



B. Business Impact

Changes in Consumer Behavior

Self-care during the pandemic and beyond: Implications for consumption and well-being

ESCP Impact Paper No. 2020-08-EN

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Abstract

This impact paper aims to discuss today's fast-paced society, in which people tend to lose touch with their bodies, and how the coronavirus lockdown has boosted a phenomenon of people reconnecting with themselves through the practices of yoga, meditation, or cooking. It intends also to demonstrate how the pandemic is impacting positively and negatively on consumption and on well-being in general. Beyond that, this paper stimulates a counterpoint reflection on the reality in poorer economies, in which people are excluded from consumption even from the basic resources needed to fight the pandemic.

Keywords: Self-care, Consumption, Well-being, Pandemic.

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Self-care during the pandemic and beyond: Implications for consumption and well-being

In today's fast-paced society, people tend to lose touch with their bodies, and cases of mental and physically-related disorders arise (Brown, 2014). Yet the coronavirus lockdown is boosting the appearance of these mental illnesses at a global level, with people exhibiting varying degrees of grief, panic, hopelessness, paralyzing fear, or difficulties in sleeping. Excessive anxiety, mainly caused by over-indulging in tuning or reading bad news about Covid-19 which tends to affect people's emotional or physical well-being, with symptoms varying from hearts beating faster, blood pressure rising and breathing rate increases, to gaining weight and the nagging worry about the future (Brody, 2020). While social change caused by the crisis is impacting mental on health and well-being, people are developing home-based coping strategies to better deal with these times.

The phenomenon, already underway, in self-care and in people reconnecting with themselves through the practices of yoga (Askegaard and Eckhardt 2012), or other related spiritual practices (Hemetsberger, Kreuzer, and Klien, 2019), seems to gain force as people want to fight anxiety and other mental disorders coming from the confinement and social change. To better deal with these issues, people are taking up yoga (Ford, 2020), dancing to music (Connolly, Quin, and Redding, 2011), walking up and down the stairs, doing exercises and carrying out breathing techniques or even taking a 20-minute walk outside. Moreover, depending on home circumstances and the number of people living together, they will have to cope with constraints and variabilities. For instance, parents may face extra challenges once they need to work from home and incentivise their children to continue being physically active as well as continuing other activities.

Consumer research around well-being has shown that people tend to escape from the struggles of their everyday life by engaging in extraordinary experiences such as 'consuming' adventurous experiences (Belk and Costa, 1998), spiritual and religious movements (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019), music (Ulusoy 2016), or nature (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). Some marketed escapes can offer healing and therapeutic services for those people in need (Higgins and Hamilton 2019). However, it seems that when it comes to confinement, there is no escaping from it. In such stressful circumstances, your body goes into fight-or-flight mode, spurring you on to do something. For those who were able to escape to the countryside, in which they can benefit from their families' house in nature, they may well have faced less stress and worrisome routines. But those that are living in big cities, which is 55% of the entire world's population (Ritchie and Roser, 2018), in small apartments/houses, they will have to find ways of fighting or at least escaping to imaginary places through the on-line practices of yoga, home exercising, music and so on.

Contradictorily, our desire for well-being (Sirgy and Lee, 2006) associated with fear (Beitelspacher et al., 2012) and anxiety can lead us to adopt unhealthy behaviours and poor decision-making too (Chater, 2020). Home confinement may tempt people to just curl up on the couch and binge-watch Netflix. The consumption of alcohol and nicotine, for instance, are very linked to anxiety (Stewart, Peterson, and Pihl, 1995), consequently drawing our attention to look at ourselves during the pandemic. Likewise, anxiety has been considered as an emotion that can increase caffeine and food consumption (Lee, Cameron, and Greden,

1985). Therefore, the longer we remain in confinement, the higher the chances of having other health-related diseases associated with the consumption of food and drugs.

Coronavirus impact on consumer behaviour and culture in the marketplace

Since lockdown forced the shutting down of nonessential businesses, a movement was born to incentivise purchasing from small local businesses instead of large multinational companies. Although people are trying to engage in this movement, it has been difficult to adapt to the changes of the crisis while still supporting all neighbourhood businesses at the governmental and consumer levels (Watson, 2020). Consequently, within this crisis, e-commerce is a sector that has been facing relevant changes throughout the weeks of confinement.

