

Marketing and Consumer Behavior during and amidst the Overcoming of a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how enterprises and people behave, and the future effects of this change are yet to be seen. Several studies have shown how lockdown measures and individual and social reactions affect organizations (Leung *et al.*, 2021; Rojas *et al.*, 2020; Zwanka & Buff, 2020). However, further research on how the marketing areas of organizations may contribute to overcoming the pandemic's devastating effects is required.

Consequently, society has made urgent requests that academia could address through research. First, we are called upon to analyze the effect of COVID-19 on consumers' different cultures, ages, and demographic variables worldwide (Madrigal-Moreno *et al.*, 2021; Sheth, 2020; Zwanka & Buff, 2020), leading to possible responses and ways enterprises can adapt and offer value propositions. Likewise, and in the same line of work, it is imperative to account for how pandemic-based individualism has shaped new habits, trends and disruptions (Larios-Gómez *et al.*, 2021; Sheth, 2020). Secondly, recognizing enterprises' work in social responsibility and their marketing actions in response to the negative impacts of COVID-19, as well as its impact on consumers, is a matter to be explored (Huang, 2021; Pesqueux, 2020).

On the other hand, it is essential to contribute to the recognition and analysis of positive dynamics in the field of marketing; for example, the pandemic has favored and promoted the connection with consumers through digital channels, the use of e-commerce and, in particular, marketplaces with a wide offer and services for sale and after-sales (Brandtner *et al.*, 2021; Gómez, 2020; Sánchez-Torres *et al.*, 2021; Saura *et al.*, 2020; Sheth, 2020) with traditional dynamics such as B2C, but also favoring entrepreneurship and independent or informal actors through strategies such as C2C.

Likewise, concerning specific sectors, facing the dropout of students, favoring educational coverage and providing them with positive service experiences amid such a complex and changing situation opens the door to thinking and contributing to educational marketing in the context of the pandemic and the portrayal of education institutions as brands (Habib *et al.*, 2021; Montoya-Restrepo *et*

al., 2020). Thus, recognizing marketing in other relevant and deeply affected sectors, such as tourism, can lead to an analysis on how to use internal marketing to motivate collaborators in the sector or how to restore and promote tourists' confidence based on marketing tools (Buhalis, 2020; Kluge, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2021; Sheldon, 2020). Similarly, we must acknowledge the various changes in purchasing retail products in this context (Brumă *et al.*, 2021; Rodrigues, 2021; Rojas *et al.*, 2020).

Given the above, in August 2021, *Innovar* journal launched a call for a special issue whose purpose was to enable a space for the academic community in the marketing field to analyze this phenomenon from diverse perspectives. As a result, 48 papers were received, and this edition – volume 32, issue 86– introduces a set of ten articles that were approved after the peer-reviewing process. In a future edition, we expect to publish more research studies that address this relevant global phenomenon. Below, there is a summary of the articles that are part of this special issue.

The first paper of this special issue, titled "The COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for food consumer behavior in Brazil: A bibliometric analysis of institutionally affiliated research in Brazil" presents a rapid systematic review of high-impact literature on the trends and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for food consumer behavior in Brazil. The results show how consumers began to look for healthier options and the increased use of e-commerce to purchase food and other products, representing an opportunity for food delivery applications.

The second paper, also written in English, and titled "Factors related to quinoa consumption in Peru during the COVID-19 pandemic," explores consumer behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic in Peru and the underlying consumer perceptions and demographic aspects that influence quinoa consumption. This paper shows that concerns for health and nutrition are related to the increase in quinoa consumption during the pandemic, with women consuming quinoa on a daily or weekly basis.

The third article, "Behavior of the consumers of cultural activities and crafts before, during and after COVID-19 in Mexico," studies the significant relations between the

consumption of cultural activities before and during the pandemic, partly explained by the lack of accessibility, the restrictions and lockdowns, and their strong correlation with tourism activities, which were significantly reduced.

The fourth contribution to this special issue, "Food purchase and consumption habits during COVID-19 lockdowns in Bogotá," analyzes the main changes in food purchase and consumption habits during the COVID-19 confinement measures adopted in the capital of Colombia. Three types of consumers were defined: "affected," who showed greater change in their habits; "stable," whose habits remained relatively the same; and "indifferent," who showed habits outside the home. On the other hand, it stresses the importance of logistics (+89%) and digital marketing (+52%), related to the increase in online purchases and home deliveries.

