." So, I would say, overall, I went to the store and visited stores a lot more before COVID. If that makes sense.

INTERVIEWER

So have you ever shopped in other stores for household goods than Kroger?

INFORMANT

It was mostly Kroger's, and sometimes I would go to the natural food store right down the road in any case, just because it was easier to get in and out, although I try not to do that because it costs more. So I would try to get everything I needed at Kroger that I couldn't find on the natural food store because it is cheaper.

INTERVIEWER

So, for the household goods, what you did before the pandemic was you made the list and you just went on a separate shopping trip for this list, or you just bought the household goods along with your groceries, along with your foods?

INFORMANT

I will usually just mix them both, so if I needed to go to the store to get some avocados or some lemons, I would also think "Do we need paper towels? Am I out of rubbing alcohol?" I also try to, whatever I needed I would, food stuff or household items, I would get it at the same time, if it was convenient -- it was all based on convenience. Like, "If I need something I'm going to get it right

now.” And it was just more sporadic trips. “Oh, I want some apples, I will grab some paper towels”. So there's more sporadic, more often trips with less items.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, basically, would you say you shop the groceries and household goods randomly instead of having a rigorous plan?

INFORMANT

Yeah, exactly.

INTERVIEWER

And did you care about the discounts or coupons?

INFORMANT

I've never really. I've never really prioritized that.

INTERVIEWER

So have you ever tried...? Oh, please go head.

INFORMANT

Oh no, I was just gonna say, if it's convenient, right in front of me, and I see “Oh \$2 off on this thing.” Then, yeah, but I've never prioritized coupons or discounts, but I do try to buy the Kroger brands, the brand names, because of my Kroger card.

INTERVIEWER

How did you feel while you were shopping at Kroger? Did you feel relaxed? Did you feel rushed? Or did you have any other feelings, before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Before the pandemic, no, I didn't feel like....I, yeah, I would definitely say I was less stressed, less anxious. I wasn't anxious or stressed at all before the pandemic going to the store.

INTERVIEWER

So how long did you usually spend during each trip before the pandemic? Yeah, we're all talking about things happened before the pandemic now.

INFORMANT

It was a lot quicker. I would say the trips inside the store were much quicker before the pandemic. I would say no more, no more than 30 minutes. Sometimes it was just in and out, 15 minutes sometimes it was like 30-40 minutes.

[Lost of connection for 2 minutes]

INTERVIEWER

How much did you usually spend each time?

INFORMANT

So I probably, generally I spent, if it was, if I went to Annie Kay's or Starbucks or somewhere just to get like a coffee or food or snacks, it would be about somewhere from \$10 to \$15, and that was, that was often, that was two three times a week. You know, get some little muffins and whatnot. And then if I went to the store, because I needed to get bread, almond milk, some avocados, that would run me around \$50 to \$70, if I needed more things. Sometimes...I would say around \$40 to \$70, depending on how many items and what the items were, if I went and it wasn't just any in-and-out kind of situation.

INTERVIEWER

What are the items you usually purchased when you went to the grocery stores? Not Starbucks or other food shops, but just the grocery stores.

INFORMANT

So I would get any household items I needed, which I usually run out, once a month, maybe a little more than that, of cloth and rubbing alcohol for cleaning, paper towels, toilet paper. Chopsticks I would get if I needed it, that was once every month or so. And then foodstuffs typically would be

avocados, lemons, limes, oranges, bananas, or just like regular stuff like that. Maybe some lettuce, bread, frozen items like frozen burritos for lunch. Frozen patties for making hamburgers -- for vegan burgers -- frozen vegetables, rice and vegetables. Rice, canned chickpeas, canned tomato sauce, maybe some pasta every once in a while, and then some cereal and milk, almond milk and that was about it. Um, so these general items.

INTERVIEWER

How many did you usually buy for toilet paper or soft clothes or household goods?

INFORMANT

It would just be one, it will be like six packs. Maybe I forget what, how many rolls come in. It wasn't a huge pack, it would be medium sized. Yeah, for paper towels, it would be either single, a single paper towel or usually two, sometimes, sometimes well, so it's usually about two paper towels, in a pack of two. So that was again not too often, about once every month and a half, something like that.

INTERVIEWER

Before the pandemic, did you buy household goods from Amazon or other allied platforms like Target.com or Walmart.com, something like that? Or did you just buy all household goods from physical stores?

INFORMANT

So, it was mostly from physical stores, but occasionally, I would only use Amazon to buy vitamins, sometimes cat food. And then sometimes makeup products, but I very rarely....

INTERVIEWER

Not for toilet papers or paper towel or like rubbing alcohol?

INFORMANT

I never I would never buy toilet paper or rubbing alcohol or Q-tips on Amazon.

INTERVIEWER

Why, why would you never buy from Amazon?

INFORMANT

Because I get pretty good deals at Kroger and I don't, I would never plan an Amazon haul, like, "Oh, I need to get these items. I'm just gonna buy them off Amazon." If I, usually I would buy things off of Amazon if I couldn't get it conveniently, get it in the store, or if I needed it and I didn't want to go to the store and I maybe was like "Oh, I need cat food in three days, I don't want to forget, I don't want to go to the store just for that, ooh I'll order it on Amazon. Oh, and by the way, I probably need to get some more vitamin D supplements...", so it'd be like two or three items that I would buy on Amazon because I didn't want to feel like I needed it and I didn't want to go to the store just for that and I knew I was going to forget. Kroger, I'm usually going at least two to three times a week. Three times is kind of excessive, but I might as well just pick up a few Q- tips and rubbing alcohol when I get my avocado. So that's the thinking behind that. And also Kroger brand is pretty cheap. So, the prices on Amazon would be comparable. I do have Amazon Prime.

INTERVIEWER

So, other than Kroger, did you go to other stores for shopping groceries and household goods?

INFORMANT

Sometimes I would go to Annie Kay's, which is a natural food store near where I live. And then, very occasionally, I would go to Walmart, and it would only be if I was going with a friend, or my roommate. So that was very rare, but sometimes I would go to Walmart. And then sometimes I would go to Petco to get toys for my cat. And I would only buy my cat litter from Petco, because they have cat litter in bulk and I volunteer there. So, because I volunteer there, I just get litter there too -- plus it's in bulk.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so I think we can move on to next question. Think about the mid-March, when the pandemic became a severe issue in the United States. How did your shopping patterns change? I think you

already mentioned some of it. Like you reduced your shopping trips and any other changes in your shopping patterns or shopping behaviors?

INFORMANT

Yeah, so reduced shopping trips, bought a lot more items at once, which naturally, I spent more money at one time. I don't know if that I was actually spending more money, or I was just spending more money at one time. You know, instead of that \$70 high, it was now like over \$100. And I did notice that I would buy a lot more things that maybe weren't necessary, like I would buy things that were a little bit more like snacky and just more food than what I normally do because I am stuck at home a lot more. And I don't know when the next time I'm going to the store is. So, I like to stock up a little more.

INTERVIEWER

How much more did you stock up?

INFORMANT

I would say probably like 5 to 10 more items than I normally do.

INTERVIEWER

Like if you just buy two rolls of paper towel, and now you buy seven? Is that what you mean?

INFORMANT

Well, I, we couldn't get access to a toilet paper or paper towels, so that's not a good example. It wasn't so much household items, it was mostly food stuffs, food items. So instead of getting three oranges, I would get six oranges, and instead of getting three avocados, I would get seven. And instead of getting one gallon of vanilla milk, almond milk, I would get two. And I would additionally buy, maybe another bag of chips or another...more sweet stuff, like a chocolate bar or something. And I would stock up on my Kombuchas, the little six-ounce Kombuchas.

INTERVIEWER

But you didn't buy any more of household goods?

INFORMANT

Not really. No. I didn't know, it really wasn't like that. I didn't like to buy three tins of floss or three tins of Q-tips, because I didn't think that the pandemic was gonna affect anything other than rubbing alcohol, disinfectant wipes and paper towels and toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER

So how about toilet paper or paper towels? Why didn't you buy more than you usually bought?

INFORMANT

Because they didn't have it on the shelves.

INTERVIEWER

Did you still go to Kroger? Did you still do Kroger pickup, like you ordered online and you go to Kroger and pickup?

INFORMANT

No, I never, never did that, even before the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, okay. So why didn't you do that?

INFORMANT

Because I didn't want to look into it, and I really think that was an optional thing before that. I mean, what I mean, I probably knew it existed, but I didn't think that it was like that it was for like old people, or something like that. I didn't think that it was commonly used. And also I was just out a lot, so Kroger is literally right on my way home, really right on my route. So, if I needed something, I would just go and get it.

INTERVIEWER

So did you change what you usually purchased during the peak of the pandemic? Or, did you still buy what you usually bought? But just more items of the same product?

INFORMANT

I started buying a few different things. And generally, I didn't change what I was eating, or buying too much, but I did -- because I was in a lot longer at one given time -- I found some new products, food products that I wanted to try, or I explored more brands and products, because I think, probably because I was there for longer, and like I said, I was wanting to, you know, I was eating from home a lot more instead of eating out, and so I wanted to, I guess just diversify my choices a little bit. So I did incorporate a couple of new eating habits into my routine.

INTERVIEWER

During the pandemic, did you ever go to other stores, other than Kroger?

INFORMANT

I still went a couple times to Annie Kay's, but I reduced the amount of time I went to Annie Kay's tremendously. So instead of going two, three times a week, like once every two weeks.

INTERVIEWER

Describe what you may know about what people sometimes call panic buying.

INFORMANT

Well, a good example of that would be buying all the toilet paper. Yeah, and to the point where there's literally none on the shelf for weeks at a time. Also panic buying masks, which was a very stupid thing to do in my opinion. So, the masks and the toilet paper. Oh, and the rubbing alcohol, that really pissed me off. Yeah, I think that those three are very good examples of panic buying. And I never really, I never did that, when I...the first time I saw toilet paper was at Annie Kay's, and I still ended up going to Annie Kay's. And the reason why is, and I didn't tell you this but I buy bulk soap, like shower soap and hand soap, I buy Dr. Bronner's and it's in bulk, and it's in bulk in Annie Kay's. I have to go in every month, every week and a half, two weeks to get more soap. And I noticed that there was toilet paper in Annie Kay's individually wrapped in rolls. So, that was about three-four weeks after the pandemic really happened, and I stocked up on two. So instead of one, I bought two rolls because I wanted to be -- but I don't even think that would be considered panic buying because I live with two people and we hadn't had toilet paper in weeks, and we had been using baby wipes Pampers.

INTERVIEWER

Have you really observed panic buying in person? Have you ever seen any other consumers panic buying in the store?

INFORMANT

I, I personally have not. Um, but I'm sure some people have seen that. And I'm sure store employees have, and I'm aware of them putting those signs up saying only two per customer, only one per customer, something like that. But I personally haven't seen any of that.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever seen other signs of panic buying, such as like empty shelves? Any other signs that, you think they might be the signs of panic buying?

INFORMANT

I definitely saw empty shelves, in terms of paper towels and toilet paper, mostly toilet paper, and I didn't really notice anything else. Although I have friend of mine, I secondhand heard that he said that the shelves were low on beans -- I think it was, I can't remember if he said dry beans or canned beans, but some sort of beans weren't in stock when he went -- so I heard about that. But I never saw the beans gone, but I guess I don't eat a whole lot of beans.

INTERVIEWER

I also actually saw the empty shelves of food like the meat. The meat section, like nothing on the shelf. Probably I went to the store quite late, I don't know, but I think they restocked very quickly.

And do you have any thoughts and feelings about panic buying? I think you just mentioned that you think it's very stupid. Like any other thoughts about that?