E-commerce facilitated the growth of sales of within unusual product categories. Across Walmart and Amazon, weights such as dumbbells and kettlebells are out of stock, while backorder dates have been postponed far into the future (Wolff-Mann, 2020). In the U.S. there has been a growth in purchasing items based on three needs: to protect, to entertain and to connect. Sales of yoga mats and board games like Sorry, Connect 4 and Clue have increased drastically in the last weeks, as well as the consumption of preventive supplies (e.g. personal care and health products), food and beverages (Whitten, 2020). Bicycles and exercise gear, home and garden items, reading matter, electrical goods and coffee are also on the list of products in high demand during confinement (Gompertz and Plummer, 2020). In parallel, there has been growth in the consumption of smartphone apps, such as social networks and food delivery, and an explosion of apps of video chat, media and entertainment, online shopping, and health care (Jones, 2020).

As the coronavirus pandemic rages on, many retailers are being overwhelmed by demand, but others are seeing trade collapse (Gompertz and Plummer, 2020). The searches for luggage, briefcases, cameras, bridal wear and party events, among others, have been facing a drastic decrease since the beginning of the pandemic (Jones, 2020), as a result of the huge number of events and flights being cancelled throughout the year of 2020. Smartphone apps in the travel/hospitality and mobility industries have experienced a slowdown in consumption (Jones, 2020).

Going beyond: what is going on outside Europe?

Fragile economies can experience harder realities during the crisis when compared specifically to European countries. In Brazil, for instance, 35 million citizens - almost 15% of the whole country's population - have no access to basic sanitation (Brasil, 2019). The situation gets worse in the favelas, where the lack of constant availability of clean water, making it harder to follow the simplest World Health Organization's suggestion - to wash hands with soap and water regularly - while hand sanitizers are an unattainable luxury (Gortázar, 2020). In the favelas, large families need to share small and poorly ventilated houses, and parents do not have the chance of working from home since their jobs normally involve selling products or services in downtown, or serving richer families in privileged areas (Gortázar, 2020). This exemplifies the abysmal differences between social classes and access to the consumption of basic needs (products and services) and explains why the application of social isolation and distance practices in some regions in the world is almost impossible.

According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, about 4.5 billion people - more than half the world's population - either practise open defecation or use unsafe sanitation facilities and services, which places sanitation as a contemporary issue to tackle, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Water, n.d.). The risks gets higher for nearly half of the global workforce that may lose their jobs and who are already facing a drop in their incomes due to the coronavirus (Chaves, 2020). The situation has drawn attention from governments and companies, which are addressing resources to directly help communities impacted by the coronavirus, or supporting third-sector initiatives. Overall, a global chain of a solidarity economy seems to be happening and shared responsibility and action are needed for the world to recover (Guterres, 2020).

The discussion about self-care and well-being practices introduced at the beginning of this impact paper, gains a supporting role when we observe the reality of a considerable percentage of the global population whose basic needs are not being met. For those people, consumption and access is clearly out of reach, making trying to survive the coronavirus pandemic harder and unfair.

Conclusion

So, what will change after the coronavirus? We stressed how this crisis has alerted many consumers to use their newfound time to focus on their body-mind health. From practices such as taking up some kind of exercise while in social isolation (Jones, 2020) to cooking at home for the first time, people are arguing among themselves whether the crisis will leave a heritage of these good practices after everything is back to normal.

As predictions point to a slow return to normal life, it is expected that people will have learnt through the crisis how to behave in a new world reality. Other pandemics refined the way we take care with hygiene and shaped the way we structure and furnish medical facilities, and even within our homes and cities. Likewise, the coronavirus pandemic will have provided lessons to health care systems, economies, and lifestyles. Governments, companies and third-sector forces should get together to provide appropriate information and resources, from food to digital content, for people to better deal with emotions and 'consumption' within their new reality at home (and for those without a home). Otherwise, staying at home and facing a new reality of living may have negative influences on food nutrition, anxiety, and other health issues.

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