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Changing Consumer Behaviour in the Post-Pandemic Era: Impact Factor Analysis

Dr. M Mahalakshmi^{1*}, Dr. D. Savithiri², Dr. M Dillip Anand³

¹ Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of Economics, A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Mannampandal Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu, India

² Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of Economics, ADM College for Women (A) Velippalaiyam Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu, India

³ Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of Economics, Presidency College, (Autonomous), Chennai Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding Author: * Dr. M Mahalakshmi

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Abstract

Don't estimate a creature by its appearances and size as it may be useful as well as dangerous to any extent. This old saying by our forefathers has been proved true by the novel corona virus—which is so small in size that can't be seen with our naked eyes. This small fellow has shaken the whole world. Even the largest and strongest economies could not be spared from the sting of this microscopic virus. India is not an exception. The first COVID-19 infection was observed on 12th December, 2019, in Wuhan (in China). WHO declared it a pandemic on 11th March, 2020. In India it was recognised on the day (22 March, 2020) with the declaration of JANATA-CURFEW by our honourable Prime Minister, followed by Lockdown on March 25th, 2020. This was not the end...one day converted into days, days into weeks, weeks into months, months into years.....and now its going to complete almost two years, but its 'havoc' is not about to stop yet. No sooner do we try to come back to normal life, than its new variant appears like DELTA and now again another one ---OMICRON. By December 11, 2021, It has affected around 27 crores of people all over the world, total deaths recorded are more than 53 lacs, and in India around 4,75,000 people died of this deadly disease(worldometers.info/coronavirus). Apart from this it has given mental- stress, fear, panic and depressions. Everyone was scared of the fear that any moment off life could be the last one. In the history of mankind it is the first and foremost disease that has persisted for such a long time. Even after vaccination of more than one crores of people, it's another new variant--OMICRON has knocked at the doors.

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KEYWORDS: covid-19, pandemic, Lockdown, persistent, janata-curfew, impact, digital-era, occupational shift, values, leisure, talent, leisure, challenges, infrastructural loss.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 knocked at our doors, and Indian government announced the very first lockdown on March 25th, 2020. After the lockdown phases-11, 111, & 1v were extended and we were locked at home. Researchers are of the view that during first twenty-one days of complete LOCKDOWN the Indian economy was expected to lose over Rs. 32,000 crores (US 4.5 billion dollar).¹ According to a report by U.N., India's economy is forecast to contract by 5.9 % in 2020, and gave a warning too that growth may rebound next year but the contractions are going to result in permanent loss of income of the consumers (Source : the Hindu). According to Ministry of Statistics, India's growth in the fourth quarter of 2020 went down to 3.1 %. It released the GDP figures of quarter one (April to June) fiscal year 21, on September 1st, 2020 and showed a contraction of 24 % as compared to the same period the year before. During these lockdown phases with no mobility and only having digital media to connect, an in-depth discussion of scholars with marketing professionals of different sectors has resulted in understanding that 'Suddenness' and 'Universality' of lock down has changed the behavioural dynamics of consumers and redefined the social spheres of consumers. New order of demand and supply, in the phase of uncertainty, consumption is moving ahead. That is the need for 'food', 'clothes', 'shelter', safe indoors, social love and belongingness for all socio-economic classes alike. The socio-economic pyramid crumpled and pushed everyone to maintain 'social distancing'. The behavioural driver is – 'health and healthy choices'. It is also said in the Vedas – 'Health is Wealth'. During the Vedic period, food, health and well-being were considered as the chief requisites of happiness of family and society. Ethical values, health and spiritual views used to play an important role in framing the economic policies.

During this period, some determinants of consumers' internal and external behaviour like personality type, brand-image --- now have now become inconspicuous. Discussion with consumers revealed some key factors reflecting a paradigm switch in their behaviour.

- Now consumer orders only essential products.
- He has shifted from patronising bigger organised brands to smaller near-home retail (kirana) stores.
- COVID-19 has revived a behavioural understanding of buying that is due to 'loss of work' and 'shortage of income', the old sayings were recalled. "Simple Living and High thinking" and also "Cut Your Coat according To Your Cloth". This is a remarkable shift towards spiritual consumption.
- The grand infrastructure of corporate offices, universities, schools, shrunk to 8-inch screens.
- Importance of farming, supply chain and effective governance has resumed high positions in the society.

So, discussion with consumers has revealed that their behaviour has undergone, "Spiritual Transformation" where he is motivated to seek and express autonomy, inner satisfaction, self-actualisation and maintaining sacred relationship with others.

So, I must say that paradigm of consumer behaviour has shifted from 'MATERIALISM' to 'SPIRITUALISM'.