INFORMANT

I think that that panic and that fear is, um, you know...I'm not like, I guess it's like a normal thing for people to feel that way, based on like the world we live in. But, uh, yeah I mean it is what it is. People...I don't like to generalize people, I don't really know at large. Here in Blacksburg overall, what I've experienced physically been pretty decent, but I haven't witnessed anything that has been absurd – like “Wow, these people are going a little crazy!” I just have noticed a lot more people outside walking their dog.

INTERVIEWER

So when shopping in a store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buy or actually bought an unusual amount of item “just in case”?

INFORMANT

It would mostly be like “I'd better grab...”. It was mostly food-related, “I might as well grab an extra thing of...” Well, I mean, it wasn't too bad. I mean, there's probably, I mean, I wasn't always buying things in multiples. But sometimes I would, because I'd be like “Oh I use this a lot, because I use it a lot, I better get two”, you know what I mean? And then, one time maybe, I bought I think an extra thing of like Aquaphor lip cream or gel because...it was that “just in case” thinking. So it did happen a little bit, but not excessively.

INTERVIEWER

So, but you don't think you actually engaged in panic buying?

INFORMANT

No.

INTERVIEWER

Why did not you ever engage in panic buying? Because you didn't feel panic about the shortage of any household goods or....?

INFORMANT

I did think about not getting access to food and not having, being able to go to the store. But I did think about like, “Oh, what do we have right now in the house? We have a lot of dried beans, we have a lot of rice. We have a lot of frozen stuff. And pasta. So we'll probably be good. A couple weeks of rationing, if you had to.” And so I did have those thoughts and those fears, but then when I would go to the store and realize that the stores were pretty well stocked, and it wasn't really much of a difference, that kind of alleviated my fears. So I was like “I'll be fine, I will only get one loaf of bread.” So generally, that's what my thinking was.

INTERVIEWER

So, but you said that you did buy some items a little bit more than you actually needed. Can you talk a little bit more about the experience when you did that?

INFORMANT

So that was more so because, that wasn't a necessarily a thing because I was afraid that it was gonna be gone the next time I went to the store or I would be trapped. With that item, it was more so, a product of “Oh I don't go to the store as much, so I might as well buy an extra thing of this item or this item”. It was only a few cases that this happened. “I will buy an extra one of these because I'm going to the store and getting out in town a lot less.” And so I'm just trying to, because I use more of this one item, I might as well get two. Does that make sense? Like I was trying to be efficient with my time and my going out in town, and exposing myself to other people.

INTERVIEWER

In most cases, you buy extra items for foods, not for household goods like floss or rubbing alcohol, something like that?

INFORMANT

Generally, I bought a couple more items than I would, in terms of food. So instead of buying two potatoes, I would buy four potatoes. If I bought a new loaf of bread, I would be like "Well this is gonna last me until the next time I go to the store", I would not buy two but buy one. I guess looking back I could have bought more, but I just didn't want to have to carry it all. And there was maybe one or two cases where I bought an additional household item, because I knew that I was going to the store a lot less, and I really wanted the item. So, when I really needed this item, I was just kind of thinking ahead, but that doesn't...that only happened once or twice.

INTERVIEWER

So actually your shopping decisions were all based on your predictions about your actual usage. And it's kind of like the trade-off between actual usage and how many trips you were going to the store. It's not an emotional thing but it's very rational. You had a very thorough thinking process to make that decision.

INFORMANT

Yeah. You're right on, you're right on with that one. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

And you said you never bought anything from online channels during the pandemic? I mean groceries and household food goods?

INFORMANT

I definitely did spend quite a bit of money on clothing. I think mainly because I was depressed.

INTERVIEWER

On what? From what stores?

INFORMANT

There is three different sites I bought clothing, so I probably bought like \$200 worth of clothing from three different stores.

INTERVIEWER

Of clothing? From Amazon or other online stores?

INFORMANT

About three different online stores and altogether about \$200. So about three to about four articles of clothing....I was counting the articles of clothing I bought. It was more like seven to eight articles of clothing. And, yeah, it was about \$200. And I did it because I knew that I couldn't go shopping for awhile and I was like I was I guess I was bored, I was depressed, I was anxious, so just. Oh, and I got the stimulus packet. I got money from the government for the pandemic, you know the stimulus check?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah.

INFORMANT

So I thought, "Screw it, I'm just gonna online shop." So that's how I did it.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, so after you got the stimulus check, you just bought the \$200 clothing from different stores, because you think it was kind of like windfall money?

INFORMANT

Well, I did not need the money. The government, I don't really need the stimulus check.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, you didn't really need it? Okay, so it was kind of like an extra bonus for you?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I should have donated some money. But, I mean, yeah I could have donated some of it, I guess, to people who did need it but, I mean, I just bought clothing.

INTERVIEWER

All right. Yeah, that's just \$200 and you still have \$1,000 left. So did you spend the stimulus check on hedonic products like clothing or some other stuff for fun?

INFORMANT

It was just the clothing. I didn't buy anything else really. I mean, my roommate splurged too, but she didn't buy clothing, she bought useful stuff. Like, Kombucha packages or starter kits for making up homemade Kombucha. I'd be interested to see how many people, how people used their stimulus check. I'm sure some people really did need it. I don't know why they did it the way they did it, but everybody got \$1200. I think. Yep.

INTERVIEWER

So back to today: have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the pandemic or have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic or somewhere in between?

[Interrupted for 1 minute]

INFORMANT

So kind of like a hybrid, I would, I try to not go to the store, unless I need to, I still try to take fewer trips. But because I'm going to the lab more, I do...Because I'm going into town more, I will sometimes go back to the way I was before the pandemic and maybe a stop here or there, a little more frequently. So kind of like in the middle of the two. Does that makes sense?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah. How long do you think this hybrid shopping pattern will last?

INFORMANT

Probably for the foreseeable future, because I am...Well, probably for the foreseeable future because I really don't like to be stuck at home, I like to go out to work. And I'm going to be going out more with having to go into the lab, not just for research but for teaching preparation and teaching work, and stuff like that, so it's probably going to happen, or it's probably going to last for months.

INTERVIEWER

Just for a month? Next month, you're going to go back to the shopping patterns you were, like they were before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I mean I'm probably gonna. No, I'm probably not going to, things aren't gonna change that much. It's not gonna go complete completely to the way it was before the pandemic. Because I'm still being very practical with social distancing, limiting my exposure. I'll especially do that once the students come back into the fall, there's just more people, but I'm not going to go out to eat every other night or very often. I have been, my roommate and I, a couple of, after the initial pandemic happened and now, and since the mandates have been lifted a little bit, we have been going out to eat a little bit more, like picking up food like from Chipotle or a Chinese takeout type restaurant. But we're still being smart about it, and we're still going to do that only every so often, you know what I mean? I'm gonna maintain that -- I'm not, I don't think my shopping habits will go back to completely the way it was, although I don't know, maybe it will, because you know, you get complacent. And so when you get complacent with, you're going out more and more and nothing's happening for a long period of time, you might become complacent with the mandates, and so it could change, but I'm trying to be practical.

INTERVIEWER

So have you, I think you already have adapted to these hybrid shopping patterns, so you feel comfortable with it?

INFORMANT

I do feel comfortable with it. I'm not as stressed and nervous to go to the store now than I was when the initial couple of weeks, what it was like when we had like the initial outbreak and the initial

pandemic. I'm less, I guess, hesitant to go to the store. Um, and also physically like I said it's just a little more convenient because I am going into town more. You know what I mean? Um, so I feel better about it.

INTERVIEWER

So yeah, I have a few questions that I just forgot to ask you. During the pandemic when you were shopping Kroger, how did you feel like, what was your emotional state?

INFORMANT

I felt a little stressed out initially, because some people were not wearing masks and, basically, the media and stuff, but that kind of faded. When it became more normal when, when the pandemic was, there's more and more normalcy around it, and I got used to it, those feelings of stress and anxiety reduced.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your shopping decisions were influenced by the store environment, such as the mitigation strategies, and the store layout, or the general atmosphere?

INFORMANT

There wasn't really much of a difference in terms of my decision and actions. I tried to not walk near people as much. I tried to avoid people.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, so actually others' behavior didn't affect your shopping decisions, either?

INFORMANT

I'm sorry. Say that again?

INTERVIEWER

Like, when you saw what other people bought and how much they bought, did such things affect how much you bought and what you bought?

INFORMANT

No, but I mean, if we saw that there -- well, I mean if, we -- not really. The only thing is, if my roommate saw toilet paper on the shelf, which she did once, she took the biggest one she could find. But she just took one, but still she took it. So I mean, I bet we needed it so that doesn't even count! But I would say to your answer, not really. Nothing really changed.

INTERVIEWER

Why were you not affected by others' behavior, even though you can see what other people did?

INFORMANT

Um, I don't really, I didn't really see people behaving differently. I mean some people were wearing masks, some people weren't wearing masks. I mean, I didn't really see them behaving differently. Like, I don't really understand what that means.

INTERVIEWER

In general, it means even though you see the items other people bought, you will not buy that if you did not need it, right? Like, you would not follow other's behaviors? If you see other people all buy the same product, you wouldn't buy the same product?

INFORMANT

That did not affect me whatsoever. And are you talking about like how people are judging you?

INTERVIEWER

No, no. It's not like how you judge other people or how other people judge you. It's just whether you will follow others' shopping decisions and shopping behaviors.

INFORMANT

I see what you mean. I get it. Really, that really didn't affect my decision making.

INTERVIEWER

Because you're very clear about what you really need and what you really want, you were not affected by other people's behavior?

INFORMANT

What they were buying? No!

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, before we close today. Would you like to add any other comments related to panic buying that we haven't covered yet? Or just your consumption, your shopping during the pandemic in general? Do you have any other comments?

INFORMANT

I will say that I, I've heard from people that on the opposite end of panic buying is going into the store to buy one thing or two things, and especially going to the store to buy a couple things one or more, one or a couple of things that aren't necessary. So I've heard people complain and get upset when they would see people be at the store for unnecessary reasons or only buying like a couple of things. So that's something that I guess maybe you guys can think about, or maybe -- well I don't know if that would be helpful or not but anyway, that's just the other thing that came up during the pandemic. Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, I mean their behaviors don't make sense. It's kinda like, why they go to the stores for unnecessary reasons. Perhaps they want to increase the exposure to others? I don't know. Yeah, it's kind of like they have some negative thoughts in their mind. But it's hard to observe that because you don't know whether they purchase because people want to go outside, and even just because only grocery stores are open, and they just go there. Because I also noticed that in Europe, more people just go outside for walking their dogs because it's allowed. And they would just use all the chance they can go outside.

INFORMANT

It's really interesting, I'd like people to look into how many more -- Oh, this is interesting: since COVID there's been more dog attacks on postal workers and kids and owners and neighbors and other people, there's been a significant more amount of dog bites and attacks since COVID. That's maybe interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah. Why does this happen? I have no idea why this happens.

INFORMANT

I don't know either. It's interesting. I think we should look into it, or someone should.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, because all the dogs have their owners, right? The owners are with the dogs, but the dogs still attack the postal workers and children?

INFORMANT

Well, more so because they're home. Apparently, that stresses them out. They're home more and kids are around the dogs or kids are getting attacked more because they're just around the dog more, and it's stressing the dog out so the dog attacks, and also people open their door and their dogs run out, more because they're home. So I guess there's that correlation, is what they're saying. Anyway, I think it's interesting.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, it is. And then I would just ask you several demographic questions. First is what is your year of birth?

INFORMANT

1992.

INTERVIEWER

What's your education?

