

COMMUNITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

While the uncertainty during the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic was the main worry for the communities, it persists and propagated throughout the globe as the pandemic was progressing. The pandemic impact was felt and approached differently across the communities and the countries. As a result, there was significant divergence in the ways consumers respond to the crisis and adapt to the next stage of the pandemic. As the crisis progressed, it has triggered fundamental economic and social changes, the health services providers had to implement some changes in the patients care management pathways. The production companies and the marketing organisation needed to understand consumer behaviour and predict the demand at this particular time, also had to respond to the crisis resulted from the pandemic in an appropriate way. In addition the lockdown policies were implemented by the authorities in all countries, one of the sudden responses we've seen, was how people are approaching the period of uncertainty and isolation in a significant overnight changes to their daily life style and shopping behaviours.

KEYWORD: COVID-19, Stress, Anxiety, Unemployment, Breast cancer, e-doctor, Furlough Scheme. Panic bulk-shopping.

INTRODUCTION

In 1918, one third of world population (500 millions) was infected by Spanish Flu virus, with estimated deaths of 20-50 millions. In 1957, the Asian Flu pandemic resulted in 1-3 million deaths worldwide. In 2002,

SARS-CoV-1 outbreak also know as g severe acute respiratory syndrome, as a result of it s complication 774 died worldwide [Table.1]. The swine flu pandemic in 2009 was an influenza pandemic that lasted about 19 months and claimed the lives of 18,036 people.^[1]

Table 1: pandemics affected the world in the few last decades.

Disease	Year	First cluster	
Spanish Flu	1918	USA	
Asian flu	1957	China	
Hong Kong flu	1968	British Hong Kong	
SARS-CoV1	2002	China	
Swine flu	2009	Mexico	
MERS	2012	Saudi Arabia	
Zika virus	2015	Brazil	
COVID-19	2019	China	



Fig. 1: Some common observed daily effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, there were larger implications in highlighting the facts that economic organisations, social services and health systems were unprepared for inevitable outbreaks in the future. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic emerged in December 2019, about 219 million people has been diagnosed with this disease and the virus killed about 4.55 million patients globally.

Consumer behaviour

As news of COVID-19 infection spread on daily bases, and as the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic^[1], people immediately responded by stocking up goods. They started buying in large quantities of medical supplies as anti-inflammatory drugs, hand sanitizer and face masks in addition to household essentials like toilet paper, domestic cleaners as well as canned food, dried food and bread (Panic bulk-shopping).^[2] Soon, both big markets and online stores were struggling to keep up with demand, and cope with number of the shoppers without breaking the social distance rules.^[3] Due to lack of production or delays in the transport chain some of people will respond to the fear of shortage and lack of goods by buying large

amount of goods. There was about 80% reduction in tourist spend and travel retail industry around the world.^[3]

Health, social life and wellbeing

People with series and chronic diseases have to minimise outdoor activity and mixing with non-housemates persons. Patients with malignancies as breast cancers which is the most frequent cancer in women globally have to shield two weeks prior to their cancer operation or to be on alternative treatment modality and the surgery is deferred for later date.^[1,4-7] Patients with asthma are more susceptible for sever COVID-19 infection which requires hospitalization, so they will be advised to shield for long period to avoid encountering the infection, such group of patients will require a large amount of stocks and supplies of food and house hold (Fig.1). As a result of lockdown rules, the people has to avoid the non-essential travels and avoid crowds. This included social contexts such as life events - marriage, childbirth and funerals. Many people were not able to see in person their beloved ones for long periods, this had a negative emotional impact on vulnerable groups as

elderly or young children and the patients with mental health issues.

Working, employment and economy

The impact didn't affect only the people with chronic or series illnesses, the healthy individuals also felt the impact of the pandemic, as they have to follow the lock down policy, work from home if possible as well as to travel for essential reasons only [Table.2]. Also as a result of the pandemic people are shifting to digital platforms for day-to-day needs. According to OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) report, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered one of the misfortune unemployment crisis in the history of the industrialized world since the Great Depression which lasted from 1929 to 1939. The authorities is working hard to stop this unemployment crisis from turning into a social crisis. Transformation of

the current labour and economic market into a better and more resilient system is very crucial for defeating the current difficulties and is an essential investment for the future generations.^[8] Considering "Changes in General spending", a study conducted in the USA, showed that, there was an average increase of 60.48% in the general spending level during the first week of lockdown.^[9]

Positive impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our life, it transformed how we work, learn, communicate, shop and travel. Some of these new habits are likely to continue with us permanently as remote working, e-learning, telehealth and e-conferences. One of the positive impacts of the pandemic is the increased awareness of own health, people started wearing facemasks, increased follow hand and body hygiene, as well as improved life style by eating healthy food and performing sports.^[10]

Table 1: Trends in community behaviour following COVID-19 pandemic.

Health and wellbeing
E-Doctor (Remote consultation)
Increase waiting time for consultation/treatment
Alteration of management modality from the usual.
Surge in stress and depression,(Fear of COVID-19 infection)
Prolonged elective procedures waiting list
Work and employment
Rise of unemployment.
Remote working
On-the go-consumption decline.
Education
Remote learning
Increase spending on learning adjacencies
Home schooling
Disturbance of schooling
Communication and information
Increase in media use
Increase spending on media equipment
Travel and tourism
Decrease in tourist spend
Decrease activity in travel retail.
Increase interest in domestic tourism.
Increase interest in individual tourism plans.
Shopping and consumption
Surge in on-line shopping
Value based purchasing
Panic bulk-buying
Increase demand on long life items
Surge in home delivery shopping
Cashless society
In-door life
Home nesting or bubbles
Surge in on-line activity
TV program/Movie watching as Netflix
Entertainment and games
Surge in e-gaming
Entertainment channel shift (eg, cinema to streaming)
Government and economy

Increased spending on Health sector
Increased welfare spending (Furlough Scheme)
Increased Government borrowing
Mobility pattern
Less use of public transport
Less air travel
Inter-personal behaviour
Surge in domestic abuse
Increase rate of divorce
Increase pet adoption

CONCLUSIONS

Customers' digital experiences across different community sectors and industries are creating expectations that some new habits are likely to stick permanently. The use of digital tools in work, lifestyle and daily social interaction is expected to continue in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. The way forward is to learn from this experience of living through COVID-19. There are some trends that provide positive experiences are likely to last longer such as digital adoption in e-medicine and e-commerce, remote working and remote learning.

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