"IMPACT- FACTOR"—Emerging New Paradigm of Consumer Behaviour

During the COVID-19 Pandemic a new behavioural pattern has been visualised that myself have named as "IMPACT-FACTOR". This paradigm justifies the basic RATIONALITY assumption of economic theory, where consumer targets to satisfy his maximum needs with limited resources. This is the pathway followed by consumers during the pandemic period. Half-paid or no salaries, no work, he is left with no choice but to adapt himself in changed climate named Covid-19. This paper seeks to explain the vision of this new trend reflected in consumer behaviour.

Were

I – Improvisation

M – Moving to the digital Era

P – Privacy at Work

A – Accumulating

C – Conscious for Health

T – Trend to Use Hand-Care and Hygiene Products

F – Focus on Values

A – Adding Leisure to Life

C – Curtailing Mass Gatherings

T – Talent Hunt

O – Occupational Shift

R – Reforming Relations with Family and Friends

Here I explain the facts----

I – Improvisation: Uncertainty among Consumers

Consumers improvise after they face unexpected situations. Following an old famous saying, "Every dark cloud has a silver lining", he is discarding - his existing habits and is trying to adapt himself to the new situation. Corona Virus has changed his behaviour from 'tooth to nail'.

- All the social activities like wedding and funerals became restricted and online (zoom - services).
- Online education has been started.
- Tele-health services have emerged as a new alternative option to consult a doctor, instead of physical check-ups.
- Online orders of McDonald's Burgers, Domino's Pizza and other snacks are replaced by 'mother's-kitchen' or 'home made dishes'.
- Non-essentials aren't purchased and managed by 'jugaad' in India.

So, facing unexpected, unpredicted pandemic situation, consumer is in an exceedingly fix what to try and do. All of a sudden, he's announced to be almost imprisoned without any prior intimation, he is locked at home. In step with a survey 2*, by PwC, of quite 1600 adults,

- 49 % consumers are avoiding leaving their homes
- 50 % are engaging from home partially or entirely

- 42 % are avoiding public transportation when leaving home
- 57 % are following social distancing from friends and community.

M-Moving to Digital Era

Covid-19 made people home- quarantine; stores of big brands additionally as small –ones are closed; people are petrified of stepping out of the house. The shut- down of physical stores has led consumers to rethink their shopping habits. Consumers who are reluctant to buy online earlier, are now left with little choice. Thanks to complete lockdown; consumers are unable to travel to the grocery stores and shopping centres. The 'In – Home –Everything', culture has emerged including streaming services like Disney, Netflix, Flipkart, and Amazon Prime. These services are changing the psychology in addition because the habit of the consumers of physically visiting brick and mortar places.

A study* has revealed that in last several months (of lockdown), consumers are purchasing the products online. The Study found that---

- 28 % are making online purchases which consumers usually would purchase personally from the shop.
- 25 % are engaging from home partially or entirely.
- 42 % are avoiding public transportation when leaving home.
- 57 % are following social distancing from friends and community

P- Privacy at Work

Consumers are locked at home amidst pandemic. All relations working or non- working, school going children, engineering and MBBS students, housewives, all should stick together for each moment. They need to perform their different tasks from home only. But home has become a multitude because if father is busy in a meeting online, he fails to tolerate his ward attending the college lecture simultaneously. Senior students need separate room to study. Elders need silence and rest whereas mothers want to gossip with their friends / neighbours or chat with their parents. Everyone feels disturbed by others as there's limited space at homes, lacking privacy completely. Some families are having even ten or more than ten members (say) but not the ten rooms. In this situation social - intolerance, misunderstandings are increasing and working life of each and every member is being affected negatively leaving the exceptional cases.

A- Accumulating

To accumulate is a common instinct in every species of living beings, and can be visualised even among ant-community, wasps etc. Consumers also find hoarding or storing the products of basic needs, most safe to manage uncertainty in future. He is scared of facing shortages of food stuffs, water and other life essentials. Consumer has now become alert. With the announcement of lockdown on 25th of March, 2020, most of the people are storing the essentials like ration (flour, pulsesl,

rice, millets etc.), frozen food, vegetables, groceries etc. The highest percentage among them is that of non-perishable groceries (app. 27%), followed by frozen food and household and cleaning supplies, each app. 25%. Alcoholic loving consumers are rated around 6% in this pretext. A gray market is also emerging as a result of hoarding, where unauthorised middle- men and black- marketeirs hoard the products, create shortages in the market and then sell the products at very high prices. For example: PPE kits, Ns95 masks, sanitizers etc.

C -Conscious for Health

The year 2020 has seen the outbreak of Covid-19, a major global health crisis. As of August 3, 2020, the covid-19 has spread to 216 countries with 17,660,523 confirmed cases and 680,894 deaths*. So, health consciousness has become one of the main concerns of the consumers during Covid-19. Since going out, eating out were not safe, many developed the cooking skills at home, to eat healthy and safe food. They opted for immunity boosting food, less wastage of food, buying more fruits and vegetables and supplements to promote good health.