INFORMANT

Currently, I have a bachelor's degree. And I'm working on my PhD, but I'm not a candidate yet, so I'm the highest I've achieved is master's.

INTERVIEWER

But now you are a PhD student?

INFORMANT

Mm hmm. Yes, PhD student

INTERVIEWER

Apparently, your occupation is student. I don't need to ask. And what is your annual household income?

INFORMANT

I think it's 21,000 before taxes. 21,000 to 22,000.

INTERVIEWER

What is your marital status? Are you married or not?

INFORMANT

Single

INTERVIEWER

How do you define your household? Like are you living alone or?

INFORMANT

I'm living with my roommate. I'm trying to make sure that I told you wrong or right on the income.

INTERVIEWER

You are doing calculations all the time.

INFORMANT

I think it's more like 18,000 to 20,000, maybe not 22.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, that's fine you can just say around 20,000

INFORMANT

Yeah

INTERVIEWER

It is not that strict. I just need a range.

INFORMANT

Sometimes I can't do math. Okay. Yeah, what was the other question you have, I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, just two more one. What's your religious belief?

INFORMANT

Um, I guess Christian. I would say since I believe in God. I'm not religious, I would just put Christian.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, and what is your political belief?

INFORMANT

I would say Democrat.

INTERVIEWER

Or you can say liberal, something like that. You don't have to be like republican or democratic.

INFORMANT

Okay, that is fine.

INTERVIEWER

Thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: Grace Mark

INTERVIEWER: Jinyan Xiang

DATE: June 24, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is a friend of the Interviewer's friend, based in Boston Massachusetts. The parents of this informant live in Hong Kong.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes. Interview was scheduled at 3 pm (ET) on a weekday.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

Let's just get started. To begin the interview, how has COVID-19 pandemic affected your life.

INFORMANT

Um, I just finished school. But then I wasn't able to finish my school for the last two months. So I graduated early. Now just at home. I'm just studying,

INTERVIEWER

Studying for what, because you already graduated?

INFORMANT

Yes, I'm taking a board exam. I'm studying physical therapy. I have to take an exam in July before I start working.

INTERVIEWER

So would you say your typical day has changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

INFORMANT

Um, I wouldn't say that much, because I think the test exam. They just spread out the time, so then it would all compensate for more people. I guess like, I'm not sure how to say it, but have a small amount of people at a certain time and spread them out.

INTERVIEWER

So you still do actually the in person exams?

INFORMANT

I will be doing in person examination.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, you mean for the test you will have in July.

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

During the pandemic, during your graduate studies, during that period of time. If you think about April or March, has the pandemic changed your typical day?

INFORMANT

I stopped working. That's the only thing. Besides that, I am staying at home

INTERVIEWER

Have your priorities changed?

INFORMANT

Yes, study more, I used to go travel. And meet people, but now I will stay just at home, studying

INTERVIEWER

Have your thinking or feelings changed?

INFORMANT

Um, no.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So did you feel more stress during the pandemic or caused by the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I don't feel too stressed about the pandemic because I'm just at home. I feel more stress with studying.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you feel like more stressed with your study?

INFORMANT

I feel like I have more time to study but I'm not very productive with it because I can add on time to study.

INTERVIEWER

So, if you could go to the campus, do you think that your productivity will be higher?

INFORMANT

No, I guess.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So do you have any like other concerns such as the financial concerns or health concerns like any other types of concerns caused by pandemic?

INFORMANT

No, not really.

INTERVIEWER

So just feel as normal?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, could you talk about a little bit about how you typically shop for groceries and household goods before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Before the pandemic, I would drive to a grocery store and walk around, pick stuff like fruit. Usually, I would pick a week's food. But then because of the pandemic, I pick food specific to dishes I want to make. So I would prepare foods for three weeks.

INTERVIEWER

Before the pandemic, did you just shop for yourself or you and your roommate if you have any roommate?

INFORMANT

The food. Yeah, I just shop for myself, before and after.

INTERVIEWER

And how frequently did you shop before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Once a week.

INTERVIEWER

How much did you spend each time you did shopping?

INFORMANT

Around, 100 to 150. Oh, no. Before? You said before?

INTERVIEWER

Before, yes, we're talking about before.

INFORMANT

Before was 50.

INTERVIEWER

And how much time did you spend during each trip? Before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Before, I would say like an hour.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so what were the items you usually or frequently purchased?

INFORMANT

Before?

INTERVIEWER

Before, yeah, for groceries and household goods.

INFORMANT

Before, I would go for bread, milk, eggs, vegetables, some meat, snacks.

INTERVIEWER

So how about household goods? You're just talking about the food and the produce.

INFORMANT

Oh, toilet paper, paper towels. Um, um, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, that's fine. So how many did you usually purchase? Like how many rolls of toilet paper or paper towels did you purchase before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Before, I'll usually go to like a wholesale store to buy those. So they sell in bulk. So I only buy one bulk, one set of toilet paper was like...

INTERVIEWER

How about how about the food and produce? Like how much you purchased each time before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Like the food?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like the food you mentioned, like the bread like the meat?

INFORMANT

For the food, I don't buy in bulk. I just buy like small amounts.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And what was your state of mind during the shopping, before the pandemic? What were your feelings, how did you feel about the shopping? The general state of mind.

INFORMANT

I will say just carefree. I can pick whatever I want, I can touch whatever I want, I can buy it again, if I need to. Try to find everything I need, during this trip to pick anything.

INTERVIEWER

So, did you really make a shopping list before you went to shopping. or you just went to the grocery store and grabbed what you needed?

INFORMANT

Oh, I would say before the pandemic, I didn't make a list. But now I do.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so before the pandemic, would you consider yourself as a random buyer or buy things just random, like there's like no specific plan.

INFORMANT

No.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so which store did you go before the pandemic? Grocery stores.

INFORMANT

I usually go to Star Market.

INTERVIEWER

Star Market?

INFORMANT

Do you have some Star Markets there?

INTERVIEWER

No, so that's a local market in Boston?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, but you also mentioned you bought bulk from the wholesale stores, so which stores did you go to?

INFORMANT

I went to BJ's.

INTERVIEWER

BJ's. Okay. So, have you ever been to other stores. Yeah, like other grocery stores or other supermarket chains such as Target or Walmart or something like that?

INFORMANT

I also went to Target, Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.

INTERVIEWER

You went to each store for different items or just for the same items?

INFORMANT

For different items.

INTERVIEWER

So, what would what did you buy at Trader Joe's and what did you buy at Target?

INFORMANT

Target, I usually buy alcohol. Trader Joe's: they stock Trader Joe's specific snacks, and I would buy those. Whole Foods, it's just close to where I live, compared to Star Market. So I sometimes go there and walk there, compared to Star Market, I drive.

INTERVIEWER

So how frequently did you go to each of the store you mentioned, such as Target, Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's and Star Market?

INFORMANT

Before?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, before. We're talking now, what were you doing before the pandemic.

INFORMANT

Okay, cool. So, let's start with Star Market. Star Market, I usually go every, every week or two. And then Target, I usually go to the same time as Star Market because they're next to each other, but sometimes I just look around instead of buying stuff. And then Whole Foods, it's only when I really need something instantly. So, I would just go once every month. And then Trader Joe's, I would go once a month.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And you mentioned you usually spent \$50 to \$60 each trip, in which store?

INFORMANT

Star Market

INTERVIEWER

Okay, Star Market. Did you try any online channels for shopping groceries and household goods?

INFORMANT

Online?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like Amazon or like Target. com, something like that. Or Costco.com, BJ's.com? I don't know whether there is a BJ's.com.

INFORMANT

Um, I will get some household goods from Amazon. I don't remember what I bought.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so you did buy some household goods from Amazon?

INFORMANT

Yep.

INTERVIEWER

For which occasions you bought household goods from Amazon?

INFORMANT

Like what kind....?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, what kind and why did you buy them from Amazon? Because, as you said, you could get these household goods from BJ's as well, or perhaps other grocery stores. So, why sometimes you got these household goods from Amazon?

INFORMANT

Um, on Amazon I usually get like, like baking stuff or like pots and pans, usually because I'm too lazy to go.

INTERVIEWER

So you didn't buy like detergent, or paper towel or toilet papers from Amazon, did you?

INFORMANT

No.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. All right. And did you care about discounts when you bought the groceries, and household goods?

INFORMANT

Sometimes, but if it's too complicated to use the coupon, then I don't use it.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Okay. Um, when you went to the grocery stores for groceries and household goods, did you just go there separately or as part of other errands?

INFORMANT

Just go to the grocery store.

INTERVIEWER

Because some people are, they go to grocery stores on the way home from work, but you just go to the, like you said, a separate trip to the grocery stores, or just do that on your way home?

INFORMANT

Separate trip.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah. Okay. And when did you usually go to the grocery stores -- morning, evenings, weekdays or weekends -- before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I usually go on weekends.

INTERVIEWER

And what specific time during the day?

INFORMANT

Usually, usually in the afternoon.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, why did you choose afternoon?

INFORMANT

Because I wake up late. It is too late, so afternoon.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. All right! Think about mid-March, when the pandemic became a severe issue in the United States, how did your shopping patterns change?

INFORMANT

Oh, I go out less often. And when I go out, I usually wear a mask and try not to touch them, and just grab whatever I need and go.

INTERVIEWER

So you mentioned during the pandemic you started to make plans when you went to the grocery store each time. And why did you start making plans?

INFORMANT

Because then I try to make a list, so I won't forget what to buy. And so then I don't have to come again and buy more groceries and waste a trip.

INTERVIEWER

How frequently did you go to the grocery stores during the pandemic, during mid-March?

INFORMANT

I would say around two to three weeks. I will go once every two to three weeks.

INTERVIEWER

Did you change the items you usually bought?

INFORMANT

I usually buy more now.

INTERVIEWER

How much more?

INFORMANT

Now I spend \$150, before I spend \$50, because now I spend \$150 for three weeks.

INTERVIEWER

So, generally you buy triple what you did before the pandemic on each item, for example on food?

INFORMANT

Just like triple amount of food, like different kinds of things.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so, what were the items you bought most each time? Perhaps a snack food or any time you buy especially more than usually you would do?

INFORMANT

I would say I buy more meat, fruits and eggs.

INTERVIEWER

But, but they're perishable? Like for fruits and eggs, you cannot freeze them, but you still buy more?

INFORMANT

You try to eat them earlier now, not at the end of the three weeks.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And did you change where to shop?

INFORMANT

I usually go to Star Market still.

INTERVIEWER

And how about Trader Joe's or Whole Foods or other stores? Did you still go to these stores?

INFORMANT

I would as the same as before. I'll go like once a month.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Did you ever have the experience of waiting outside of the store?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

So, can you describe a little bit about that experience? How you felt and why that happened?

INFORMANT

I feel like standing outside and waiting is not a bad idea because we're all like six feet apart. And we're always getting in. And there is a person who always squirts and hand sanitizers before you go in. So it's very hygienic, I guess. Nothing is against it.

INTERVIEWER

So, when did that happen?

INFORMANT

A month ago.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. and now, you don't have to wait anymore?

INFORMANT

I think I still have to, but not that long.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so which store did you wait for entering?

INFORMANT

Star Market, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's.

INTERVIEWER

And did you change the day you went to the store? You still went to the store on the weekends or ?

INFORMANT

Oh, on the weekdays.

INTERVIEWER

So now you started going there on weekdays?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Still afternoons?

INFORMANT

Yes, still afternoons.

INTERVIEWER

Because what?

INFORMANT

Oh, because there's less people.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, that's true. And, so you didn't buy any more of like the household goods during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

I just buy around the same, which I buy bulks.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, still the same. Have you ever heard about panic buying?

INFORMANT 1

Yes, I guess. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, so, how do you think about that, where did you hear about that? From your own personal and direct observation? How did you know that?

INFORMANT

I saw it online, on social media. People are buying a lot of toilet paper, eggs and stuff. But usually, when I go to the store, in the beginning of the pandemic, there were no toilet paper, no eggs, no bread, stuff like that. But I didn't really care too much, because I don't really need them. So, yeah.

INTERVIEWER

So, how did you feel about that? Like when you saw the empty shelves, when you watched the videos posted on the social media about panic buying, how did you think about this phenomenon?

INFORMANT

I feel like it's unnecessary. Kinda like, it's all there, people are panicking because of this pandemic and I don't think you need to bulk up on stuff. So I kind of think.

INTERVIEWER

Did you think they were kinda like rational or irrational?

INFORMANT

I would say irrational.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you think they were irrational to do that?

INFORMANT

Because they're trying to buy all stuff for themselves but not thinking about other people who need them.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it's an emotional response to the pandemic or to the crisis?

INFORMANT

I would say it's psychological, because in their heads, they are thinking "oh, there's a pandemic, I can't go out and I need to buy a bunch of stuff so I can stay at home and not get infected or...".

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever talked about panic buying with any of your friends or family members? Have you talked about that with others?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I've talked to my family and my friends about it.

INTERVIEWER

And what were their responses to panic buying?

INFORMANT

My parents would tell me "Oh buy a bunch of stuff", and then I'm just like "Oh man, I don't wanna buy. I'll just buy what I need". And I just joke around with my friends when we talked about panic buying.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so why did your parents ask you to buy as much as possible? What would be their rationale behind that suggestion?

INFORMANT

They said buy a lot of rice.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, that makes sense.

INFORMANT

Yeah, just that one, I think, just rice.

INTERVIEWER

Are they living here or in Hong Kong?

INFORMANT

They are living in Hong Kong.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so would you say the situation in Hong Kong affects their suggestion to you?

INFORMANT

I think so, but I think Hong Kong is doing better than US.

INTERVIEWER

So, they only suggested you that you should buy as much rice as possible?

INFORMANT

Well I think before, not really, but now they told me to buy more rice.

INTERVIEWER

Now?

INFORMANT

During the pandemic, sorry.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, I got it. Yeah, so why did both you and your friends just joke about the panic buying, like none of you took it seriously?

INFORMANT

No, I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And how long did the panic buying last, in your observation? Do you think people are still engaging in panic buying now, or have they stopped doing that?

INFORMANT

I think now they stopped doing it. I think it lasted for almost two months, starting at the end of March to May, beginning of May. And then now it died down. And there's a lot more food on the shelf and toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER

So, in your opinion, why did these people stop doing that, starting, perhaps starting in late May?

INFORMANT

I think they realized that it's not as bad now, I guess and that they can go out more often and buy food.

INTERVIEWER

So, in your opinion, what caused these people to do panic buying, except for psychological response to the pandemic? What could be the other causes or reasons?

INFORMANT

Um, I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, That's fine. And when shopping in store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buying or actually bought an unusual amount of an item "just in case".

INFORMANT

More than an item online?

INTERVIEWER

No. In store or online during the pandemic, did you ever consider buying or actually bought an unusual amount of an item "just in case"? For example, did you ever buy any items more than you needed?

INFORMANT

Just eggs.

INTERVIEWER

And why, why you picked eggs?

INFORMANT

Oh, because recently I've been into baking stuff, so I use a lot of eggs.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, have you ever considered buying something more than you needed?

INFORMANT

No, no.

INTERVIEWER

So like you said, you noticed that other people were doing panic buying and even your parents suggested you that you should buy as much rice as possible. But why didn't you do that?

INFORMANT

Um, well, because I didn't think I need that item, and I think other people need those items more than I do, so I just needed to buy that much. And I can go out, I guess. If that makes sense?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, that makes sense. Sure. Definitely. And during the pandemic, do you think your shopping is affected by others or not, your in-store shopping?

INFORMANT

Like what would I do in store?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like what you do in store, your shopping mindset, your shopping decisions. Were they affected by others' behaviors?

INFORMANT

I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER

So no matter what items other people buy and how much other people buy, you just follow your own list and you don't really care about what other people are doing when make your shopping decision?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

So, how did you feel when you saw other people wore a mask or didn't wear a mask? Or, how did you feel about any like mitigation strategy the stores took?

INFORMANT

Well, in the beginning of the pandemic, people were saying "Oh, you shouldn't wear a mask because it has more bacteria on it", but since I was in Hong Kong when the SARS happened, I wore a mask. So I wore masks earlier on. So I thought, people who didn't wear a mask were like "Oh, you're gonna give the virus to other people", but now in stores most people wear masks, so it's not a problem.

INTERVIEWER

So at the beginning of the pandemic when you saw other people didn't wear masks, did you feel stressful or did you feel nervous?

INFORMANT

Yeah, a little bit. I tried to walk away from them.

INTERVIEWER

And how did you think about any mitigation strategies the grocery stores you went to took? For example, did they follow the social distancing, and did they put out some notice to ask people to wear

a face covering or something like that? Any mitigation strategy the store took, how did you feel about that?

INFORMANT

Most of the stores took, is that they usually have like a sign on the door saying that you have to wear a mask to go in, and usually in the grocery stores they have like tape on the floor, for which direction you wanna go, so you won't intersect with people and give people more space. So I thought that was a good idea, but some people don't follow it. So, sometimes it doesn't work. But I think they follow the regulations.

INTERVIEWER

So how did you feel about the people who didn't follow the regulations?

INFORMANT

Just look at them. I don't really say much to them or correct them?

INTERVIEWER

So, eggs were the only item you bought more than you needed during the whole pandemic? Did you buy any other items more than you needed?

INFORMANT

Onions?

INTERVIEWER

So, anyway, just foods?

INFORMANT

Yeah foods.

INTERVIEWER

Not for any household goods?

INFORMANT

No

INTERVIEWER

How many more eggs did you buy?

INFORMANT

Nine more? Wait, I usually buy 12 and now I buy 18 ones.

INTERVIEWER

Okay Okay, I see. You buy one and half dozens.

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, what was your state of mind when you were doing shopping in grocery stores during the pandemic, especially during the peak of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Like what I thought about?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, yeah like your general feeling, because you said before pandemic, you just felt carefree but during pandemic, how did you feel in general?

INFORMANT

I guess I feel a little stressed and confined because of the mask little bit, because it kind of restricts your breathing a little bit. And trying to stay away from people and keep social distancing, so that was a little stressful, but nothing too much.

INTERVIEWER

So, actually the stress perhaps was mainly caused the physical uncomfortableness?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And do you know anyone around you like your friend or family, bought some items, more than they needed during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

So, I will say one of my brothers. He's in New York. He bought, eggs, pasta, frozen food, and toilet paper, paper towels and stuff, hand sanitizer?

INTERVIEWER

So, have you ever talked with him about why he bought these many household goods and frozen foods?

INFORMANT

Um...

INTERVIEWER

Or what is your guess why he bought more than he needed?

INFORMANT

I don't really know, but he just he just felt like buying, kind of thing. He felt like he needs to buy it. It does not have a real reason; I don't really think.

INTERVIEWER

You will basically say that it might be just an emotional response, rather than a rational decision?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And would you think that was partially because he was in New York City, which was very severe, the pandemic thing, compared to other cities in the States?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I would say. So, New York is the most dangerous, I would say, and I guess he was affected by that. He wanted to buy more food and household goods.

INTERVIEWER

So, if you were living in New York City during the pandemic, would you envision that you would buy more than you needed?

INFORMANT

I guess so. I guess I would buy a little bit more.

INTERVIEWER

For what reason?

INFORMANT

Because it's more dangerous to go out in New York than Boston.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Just like for each trip you, you'd like to buy as much as possible to reduce the number of shopping trips. During the pandemic, how frequently did you go to the grocery stores? You said two or three weeks?

INFORMANT

Yeah, once every two weeks.

INTERVIEWER

And have you ever bought anything from Amazon during pandemic like the household goods or groceries?

INFORMANT

Not groceries, but mostly baking stuff, like baking trays and utensils.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so did you just buy a usual or an unusual amount?

INFORMANT

A normal amount.

INTERVIEWER

So why did you buy the baking stuff and the utensils from Amazon instead of from like local stores?

INFORMANT

Good question. I don't know. I feel like Amazon, just easier to see all the options of the different kinds of baking stuff. Instead of going into the store, I have to look and find all that stuff. So, Amazon was easier but then Amazon takes longer to ship now because of the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel more relaxed when you shopped on Amazon than when you shopped in store during the pandemic.

INFORMANT

Yes, more relaxed when I shopped online.

INTERVIEWER

So you chose Amazon, because you feel there was a more diversity of the options of baking stuff?

That's the major reason you chose Amazon?

INFORMANT

Yes, more easier, easier to see options.

INTERVIEWER

So during the pandemic, you would not shop around in a store? For example, if there were as many as options of the baking stuff, or utensils, in Star Market, you would still choose Amazon?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I guess. I'm not sure. I think Amazon is cheaper, maybe for all those kinds of items. So usually I just go to Amazon buy them.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say there are any other changes in your shopping behaviors or shopping patterns that we haven't covered if you compare your shopping patterns during the pandemic and before the pandemic? Are there any other changes that we haven't covered yet?

INFORMANT

Um, I would say, I wipe my groceries when I come back with alcohol and stuff before putting them in the fridge or in the cabinets. But besides that, everything else is the same.

INTERVIEWER

How about the packages you get from Amazon? Did you also wipe it?

INFORMANT

I would also. Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, great. So, back to today, do you think your shopping patterns remain the same as they were during the pandemic, or they have returned to the way they were before pandemic, or some somewhere in between? You have hybrid shopping patterns now?

INFORMANT

I would say in between. I make a list but sometimes I buy stuff that are not on the list. I feel a bit more carefree when I shop. I just look around more, so looking for what I need to buy. But when I come back, I still wipe through before (putting them in the fridge or cabinet).

INTERVIEWER

Did you increase your shopping trips now or recently?

INFORMANT

Yes, I think I go once a week.

INTERVIEWER

Basically the frequency you did before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Yes, around the same.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so you kind of like you're ready go back to the normal frequency and perhaps the normal items, and the normal amount of items you bought before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

The only difference is you still follow the restrictions and protocols, and also you still wipe the groceries and anything you got from outside?

INFORMANT

Yes

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so how long do you think this pattern will last?

INFORMANT

I think the rest of the year.

INTERVIEWER So, what caused you start like going back to the shopping patterns you had before they pandemic?

INFORMANT

Because I think, um, Boston is opening stuff up. Like the phases and stuff so, not restricting to go outside, so I don't feel as guilty to go outside now than before, so I just go out buy food and come back whenever I want.

INTERVIEWER

When did you start having this feeling like you don't feel guilty anymore? When did you start having such thinking and the feelings?

INFORMANT

I would say a few weeks ago, like two weeks ago.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, if there would be a major wave of the pandemic in this fall, would you prepare in advance?

INFORMANT

If there were to be another?

INTERVIEWER

Another peak of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

In the fall?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah.

INFORMANT

Like what would I do?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah.

INFORMANT

I guess I'll just go back. Feeling guilty.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, just please go ahead.

INFORMANT

I would just go back to my usual pattern of shopping: less often, stay at home. And I think I'll be more affected then, because in the fall, I would have taken my test and I would have to start working. So I would have to find jobs, which will be tougher.

INTERVIEWER

And would you think people will still do panic buying if there would be another peak?

INFORMANT

Yes, I think people will start buying again.