- Air quality has improved, air pollution dropped down by 79% in Delhi.
- Every second consumer is observed to sign up for virtual workout classes.
- A trend to sit in sunshine to disinfect the body and to take vitamin D is seen.
- Consumers are sanitizing everything they touch and every place they go like office, malls, shops, hotels etc. And so raising the demand for these products.
- Though it is difficult to change the habits but during pandemic, taking steams and doing gargles has become a part and parcel of their daily routine.
- Shifting towards old methods or "Nani-ke-Nuskhe", they are taking "Giloy-Kaadha" and taking all preventive medicines.
- Millions of people all over the world are doing "YOGA", watching 'India TV program', "Corona se Jung, Swami Ramdev ke Sung".

He is more conscious of cleanliness and hygiene.

He has adapted himself to wear mask while stepping out and PPE Kits where necessary.

T – Trend to Use Hand-care And Hygiene Products

Whenever there is a crisis, usually consumer has a tendency to postpone his demand for the various products, sparing the necessities. A new behavioural act is being visualised during this pandemic in the form of awareness towards the importance of hygiene. The standard of industry has improved in recent times. During Covid-19, the demand for hygiene products has marked remarkable increase. Government health organisations across the country are increasing awareness among the masses to maintain hygiene. Using the social -media, advertisements, announcements, caller- tunes etc., they are encouraging and advising the masses to wash hands repeatedly at least for twenty seconds with the soaps, hand washes and sanitizers. They are telling them not to step out of their houses unless it is very

urgent and wear mask. These products are visualised to penetrate in Tier 2 and 3 town and rural areas.

F- Focus on Values

Consumer's sentiments, psychology and ideology have changed a lot. It is seen that consumers in few countries like India, China and Indonesia are optimistic than Japan and Europe. Consumers in these countries are religious, having firm belief in god and His divine powers. They surrender their lives to Him and believe that He (god) only will take care of their lives and will punish only those who have committed the sins. Their optimism asserts that the pandemic would come to an end very soon. Consumers were quite sure of the successful launching of the vaccine for Covid. The health workers are dedicated towards their profession whole heartedly, trying their best to save lives and maintain a faith among masses to fight and get victory over it, resulting in the decline of death cases.

A- Adding Leisure to Life

Covid -19 hit hard at homes of consumers. Be it economic sector or any other sector; well being of the consumer or their health, no area is left untouched, unaffected. One major impact of corona – virus on consumer behaviour is to reunite with friends and family. In the fast materialistic life, running in the race of earning more and more money, people have left behind all the relationships, even their parents, some going to other state, while others migrating abroad. But the pandemic has provided a golden opportunity in terms of forcibly provided spare time with no work at all, to spend time with their family as well as friends and remove all their complaints. Now consumer spends more time with his family, feels more concerned about their health, and other issues. During this period consumers are performing all household chores collectively, as all the maids and servants are absent from the whole scenario. Sitting at the porch and terrace of the houses, they are talking, making discussions on politics, sports and economy, making fun, exchanging views about the future prospects with each others, of course maintaining social – distancing. All birthday parties, kitty –parties, corporate meetings, school and colleges' staff meetings are being organised on social media such as Zoom and Whatsapp etc. They have got the time to enjoy the hobbies that they had longed for, but due to lack of time could never enjoy earlier. They are spending significantly more time –

---on entertainment, watching TV, movies and games;

--- News lovers are busy in watching or reading news from different media;

---artistic buddies are enjoying their hobbies like listening music, playing various instruments (guitar etc.), art, reading books, gardening etc.

---consumers that relish the new dishes are busy in cooking with U-Tube channel

---social consumers have become more active on social media;

---housewives/ladies are indulged in managing their household chorus like cleaning, laundry, repairing etc.

---shaking hands with others and giving a hug are replaced by traditional Indian culture, "NAMASTEY"

---YOGA has become part and parcel of their daily lives to keep them physically fit.

C -Curtailing Mass Gatherings

The centre has advised state authorities to take steps to avoid mass gatherings. This is an attempt to control the spread of novel corona virus infection in the country. Consumer is aware of this fact and taking all precautions.

- He didn't go to the market unless it is very urgent.
- To move to workplace he preferred personal conveyance to public transport thus giving a hike to demand of vehicles.
- He avoided social gatherings like marriages, birthday parties, kitty-parties, picnics, holiday tours and funerals. A gathering of 50 to 100 persons was allowed in most of the states.
- He wore mask every time away from home maintaining social distance while talking to someone.
- All the non essential journeys were postponed or cancelled out.
- All academic institutions- schools, colleges, universities were closed to avoid risk disaster and seizing health opportunities of the students/children.
- All the cricket matches, sports etc. were held with few viewers.
- All reality shows were conducted virtually.