INTERVIEWER

So why do you have that conclusion, or prediction?

INFORMANT

Because I guess this disease is increasing, which makes people more scared and more afraid. So then they go panic buying, kind of.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there will be any strategies that can mitigate the panic buying, any restrictions or any suggestion that our governments can give or the stores can give to the average consumers that can reduce panic buying?

INFORMANT

I think the stores already do restrict certain items that people panic buying such as like eggs, bread, meat, milk and all that stuff. So, they already restrict like buying one carton or two of it and one dozen of eggs.

INTERVIEWER

Oh yeah yeah yeah like one pack.

INFORMANT

Mm hmm. So, if they keep restricting like that, it could reduce panic buying.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there would be any strategy that can emotionally reduce this response? Because what you just said was, when the restriction or the quantity limit, customers cannot do panic buying, because they cannot buy more than one or two. But then, emotionally perhaps they still want to. Do you think there are strategies that can help people stay away from the mindset that "I need to buy as many as possible"?

INFORMANT

Um, I would say it's a tough thing to like change those mindsets, but maybe on social media, we could like say "Oh, she shouldn't panic buying. Think about others who need food that are out of stock. Help those people in need instead of being so selfish".

INTERVIEWER

Alright, before we close today. do you have any other comments related to panic buying that we haven't covered yet? Anything you want to say about this topic, or general consumption or shopping during the pandemic? What you observed or heard about? Anything you want to say?

INFORMANT

No.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, that's pretty much all you want to say?

INFORMANT

Yes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Then I would just ask you a few demographic information. First is, what is your year of birth?

INFORMANT

1996.

INTERVIEWER

And what's your education?

INFORMANT

Education?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like the highest educational level.

INFORMANT

Doctorate.

INTERVIEWER

You are a doctor?

INFORMANT

Yes, I don't know. I have a degree in physical therapy which is a doctoral. A doctoral PT, EPT. I guess I am a doctor.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, are you gonna work in hospital?

INFORMANT

I can, I can work in clinics.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, okay, how many years did you do for the doctorate?

INFORMANT

Six, six years.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, so you started the doctorate right after your undergraduate?

INFORMANT

Right after high school.

INTERVIEWER

Right after high school? Oh, it's like a combined program. Cool. That's great, because X is still doing it.

INFORMANT

I know. It's gonna be all?

INTERVIEWER

And what is your occupation?

INFORMANT

I am unemployed right now.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, actively seeking for a job. And what is your household annual household income?

INFORMANT

I have none. I am not earning anything right now.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So you're financed by your parents, by your family?

INFORMANT

Yes. Financed by my parents.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And what is your marital status?

INFORMANT

I'm single.

INTERVIEWER

Cool. And how would you define your household?

INFORMANT

Who I am living with right now?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like, are you living alone or are you living with your friends?

INFORMANT

I am living with one roommate.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And what is your religious belief?

INFORMANT

I am not sure.

INTERVIEWER

I would just put down unsure, that's fine.

INFORMANT

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your political belief.?

INFORMANT

I don't have a good belief.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And thank you for your time today.

INFORMANT: X

INTERVIEWER: Jinyan Xiang

DATE: June 26, 2020

CONTEXT

Informant is a friend of the Interviewer's friend, based in Boston Massachusetts. The family of this informant live in Asia.

Interview took place via Zoom, with both Informant and Interviewer participating from their homes.

Interview was scheduled at 12 pm (ET) on a weekday.

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

And now, let's just get started. So, to begin the interview, how has COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?

INFORMANT

I live in New York. So, I started working from home from the second week of March. Ever since I started working from home, I haven't been taking public transportation, so I haven't been on the train this whole time. I haven't taken Ubers or anything like that. Just walking around, you know. If I have to go out, it's mostly just shopping for simply buying groceries or going for walks or jobs.

INTERVIEWER

Has your typical day changed?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah, a lot, because I'm working from home now, so I'm not going to the office anymore. In terms of work, it feels even busier than it did before. Just because I work in advertising, so there's a lot of things that we're doing to write responses to COVID-19.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your priorities changed during the pandemic or because of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Priorities, I think that in terms of being more health conscious, and, in terms of safety, I'm a lot more mindful of that now. I don't think I washed my hands as regularly as I do now, before. Sorry, I cannot really think of anything else right now.

INTERVIEWER

Have your thinking or feelings changed? How did you feel about your life, or how do you feel about the general situation, something like that?

INFORMANT

General situation, I am honestly not really surprised that things are turning out this way. It's a really tough situation, but I think that -- it is hard to explain -- I think that you see what's going on all over America, I feel like people who live outside of the big cities are not, don't see as much of a threat because, you know, these cities aren't as populated. I think in New York, people take it a little bit more seriously. So my view is, I do feel like people in New York are taking it seriously, so I feel a little better about the situation here. But we'll see how it goes and everything's reopening so I'm a little bit afraid of how people are gonna behave once they're pushing a reopening of everything, so that's my general opinion of the situation.

INTERVIEWER

So did you feel more stressed during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I mean, I feel like it's stressful having to be afraid of the unknown. You know, you don't know what's gonna happen when you go outside, if you're going to be safe in terms of... But I feel like there's both sides to everything, because since I am working from home, I don't have to have that daily routine of getting up and taking a train to work. So I can wake up right before work starts, it takes away that kind of stress, but overall I feel like you can't really plan things to do on the weekend that would like give you stress relief before, you know, because everything was canceled, everything's closed.

INTERVIEWER

So what is your major source of stress? Is it the uncertainty about everything, or is it the health concerns, or any other source like financial stress, anything?

INFORMANT

Financially, I don't feel stress. I mean, I think in the beginning I did, because there were lay-offs going around several companies, including my own. But I did not get laid off. And I don't see myself getting laid off anytime soon, so I don't really feel stress in that aspect. I think that mostly my stress is related to you that uncertainty of "What's gonna happen?", because no one knows what's gonna happen now, no one knows when we're gonna go back to the office, and when things are gonna start going back to normal. And also just staying safe and healthy, because you never know.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any specific feelings or emotions about the pandemic? Like did you feel... I think you expressed that you feel kind of uncertain, but did you have any other feelings such as distraction, anxiousness, or anything else, or just feel uncertain?

INFORMANT

I wouldn't really say distracted. Maybe distracted as in more of my focus is shifting on, looking at the news about COVID-19. But I don't really see that as a distraction. Yeah, I mean, my feelings about is just, you know, I feel anxious because I don't want to infect people that I live with or people who I interact with. I don't want to get sick myself, you know. So, and also, I feel like our whole life's, everyone's lifestyle changes completely. We have no idea what's coming. Yeah, we have no idea what's gonna happen, so yeah it's mostly just feelings of a lot of uncertainty. And you know, sadness too because I had a lot of things planned this year: I had multiple trips that I was going to take but then I had to cancel a lot of things

INTERVIEWER

Did you have any positive feelings?

INFORMANT

I can say working from home can be nice, more flexible. Yeah, you can wear comfortable clothes and it's a little bit more relaxed in some sense. And, I actually feel like I've had more time to do things like workout, because like I feel like, back then, when I would go to the office, I would come back home I would get more tired. But now, since I'm just stuck at home all the time, I want to do something more. Yes, I want to get more active. So that's been motivating me to do more exercise, actually.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so let's move on. Please think about the time before the COVID-19 pandemic. How did you typically shop for groceries and other household goods before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

How did I shop for groceries and household goods before the pandemic? Um, I would go to the grocery store, so I would go to Trader Joe's, once a week. Yeah, and then, now, I usually just order my groceries online, or if I need something urgently like I'll walk to a nearby grocery store that isn't as crowded, because I can't go to Trader Joe's anymore, because the line is super long.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so before the pandemic, did you go any other grocery stores, other than Trader Joe's?

INFORMANT

Yeah, just Trader Joe's, because that was what are the cheapest.

INTERVIEWER

And you mentioned you went to Trader Joe's once a week, as the typical frequency you went to Trader Joe's before the pandemic. How long did you spend during each trip at Trader Joe's before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

How much time I spent there?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, yeah, how much time you spent each time you went to Trader Joe's.

INFORMANT

Um, I would say 30 to 45 minutes.

INTERVIEWER

You also bought household goods from Trader Joe's?

INFORMANT

Um, household goods. No, I think I tend to buy...back then, I would buy those either at Bed, Bath and Beyond or Amazon. But that would be less often. It would be maybe like twice a month, yeah, maybe twice a month.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, now let's first talk about Trader Joe's. So how much did you spend each time at Trader Joe's?

INFORMANT

So, I'll be shopping with my boyfriend for the two of us. We would spend around \$100.

INTERVIEWER

That's for two people?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

And what was your state of mind when you were shopping at Trader Joe's?

INFORMANT

I'd say my mind, it was fine. I, it was, I think I didn't really like how crowded it was, but then they had everything.

INTERVIEWER

So did you feel relaxed, did you feel enjoyable, did you feel kind of rushed, or just no specific feeling?

INFORMANT

Not specific. I don't particularly enjoy having to go grocery shopping and carry everything out of there, so I don't feel like any specific feeling but maybe it's just like "It is done", it just feels like an errand, another errand I have to do.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So did you go to Trader Joe's as part of other errands or, or separately?

INFORMANT

Um, sorry, are you talking about like buying household goods or...?

INTERVIEWER

No, just Trader Joe's. When you went to Trader Joe's, you went there as part of other errands or just "Today, I'm gonna buy some groceries, and I go to Trader Joe's"?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah, I would split it up, so I wouldn't group it up with other things.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so when do you usually go to Trader Joe's, like weekends or weekdays?

INFORMANT

Weekends and -- actually, sorry, I wouldn't go sometimes on weekends, but I remember I would go after work, because it was less crowded sometimes too.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, even on a weekend, did you usually go in the afternoon?

INFORMANT

Yeah, afternoon, because there were fewer people. Yeah, but also I just probably would have woke up later on the weekend.

INTERVIEWER

Sure, and did you just shop for yourself, or shop for you and your boyfriend?

INFORMANT

Um, usually shop for two of us.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, and also for household goods, you also shop for two of you?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And as for the household goods, you mentioned earlier you either go to a physical store -- Bed, Bath and Beyond -- or Amazon. So, did you have a primary choice between the two?

INFORMANT

I personally prefer, Amazon, just because it's a lot easier. You don't have to go to the store and pick everything out. But if I needed something urgently, like same day, then we would go Bed, Bath and Beyond.

INTERVIEWER

Did you shop on other online channels, such as Target.com, Walmart.com or just Amazon?

INFORMANT

Just Amazon, because I have the Prime membership.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And did you plan or did you write the shopping list before you went to the grocery store, or before you shop on Amazon for household goods, or just bought stuff more randomly?

INFORMANT

Um, for household goods, yes, I do usually have a list. But when I go to a grocery store, it's, I kind of get the same thing every time -- maybe a few changes each time, but it's not, it's never anything strict, it's kind of like "Oh, what I am urgent for?". But, usually I just buy the same amount of meat and the same amount of veggies. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

So it was kind of like a routine, like you know, once you're gonna buy, you don't need a list every time and you have a list in your mind?

INFORMANT

Yeah, exactly.

INTERVIEWER

For household goods, you did write a list?

INFORMANT

Yeah, for specific items, so I don't forget it.

INTERVIEWER

So, did you buy household goods regularly?

INFORMANT

Um, twice a month.

INTERVIEWER

So, did you ever buy household goods like you're running out something and you need to buy it, or you always buy regularly and there's no experience of running out.

INFORMANT

No, I usually buy once I feel like I'm about to run out.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Sure. Did you care about discounts or coupons?

INFORMANT

Do I care, do I care about it, or...?

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that discounts or coupons affected your decisions a lot? Do you prioritize it?

INFORMANT

And yeah.

INTERVIEWER

There are discounts or coupons, and you're more likely to buy something?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And think about mid-March, when the pandemic become a severe issue in the United States, how did your shopping patterns change?

INFORMANT

So, I remember the very first week that we had to lock down and started quarantining. I went to the grocery store, first thing in the morning, right before it opened, waited in line. And then, you know, put on all the masks and everything, and I was there to buy a lot of groceries to stock up for the next few weeks as much as I could, because I wanted to avoid going to grocery stores as much during that time. And then later on, yeah, later on, I started ordering groceries online from other grocery stores because Trader Joe's doesn't do delivery. Um, but there is a grocery store near me that isn't as crowded, so I don't feel as, you know, unsafe to go inside, so sometimes I'll go in there these days.

INTERVIEWER

So, which store did you go for your first shopping trip after the pandemic? You mentioned you went to a store and you waited outside for a long time.

INFORMANT

Trader Joe's.

INTERVIEWER

And after that, after that trip, you didn't go to Trader Joe's anymore?

INFORMANT

No, just because the lines are always crazy long.

INTERVIEWER

And how often did you shop during the pandemic?

INFORMANT

How often do I shop? I would say I buy a lot more things online. So, I'm probably buying, shopping on Amazon at least once, maybe like once or twice a week.

INTERVIEWER

For groceries?

INFORMANT

No, I mean in general. As how much I shop for groceries, it's every, once every two weeks. I order things online or pick some things up at some quieter grocery stores.

INTERVIEWER

So during the pandemic, you started to do the grocery pickup?

INFORMANT

I didn't, I don't do pickup. I just, I go to the store and buy it.

INTERVIEWER

But you mentioned you order online groceries?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah, get delivered. I do delivery for it.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, okay, delivery. So which store did you choose for that service?

INFORMANT

Oh my. I've mostly been doing Whole Foods. But before that, I tried Instacart a couple of times, but I felt like the quality of the service was not good so I, I've been using Whole Foods more.

INTERVIEWER

So, how much did you spend for each shopping trip?

INFORMANT

Whole Foods? Definitely around like 200 to 250, every time.

INTERVIEWER

For two weeks?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And how about your first, that trip at Trader Joe's?

INFORMANT

I'm sorry what?

INTERVIEWER

How much did you spend at Trader Joe's for that shopping?

INFORMANT

How much did I spend at Trader Joe's? Um, because I went to Trader Joe's like once a week, right, so it's been around like 80 to 100.

INTERVIEWER

I mean, during the pandemic because you said you didn't go?

INFORMANT

Oh, oh, for the first time? I don't remember. Long time ago.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, that's fine. And so during the pandemic, you switched to other grocery stores such as Whole Foods. And you didn't go to Trader Joe's anymore. Did you try any other grocery stores? Oh, you mentioned the one near your place.

INFORMANT

I mentioned Instacart. It's like a delivery service. Do you guys have that there?

INTERVIEWER

No.

INFORMANT

Okay, well it's like a delivery service for groceries, so there's different stores that you can choose from. The store that I choose from was Keyfood, that is a grocery store. It's a, it's cheaper than Whole Foods. But, yeah, the quality of what we got was just not good, so we decided not to stick with it. And then for the grocery store I mentioned that I like I go into sometimes physically, it's a local store called D'Agostino, so yeah.

INTERVIEWER

So for that store, when did you go there: afternoon, morning, evening?

INFORMANT

Usually evening, after work.

INTERVIEWER

During the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I don't go very often though, maybe like once a month.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And how did you feel when you waited outside at 'Trader Joe's'?

INFORMANT

Um, kind of scared because, you know, there was a lot of people in line and then I was scared that the food was gonna run out fast, which is why we went there right when it opened. Um, so, I was feeling afraid that other people would be, you know, grabbing everything. So I wanted, once I got in, I tried grabbing everything I needed as fast as I could. And luckily we got everything I needed.

INTERVIEWER

So how long did you wait for that time?

INFORMANT

I think, a little over an hour.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And have you ever heard about or observed people sometimes called panic buying?

INFORMANT

Sorry, what?

INTERVIEWER

Like, have you ever heard of, heard about or observed panic buying?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah. Yeah, I remember. Um, yes, see, you mean seeing things completely out of stock, right? Like toilet paper, pasta, perish, non-perishable goods?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah.

INFORMANT

Yeah. I've experienced it before, especially during COVID-19, all the sanitizing products are really hard to get. Also, masks and gloves and things like that.

INTERVIEWER

How about the dry foods or canned foods and household goods, other than the medical stuff?

INFORMANT

So the first time I went, I managed to get a good amount of cans and things like that. So I personally didn't have to worry about it, but I heard that a couple weeks after everything was gone, in terms of canned goods and other nonperishables.

INTERVIEWER

So have you physically observed it? Or just heard about it from media?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I mean I've seen it, and other shops I visited before I went to 'Trader Joe's', it might have been like -- that was before the quarantine everything though, like people were already starting to stock up.

INTERVIEWER

And how did you feel about that? How did you feel about this phenomenon?

INFORMANT

I honestly feel like, you know, it's like pretty stressful because everyone wants to take care of themselves, but...and I wasn't sure if we would have the resources to restock in time for everyone. And it made me feel worried.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it's rational or irrational?

INFORMANT

I think it's rational. I think that, you know, people are worried about how other people are gonna behave you know because, yeah, that makes sense. So that's why people hoard, because they're worried that if they don't get enough then other people are gonna take everything and you know it's gonna happen either way, I feel. But then, a lot of stores have been enforcing the non-hoarding policy, you know, where you're only allowed to take one box of masks or something like that, so it does make me feel a little better that they have a little someplace but...

INTERVIEWER

And do you think that emotion plays an important role in panic buying?

INFORMANT

Yeah. Because you don't put urgency, or you don't feel scared, and you're not gonna care enough to do that.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So how long did the panic buying last in your observation?

INFORMANT

Let's see: for maybe a few weeks, three to four weeks.

INTERVIEWER

From when to when?

INFORMANT

Um, maybe from the beginning of March till the end of March. I feel by the time April came, people found a more regular routine of getting groceries and people weren't hoarding as much.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, have you ever talked about the panic buying or hoarding behaviors with others? With your family or with your friends or with your boyfriend?

INFORMANT

Yeah, yeah, definitely. I think that's one of the reasons why we wanted to go to the store earlier as well, not just to avoid going back there so often, but to be the first there in case things run out. And then in terms of masks and stuff, those are super hard to find here in New York, especially even before the quarantine started, it was sold out everywhere. So, yeah, my relatives really talked to me about sending masks over here. And, you know, the whole toilet paper situation, I think everyone was talking about. Yeah, that's all I can think of right now.

INTERVIEWER

So, all of your friends in New York City and your family members took the panic buying seriously and reacted to it fast. That's why you went to the store as early as possible?

INFORMANT

I wouldn't say everyone reacted fast. I think that everyone was talking about it but people, some people didn't respond to situation quickly -- they did not. They saw it more as like a, "I'll just get whatever is left", like they'll just deal with it. And I think that, at the time, a lot of people were instead, actually planning on leaving the city, their cities where all this was happening. So, I think that. Yeah, I'm not really sure what their personal experiences were like, the panic buying, but all I can say is for me. I tried to, in the beginning, I tried to go to the store first and before everything ran out.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that's also part of your panic buying experience?

INFORMANT

Oh yeah, for sure, because I remember, I wanted to like stock up as much frozen food as possible -- you know, like frozen vegetables, things like that -- because I never, I didn't know how, I didn't know when they would come back, I didn't know if we ran out -- would there be more, if everyone else is also doing the same thing?

INTERVIEWER

So, based on your experience, you actually considered buying, or actually bought an unusual amount of an item just in case during the pandemic, right?

INFORMANT

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER

And could you elaborate a little bit about your decision process? Why did you consider buying more than usual, and how did you make the decision?

INFORMANT

Yes, the main reason why I wanted to stock up more was just to reduce the amount of times I'd be going to the grocery store. And, just to keep myself safe as well. I'm not going to the grocery store. Also I bought more, because I wasn't sure if it would regularly be in stock in the future as well. So, those are the two main reasons.

INTERVIEWER

And how much more did you buy?

INFORMANT

Sorry, I am not sure I remember.

INTERVIEWER

It's like comparing to your usual buying amount: it is triple, double or something like that? Or, if you don't remember, that's fine.

INFORMANT

Probably, maybe like five times more than I would have bought before. If I usually would just buy maybe two packs, one or two packs of vegetables, I would get five to eight or I might have gotten actually -- I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, that's fine. Um, so, did you just do such panic buying in the store. or did you also do that on Amazon for household goods or masks or hand sanitizers, like any other goods or just foods?

INFORMANT

Um, mostly just foods. I remember buying a hand sanitizer, like five mini bottles of hand sanitizers, because that's all the store had at the time, which isn't that, it wasn't, I don't know if that's that much but...

INTERVIEWER

Why didn't you buy an unusual amount of household goods like toilet paper or like paper towels, because a lot of people were buying that during the pandemic, during the peak of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Oh, well, because before the pandemic started, I actually had a quite large one of toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER

You intentionally stocked up before the pandemic, or that's your regular stock at your home?

INFORMANT

Yeah, well like I said before, I actually have a family living in Asia and they, so the coronavirus hit them first, and they told me, they were warning me about how all the toilet paper is gone and sanitary items. So, um, yeah before it became a bigger deal here in the US, I ordered on Amazon, I ordered, like 60 rolls of toilet paper.

INTERVIEWER

60 rolls?

INFORMANT

Yeah, it was a good deal, though it was like one...I didn't order like, what is the word? I didn't order multiple quantities; it was one quantity. It's a huge, huge package. It was just a huge box. But, yeah, luckily I got that one huge box in the very beginning, so didn't have to worry about it later on.

INTERVIEWER

So, would you say you actually also engaged in the panic buying of toilet paper, but just much earlier than other people did in the United States? Because you kind of had an early warning?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I feel like I didn't, I didn't panic as much because other people weren't feeling the panic yet. It was like, I got warned, so I was kind of like "Okay, well before everyone else realizes that this might be an issue, I might as well just go ahead".

INTERVIEWER

And you said you bought a lot more foods than usual, because you didn't know whether they would be restocked. So, if you could have more information about the stock, information like the stock of the foods, would you still buy them as much?

INFORMANT

Um, yeah, because there was the other reason, why I wouldn't want to go to the stores as frequently as I used to.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. Um, so can you talk a little bit more about your in-store purchase experience, or in store shopping experience for groceries during the pandemic? How did you feel, what was your state of mind and what were your thoughts?

INFORMANT

I think the very first time, compared to now, it's quite different. Now when I enter a grocery store, I definitely feel a lot more relaxed. Because it's no, the one I go to, it's not that crowded. It's barely anyone inside. And I don't feel this worried because people aren't panic buying anymore. So I don't have to rush. Yeah, because the first time I was like, I was really worried that certain products would be sold out so I would be, you know, running to different sides of the grocery store to make sure that I got everything I needed. And then it was just, yeah, it was a pretty stressful experience, and then also the fact that you need to stay six feet apart from other people while you're also trying to grab things. It's like you have, it's so many different priorities at once, that you have to be aware of. Yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

INTERVIEWER

No, you go ahead.

INFORMANT

Um, no, I mean that's basically it though, I cannot really think of anything else.

INTERVIEWER

And did you write a list before you went to the Trader Joe's for the first time?

INFORMANT

Sorry, a list?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, like a shopping list.