T - Talent Hunt

During Covid- 19 pandemic, consumers have got maximum-ever in life, spare and flexible time. They are using this time in hunting their hidden talents. Housewives are experimenting new recipes, whereas music lovers have practiced new ways to play music, singing and composing new songs, uploading them on U – TUBE channels. Tik-Tok lovers are busy in preparing videos; young generation is busy in creating new start – ups; developing new video games. Teachers are busy in executing new technical ways of delivering their lectures while writers are busy in searching their potential by creative writings, new novels, poetry and editorials in news papers. Some consumers are busy in maintain their gardens, growing fresh vegetables and fruits at home only. Concisely, we can say, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to hunt the hidden talents inside the consumers.

O- Occupational Shift

COVID-19 has affected the occupations of the people. Facing the unexpected circumstances, many are forced to change their profession to earn their livelihood and support their families.

- *Employees in apparel companies (like Brook Brothers and New Balance) are now producing surgical masks and gowns.
- Telsa, Ford, and General Motors have retooled their factories to produce ventilators from car parts after idling their automotive plants due to increased consumer demand.

- Many consumers have shifted their business to produce sanitizers, hand washes and disinfectant soaps etc.
- Grocery stores(kirana shops) and medical stores have been significantly a centre of attraction for the masses to earn their livelihood
- Girls are finding 'kirana shop merchants' and 'medical store owners' as the best suitable and secure match to marry with.
- The groups that have bad effect of Covid are laundry(dhobi), Zym, Hotels and restaurants, vendors of flowers/juices/fast food and hawkers. Few have started selling fruits and vegetables which are in continuous demand.
- Pharmaceutical industry has been flourishing providing employment to many job seekers.
- Many new kirana stores and home-delivery food chains have been started.
- Labour, having no work, no wages are seen migrating to their native place, barefoot, loaded with their luggage on their head, getting no public transport (bus/train/taxi/van). They are seeking opportunities in their native profession and place.

R- Reforming Relations with Family and Friends

Covid -19 is hitting hard at homes of consumers. Be it economic sector or any other sector; well being of the consumer or their health, no area is left untouched, unaffected. One major impact of corona – virus on consumer behaviour is to reunite with friends and family. In the fast materialistic life, running in the race of earning more and more money, people have left behind all the relationships, even their parents, some going to other state, while others migrating abroad. But the pandemic has provided a golden opportunity in terms of forcibly provided spare time with no work at all, to spend time with their family as well as friends and remove all their complaints. Now consumer spends more time with his family, feels more concerned about their health, and other issues

On the other front, by staying at home, they are paying much cost for this pandemic situation. According to Pwc* survey –

- 71 % are paying human cost, in terms of sickness and life lost
- 51 % are costing their personal health
- 49 % are ill – affected in their personal well –being, and
- 48 % are spreading the virus to the family

The survey reveals that situation is becoming more alarming day by day.

Challenges Ahead:

The World Health Organisation(WHO) has already warned nations regarding early stages of third wave of Covid-19. As the virus is consistently mutating into more transmissible variants, the third wave is already hitting several European and Southeast Asian countries and now have reached in India(Business Line). After the second wave, the daily average of infected people was spiralling down, leaving exceptions in some states. Still there is some positive silver lining, which is—'the growing pace of

vaccination'. Though we may not be able to bid goodbye to the threat of third wave, but by learning the lessons from the experience of last two waves i.e. cost incurred in the form of loss of infrastructure, agricultural and industrial growth, educational loss, career postponements, mental strains and economic development; we can win the battle ,taking all precautions, co operating with the government and following the guidelines released by WHO.

CONCLUSION

Not only India nor Asia but the whole world is trying to combat the Covid-19 virus. The lockdown and social distancing has changed the consumer behaviour tremendously. His bare necessities of food , shelter and home are replaced by cell phone, internet and apps. YouTube, Disney, Netflix, Amazon have become more important than bread. Consumer can't part with the mobile phone even for a moment as if he is not able to breathe without it. 'Namastey' has taken place of handshakes and hugs (western culture).Wearing mask every time he steps out, washing hands with soap/hand wash, sanitizing every parcel, product, grocery, fruits and vegetables, clothes.... everything. Virtual relations and meets are preferred to physical ones. Consumer cannot go to store, so store comes home. All the habits along with new technologies and government policies are expected to continue even in future. It seems difficult that consumer would ever come back to his old pre-pandemic lifestyle, habits and behaviour.

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