INFORMANT

Oh, um.

INTERVIEWER

Or just when you were there, and grab what you can grab?

INFORMANT

I didn't write a specific list, but I, you know, have kind of a plan in my head like, I need to buy items that are going to last long. I need, you know, like frozen foods or canned items. And, yeah, because I wasn't exactly sure what specific items I wanted, I just wanted to see what they had and what was available.

INTERVIEWER

And did other people's behavior affect your shopping decisions when you were in store? Like when you saw other people grab meat, would you also grab that much meat, something like that? Do you think you were affected by others' shopping decisions or shopping behaviors?

INFORMANT

It's hard to say because, you know, I saw people grabbing everything. Funny enough, a lot of people are grabbing perishable items. Every, everyone's grabbing everything, so I didn't feel like everyone was grabbing like one specific thing, I didn't really see that. It was, yes, I was not really influenced by that. I was more thinking about what I wanted for myself and the kind of foods that I would actually want to eat.

INTERVIEWER

So when you saw other people grabbing everything they could grab, including the perishable goods, foods, did you feel more stress or more panic, or you just felt they were irrational to do that because they were perishable foods?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I felt like it was kind of....Yeah, I wasn't really like....For perishable goods, yeah, I didn't really feel like anything when people were grabbing them. Yeah, I'm not here to buy those. But I think that, one thing I noticed was that everyone was trying to get pasta, spaghetti and things like that, because I noticed like people were like grabbing a lot at once. So I did feel a little bit worried when I saw people doing that, because I wanted some for myself too.

INTERVIEWER

When you were waiting outside the door?

INFORMANT

Um, no, when I was in the store, because it was like the whole aisle was packed with people grabbing the pasta.

INTERVIEWER

How about the mitigation strategies Trader Joe's took when you were there? Did it have any mitigation strategies or just like none at all?

INFORMANT

Yeah, they did. They let a limited amount of people in at once. Um, I forgot how many people, it might have been like 25. But then I remember there was a point when the guy was letting so many people in and then the workers inside the store came out and they started getting really angry at him, like "You're letting too many people in, man". Yeah, they kind of had a plan, but it kind of failed. So, it was kind of scary.

INTERVIEWER

So how did you feel about that?

INFORMANT

I was, I was, just thought that everything was really disorganized and no one was fully prepared what was happening.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel like more anxious, because if there was no mitigation strategy, it would increase your risk to be exposed to some virus?

INFORMANT

Yeah, but, I mean, I already felt the risk when I went there, because I, you know, even if there were only like 25 people around me, I could still get it either way. But my goal is just to get a trip as fast as I could. And, yeah, I mean, I didn't really think too much about it. But that made me not want to go back to Trader Joe's after that, as well, even more.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so how about your experience in the local grocery store near your apartment or house?

INFORMANT

Um, there's never any line to get in, the most amount of customers I see inside is maybe like five. It's not like a tiny store either, so I feel a lot safer. The only problem is that it's a bit pricier than Trader Joe's, which is why.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, did that store take any mitigation strategy?

INFORMANT

Um, yeah, they have. Um, well I can only speak for now, because I remember in the first month I didn't really go there. But for the past few months, they had a mask rule. I don't remember when it started, but it probably started like April, you have to wear a mask. I think that they have a limit for how many people can get into the store, but there's never, I've never seen that many people in the store anyways. I've never seen anyone enforcing anything. Um, and, yeah, I mean that's still the main things that I've seen from them. I haven't, I haven't really noticed anything else.

INTERVIEWER

So you actually didn't go to that store until perhaps, April? You didn't go to that local store in March?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I don't, I don't completely remember, but I don't think that I went there in March.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, sure. And how were things different for the time you bought groceries and household goods online, compared to your experience in the store? Because you did Whole Foods delivery, what were your shopping experiences on that?

INFORMANT

So for buying groceries, in store I prefer to buying it online, because I can choose the products myself, I can choose a quality, like if I buy fruit or something, I have more control over that. Because, yeah, I've had some bad experiences with delivery where they, they don't, people choosing, they don't really care which ones you get, so you might get ones, or not as good. The only thing I do like more about deliveries -- just you feel safer, more convenient. And then for household goods, I -- at this point, I'm only buying household goods on Amazon. I think that, before when I would go out to buy household goods, I would kind of...if I went to Bed, Bath and Beyond or something, it's kind of like a big Target in a way, so I would find enjoyment in shopping, looking at other items too, back then. But that's the only way I could say I enjoy shopping in store more, but right now I prefer my Amazon ordered online experience, just because it's super quick and easy. I usually appreciate it.

INTERVIEWER

When did you do online shopping for groceries or Amazon online shopping?

INFORMANT

Um, online shopping: how often do I do it or when?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, you could say both, how often and when did you do that? Morning, evening or weekday, weekends, or more flexible? Because for in-store trips, you said you usually do after work or on weekends, how about online ones?

INFORMANT

Um, I feel like when I'm ordering groceries, it's usually after work and eating time. I'm usually ordering groceries online even in the evening. So my groceries should only come the day after, or two days after.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, so that's for online grocery shopping. So how about Amazon?

INFORMANT

Amazon. Not really like, I don't really have a set time for that, it's kind of like, if I noticed that I'm out of something or almost going to be out of something. So, there's no specific time, but it just depends on when I feel there is need to buy something.

INTERVIEWER

What was your state of mind when you were doing online shopping? Did you feel relaxed or did you feel like anything?

INFORMANT

Yeah, I definitely feel a lot more relaxed and I feel like I can take my time and see what's the best deal, you know. For Whole Foods, though, I feel like in the beginning, there was a lot of people trying to order at the same time, so the windows to add stuff to your cart were closed a lot, so I had, I actually had to wait awhile to be able to shop on the Whole Foods website. So that was kind of stressful, and then I remember in the beginning, some items would sell out fast even while I was adding it to my cart. So, yeah, that felt stressful but now I feel like things have, you know, gotten a lot better. I don't, I don't have that issue of tons of people trying to order groceries at the same time.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever experienced a stockout on Amazon? Like you wanted to buy something, but it just shows that it's out of stock, or it will be in stock perhaps in one month? Have you ever experienced that?

INFORMANT

Yeah, um, in the beginning when I was trying to order more masks, everything was out of stock.

INTERVIEWER

And how did you feel about that?

INFORMANT

I just felt really worried and frustrated.

INTERVIEWER

And did you find a solution to that, or just wait?

INFORMANT

So luckily I found a hardware store near me, so I was able to buy some masks. And we had some friends and relatives give us some masks too. So, I didn't have to worry too much about it. But, yeah, it was uh, it was pretty stressful in the beginning. But last week I was able to buy more masks at a pretty good price just at a convenience store. So, I just think that timing has made my shopping experience different, especially from the beginning of the lockdown and now.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever tried refreshing the Amazon page around midnight, because they will usually restock that on midnight?

INFORMANT

No, I haven't tried that. Midnight, like 12 eastern time or...?

INTERVIEWER

I think it's just Eastern time.

INFORMANT

Okay.

INTERVIEWER

And do you see any difference between your pandemic online shopping experience and before pandemic online shopping experience?

INFORMANT

Have I seen any difference between the pandemic....?

INTERVIEWER

Your online shopping experience during the pandemic and before the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Oh, yeah, I mean, I think that before the pandemic, things came a lot faster because they had more stuff. And I'm not just talking about other brands as well, other shops like clothing stores for example. Yeah, whenever I buy things online now, I would get like a message saying like "Sorry, your package might be delayed because we don't have enough carriers or something to deliver."

INTERVIEWER

So before the pandemic, had you ever used Whole Foods delivery, or you just started using it because of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

No, I've never used it before. I rarely went to Whole Foods before the pandemic, just because it was pretty pricey.

INTERVIEWER

Are you satisfied with it? Or will you still use it, after the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Probably not, once I feel like it's safe to go back to Trader Joe's, I will go back, just because I'll save a lot more. Um, I mean the quality of the food is great at Whole Foods. So, I'm happy with that. I'm pretty satisfied. But, yeah, it's just pretty expensive.

INTERVIEWER

And then back to today, have your shopping patterns remained the same as they were during the peak of the pandemic, or have they returned to the way they were before the pandemic, or somewhere in between? Your today's shopping patterns?

INFORMANT

I mean I think that, I would say right now, I'm mostly ordering things online. Yeah, mostly ordering things online. I think, before I would have...Are you talking about compared to the beginning of the pandemic or before the pandemic?

INTERVIEWER

It's kind of like, if you think about your today's shopping patterns, is this closer to before the pandemic or during the pandemic, or in between?

INFORMANT

I'm closer to the beginning of the pandemic.

INTERVIEWER

Because you're still worrying about the, the whole pandemic or because New York City is still in danger.

INFORMANT

Yeah, I prefer online, because I'd rather not go to the grocery stores. And also, even if Trader Joe's has their mitigation plan in place, I don't want to wait that long just to go grocery shopping. So, it's also a convenience thing too.

INTERVIEWER

And how long do you think this shopping pattern will last?

INFORMANT

Probably until things get safer, or we get a vaccine or something, so it's hard to say. Just as long as the virus lasts.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, in your opinion, how the current situation is similar to the peak, the peak of the pandemic or it is already quite different?

INFORMANT

Um, honestly, I would say it seems like quite the same.

INTERVIEWER

It's for New York City, or you will see that for the whole United States?

INFORMANT

Oh, are you talking about in terms of shopping, or you talking about just...?

INTERVIEWER

No, it is just the general current situation, the pandemic situation. Is that similar to the peak of the pandemic, or it's already different from the peak of the pandemic?

INFORMANT

Oh, okay. Yeah, I think it's quite different. I think that people are a lot more relaxed about it, they're not really prioritizing like their safety as much anymore. I think people are really, people really want to, you know, go out and do stuff more now. And then, you know, we hear news saying that the cases have lowered, so people feel safer too. And then, every city is reopening things now, so it also makes people feel safer as well, and they don't feel as worried as they used to during the peak.

INTERVIEWER

So even though the situation improved a lot from the peak of the pandemic, you still prefer the online shopping?

INFORMANT

Yeah. Because personally, I don't really feel like it is much safer. I still feel, going outside and like interacting with those people, like you still have the threat of getting the virus. And it, the behavior, how other people are approaching the situation more relaxed kind of makes me worried myself, because once other people start being more relaxed about it, then people might be acting more dangerously, you know, like not wearing masks or, you know, sometimes I see big crowds of people together and they're not, you know, keeping a safe distance, so that makes me feel stressed. So, and the more I see people go out and not really worry as much, it makes me not want to go out as much as, just because I feel like they're not being safe.

INTERVIEWER

And if there will be a second wave of the pandemic in this fall, would you think you will prepare in advance?

INFORMANT

Um, you mean in terms of stocking up for?

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

INFORMANT

I don't, I honestly haven't thought about it. I haven't thought about stock up for a second wave, because I feel like we're constantly, you know, it was just like one constant virus, and everyone's gonna...I don't think that people are suddenly gonna start buying more when facing the second wave. I feel like we're all kind of just going in one direction

INTERVIEWER

Okay. So, what is the one direction actually? It's kind of like slowing down?

INFORMANT

I feel like everyone's shopping habits have already changed, so I don't think that people are suddenly going to be like "Oh I need to buy more now." I think that we've all kind of reached level ground where it's, we're not, we don't feel the same amount of panic as we used to in terms of shopping.

INTERVIEWER

Yeah, I understand. So, it's kind of like, if there is another peak this fall, just like what happened in mid-March, would you think people will engage in panic buying again? Because now, because the cases as the whole pandemic are slowing down, are going down, but then if it kind of shifts and starts going up again, and reach a peak, would you think people would still do panic buying?

INFORMANT

No, because I think that the reason, the main reason why people did panic buying at the beginning, because they weren't sure what was gonna happen. And now that we all kind of experienced it, we know that it's gonna...we don't have to panic buy to get the stuff that we need, especially right now, I don't know anyone who's panic buying, we're all still getting everything that we need. So I don't think that later on people are gonna start doing that again, because I think we've all realized that it doesn't have to be that way.

INTERVIEWER

So, in your opinion, people have more knowledge about the whole situation, and they're kind of adapted to this?

INFORMANT

I feel like, yeah, it's not really as much of a, it won't be as much of an unknown if the second wave comes, because I feel like we're all kind of, we all know more what to expect.

INTERVIEWER

And before we close today, would you like to add any comments related to panic buying that we haven't covered yet?

INFORMANT

Oh, no, sorry I can't think of anything right now.

DEMOGRAPHICS

INTERVIEWER

That's fine. That's pretty much it. And now I would just ask you a few demographic information. First is, what is your year of birth?

INFORMANT

1996.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your education level?

INFORMANT

I have a bachelor's degree.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your occupation?

INFORMANT

I work in advertising.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your annual household income?

INFORMANT

60,000.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your marital status?

INFORMANT

Single.

INTERVIEWER

And how would you define your household? How many people are living in your household now?

INFORMANT

I would say, two.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, and what is your religious belief?

INFORMANT

Christian.

INTERVIEWER

And what is your political belief?

INFORMANT

I would say, kind of like libertarian.

INTERVIEWER

Okay. And thank you for your time today.

Appendix E1

Coding/Analysis Scheme

<u>Primary Category</u>	<u>Subcategory</u>	<u>Code</u>
Impacts of the pandemic		
	General feelings, thoughts and comments	1
	Typical day	2
	Priorities	3
	Stress level and source of stress	4
General thoughts on panic buying		
	Source of impressions/knowledge of panic buying	5
	Intuitive understanding/definition of panic buying	6
	Duration/evolution of panic buying during crisis	7
Observations of panic buying made in store or online		
	Empty shelves or stockout	8
	Panic buying by another shopper	9
	Significant price increases	10
	Limits on purchases	11
Emotional and cognitive responses to panic buying		
	Worried (or did not) about future availability of supplies	12
	Sought to avoid contact with people	13
	Frustrated/annoyed/angry at bare shelves	14
	Expressed opinions about panic buyers	15
New purchasing practices to ensure supplies during crisis		
	Bought larger quantities of items to reduce store visits	16
	Increased size of stock to maintain at home	17
	Bought items in larger bulk packages	18
	Found new items to stock up on	19
	Visited multiple stores to obtain item	20
	Switched to or increased online grocery shopping	21
	Changed planning habits	22
	Discovered shopping tricks	23
	Shopped early in day or other unusual times	42

	Employed mitigation strategies	43
	Avoided lines	44
	Utilized delivery or pickup service	45
	Tried a new store	46
	Minimized time in store	47
	Became more flexible in purchasing preferences	48
	Switched to cleaner/safer store	49
Communications with others related to panic buying		
	Received suggestion on panic buying	24
	Asked someone else to buy items on their behalf	25
	Offered product from someone else who panic bought	26
	Discussed panic buying with friends/family	27
Motivations for panic buying		
	The public in general	28
	Observed panic buyers	29
	Acquaintances (family, friends)	30
	Self	31
Factors against panic buying		
	Sufficient pre-pandemic supply of household goods at home	32
	Insufficient storage space	33
	Budgetary concerns	34
	Negative assessments of panic buyers	35
	Negative attitudes towards panic buying	36
	Reasons against panic buying	37
Other comments on panic buying		
	Speculation on reactions to another wave of crisis	38
	Strategies that can mitigate panic buying	39
	Which people more inclined to panic buy	40
	Changes in total spend	41
	Role of news, social media, WOM	50

Appendix E2

Sample Coding based on “Cutting and Sorting”

5

Fiola

I definitely heard about from social media. Because I don't watch the news. I don't have cable and so....I might have gotten it from a news source, but I definitely saw that source on Facebook or Instagram or something.

Oberschlake

when I hear that phrase, the idea that comes to mind is people who are buying goods out of fear that they won't be able to or that don't need it down the road, even though they might not have needed that much or needed that specific item previously

Paulsen

when I go to the store and there's no toilet paper on the shelf, I think “Somebody's got something going on”, I don't know. And when I was in Florida right towards the end, I mean, there were shelves empty in every grocery store, usually paper towels, hand sanitizer, cleaning products and toiler paper, did I say? Yeah, toilet paper and paper towels. Hand sanitizer. It was just crazy to me, like, completely empty shelves.

X

I've experienced it before, especially during COVID-19, all the sani, sanitizing products are really hard to get. Also like masks and you know gloves and things like that.

Mark

one of my brothers. He's in New York. He bought, eggs, pasta, frozen food, and like toilet paper towels and stuff, hand sanitizer

6

Fiola

I didn't notice, like I said, with the vitamin C and zinc, that those were less available than usual. And so that seems like a kind of relevant panic buy. That's more what I would have expected people to buy: sanitation supplies and vitamin C and things that could actually help with sickness versus toilet paper

Miraglia

initially the thought is, it's like: “If everybody just bought their normal usage, we wouldn't have it.”

Shawver

I see that as people fearing that they're not going to be able to get their hands on something or they're going to need a lot of it so they buy as much as they possibly can, without regards for other people's needs.

7

Miraglia

my Heinen's was completely bare, bare, there was nothing. I will tell you another thing that I realized: like, Heinen's had no flour. We were going to be baking before Easter, they had no flour anywhere. Giant Eagle had flour, Marc's had flour. So I found that Giant Eagle probably did a better job of things. There wasn't a lot, I mean, and they limited what you could buy but again, it felt like a short period of time. It didn't feel like it went on forever, like the bare shelves went on forever. It just felt like a month, six weeks, and then things started to get back on the shelves.

Oberschlake

when the stores started to put limits and things like that, and I recall at one point Trump even made a statement that people shouldn't be buying for months ahead of time. I think once things progressed, people started to think "Hey, stop that" and start to buy things the way they normally would have, or at least in the quantities that they would have. That would have been April.

as things progressed throughout the entire pandemic, people started to gradually buying things and in their normal quantity, so there wasn't that scarcity of goods as much and the empty shelves. So knowing that, we weren't as concerned with going to the store and not finding something that we're looking for, with restaurants and everything opening back up. Knowing that we're going to go out to eat maybe two or however many times a week, we don't see any need in getting more than that and just evaluate....what we need at that point.

Paulsen

when I go to the store and there's no toilet paper on the shelf, I think "Somebody's got something going on", I don't know. And when I was in Florida right towards the end, I mean, there were shelves empty in every grocery store, usually paper towels, hand sanitizer, cleaning products and toilet paper, did I say? Yeah, toilet paper and paper towels. Hand sanitizer. It was just crazy to me, like, completely empty shelves.

X

maybe like a few weeks, like, three to four week.

maybe like from like the beginning of March till the end of March. I feel like by the time April came, people found a more regular routine of like getting groceries and people weren't hoarding as much. I wouldn't say everyone reacted fast. I think that like everyone was talking about it but people, some people didn't, you know, respond to situation like quickly like they did not.

Now when I enter a grocery store. I definitely feel a lot more relaxed.

Mark

I think now they stopped doing it. I think it lasted for almost two months like starting at the end of March to May, beginning of May. And then now it died down. And there's a lot more food on the shelf and toilet paper.

Boston is opening stuff up. Like the phases and stuff so, like, not restricting to go outside so I don't feel as guilty to go outside now than before so I just go out buy food and come back whenever I want. I would say a few weeks ago like two weeks ago.

Hannah

I'm not as stressed and nervous to go to the stores now than I was when the initial couple of weeks. What, what it was like when we had like the initial outbreak and the initial pandemic. I'm less. I'm, I guess, hesitant to go to the store. Um, and also physically like I said it's just a little more convenient because I am going into town more. I mean, um, so I feel better about it.

Appendix E3

Sample Coding based on “Repetition”

Observations and thoughts about panic buying

1. Examples/evidence:
 - a. Toilet paper (Fiola)
 - b. Empty shelf/stock out (Everyone)
 - c. Quantity restriction
 - i. Toilet paper (Fiola)
 - ii. Canned foods (Fiola)
 - iii. Not identified (Oberschlake: April, Angel, X)
2. Observations:
 - a. Indirectly heard from social media or news (everyone)
 - b. Directly observed in store:
 - i. Fiola: Walmart, Western VA, early March (before VA lockdown) middle-aged women, two giant packs of toilet papers and one giant pack of paper towels; reactions: “Oh, come on, like really? Like with the toilet paper?” -- “seven kids or something and she needs the toilet paper” & “she was just going with what was available”
 - ii. X: an unspecified store, NYC, pre-pandemic, everyone; reactions: stressed, uncertain about restock; Trader Joe’s, NYC, mid-March, everyone (even for perishables); worried about the foods she wants, unbelievable about perishable goods
 - iii. Oberschlake: Cleveland, OH, a lady with couple of children, cautious enough, three big packs of toilet papers; reactions: emotional response, should not have been able to buy these many because other people need them
 - c. Duration of panic buying:
 - i. Oberschlake: early March to April; quantity limitation, Trump’s statement
 - ii. Mark: late March to early May; situation progressed
 - iii. X: early March to late March; a more regular routine of getting groceries
 - d. Feelings about panic buying:
 - i. Crazy: Oberschlake, Paulsen
 - ii. Emotional: Oberschlake, Mark, Angel, X
 - iii. Irrational: Oberschlake, Mark, Angel
 - iv. Psychological: Mark
 - v. Rational: X
 - vi. Unnecessary: Shawver (supply chains do not break down), Mark
 - vii. Stupid: Angel
 - viii. Frustrating: Shawver, X
 - ix. Angry: Shawver (“people who really needed could not buy”)
 - e. Sharing opinions of panic buying with others:
 - i. Oberschlake: with wife and co-workers
 - ii. Mark: with friends (joke around)
 - iii. X: with boyfriend (lead them panic buying); with others (not everyone reacted fast, and some was planning to leave NYC)
 - f. Thoughts on why people panic buy

- i. Fiola: social media is responsible; "some of them weren't actually panic buying due to the pandemic, they were panic buying in response to panic buying"
- ii. Miraglia: driven by fear; "if everybody just bought their normal usage, we wouldn't have it"; "gosh, if I can't get to the store, because we're locked in our homes, if they are not going to allow us to go to the store..."
- iii. Oberschlake: driven by fear, emotional response; "people who are buying goods out of fear that they won't be able to or that don't need it down the road, even though they might not have needed that much or needed that specific item previously"; "in that people were...getting such an emotional response from everything going on to where they felt they needed to buy in bulk to the point where it was impacting what others were able to buy".
- iv. Paulsen: driven by sense of out of control; "just that we were all surprised that people were kind of in panic mode for some of these items" "people are feeling out of control"
- v. Shawver: driven by uncertainty; "they heard it was going to be a problem and it was just kind of an in the moment thing" "there's a price gouging aspect to it", "if there was better information out there it would stop a lot of them from panic buying"
- vi. Angel: "I guess it's like a normal thing for people to feel that way, and based on like the world we live in"
- vii. Mark: psychological; "because in their heads, they are thinking "oh, there's a pandemic, I can't go out and I need to buy a bunch of stuff so I can, like, stay at home and not get infected or so"
- viii. X: rational decision based on prediction on future situation; "people are worried about how other people are gonna behave you know because, yeah, that makes sense" "scared"