The fifth paper, "Changes in the digital marketing strategy of exporting SMEs in Costa Rica as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic," examines the effects of the pandemic on international businesses in Costa Rica and the emergence of new ways of conducting businesses related to virtualization and the use of digital media as part of their information or sales strategies. It also shows that companies that did not assess their performance had unfavorable results in exports, thus confirming the importance of assessing the performance of each digital marketing tool.

The sixth paper is titled "Analyzing academic discourse evolution on consumer behavior and COVID-19 using Topic Modeling." This work shows a series of issues and their evolution throughout the pandemic concerning a study on consumer behavior. Thus, it first studies the lockdowns implemented to contain the coronavirus, then presents the protection measures required to maintain commercial operations, and the changes in consumers and organizations' behavior toward sustainability. The internal and external drivers, which traditionally affected consumer behavior (personality type, brand image, status, etc.), have become obsolete in the context of the pandemic due to the emergence of other drivers, such as recycling and reusing products. On the other hand, customers now value comfort and personalization much more.

Paper number seven, in English language and under the title "Customer value co-creation behavior in times of COVID-19: The case of the Mexican food service delivery ecosystem" uses qualitative research to show how customer participation behavior (CPB) and customer citizenship behavior (CCB) are related to the creation of customer value co-creation behavior (CVCB) in the ecosystem of Mexican food delivery services. Responsible behavior and sharing information are

the variables most related to CPB, while recommendations and helping other clients are most associated with CCB.

The eighth paper published in this special issue, titled "E-commerce and consumer habits during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico," explains how the consumption of information and entertainment through digital platforms increased. Furthermore, consumers learned to look for high-quality information from reliable sources, with health being one of the most important topics. The COVID-19 pandemic favored the growth of electronic commerce in Mexico, especially regarding products related to health care, household cleaning products and food during the first moments of the pandemic.

Paper number nine, "Regulatory beliefs and trust: Adaptation of the technological acceptance model to e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ecuador," shows that perceived trust does not significantly influence the intention towards e-commerce use. At the same time, regulatory beliefs and competition in electronic devices are the factors that most influence the user's decision. The authors stress that e-commerce was adopted because the shopper had no alternatives in a lockdown context. Still, the lack of confidence could motivate a return to traditional commerce when shoppers are able to do so.

Finally, the tenth paper, titled "Influence of ethical sales on the relational variables of the industrial customer amid COVID-19," presents a study on ethical sales and their relation to customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty to the selling company. In this environment, face-to-face contact has been minimized and even annulled on many occasions due to the new commercial scenario caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors mention that the satisfaction and trust some customers obtain from a given supplier company will be determined by the services and products sold and the contributions and services of sellers through successive sales interactions.

In short, after this experience as guest editors, we must make some considerations that emphasize the role of marketing from an academic and research perspective and also think about professional practice. First of all, it is worth noting that the global scenario has learned valuable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, since the possibility of searching for timely information about the characteristics of consumer goods through digital media has allowed consumers to demand better quality products that contribute in a more transparent way to the realization of ethical practices and fight for corporate social responsibility (He & Harris, 2020), adjust the physical and virtual purchasing environments, and consider the role of pro-social

(Franco & Silva-Franco, 2022) and sustainable or pro-environmental consumption (Bohórquez-López & Gutiérrez-Leefmans, 2022), the latter being a relevant trend anticipated in the literature before COVID-19 (Ciro, 2021).

Secondly, all over the world society has gone through various events that, over the years, have been transcendental and brought changes, adaptations, adjustments, and leadership in the diverse ways of life. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the historical events that recently shook the world. It was a breakthrough to see the work and decision-making in various aspects of society through different approaches. One of the aspects that had the most significant impact was the communication process inside organizations. From a business perspective, organizations began to create communication links with their stakeholders and audiences, whether suppliers, competitors or consumers (Kang *et al.*, 2021). Another factor was how we conceived entertainment, consumption of cultural goods (Zamacona-Aboumrad & Barajas-Portas, 2022), wellbeing, health, related consumption patterns and nutrition (Higuchi *et al.*, 2022), which also lasted after the pandemic (Acevedo-Navas & Osorio Romero, 2022).

As a third element, the professionalization of social media and digital platforms was boosted. Although they already existed, were not exploited as much as companies do today; in fact, the pandemic led SMEs to take a step towards digitalization (Jiménez *et al.*, 2022). Companies seek to build, maintain, and optimize their relations with their stakeholders by implementing social media and digital platforms to strengthen their communication processes (Mason *et al.*, 2021). From another perspective, consumers were eager to obtain goods and services in conditions of social alienation and began to exploit the resources at hand, fearing contagion. Thus, regardless of their age, gender or socioeconomic level, they became experts in the use of platforms to obtain any necessary input for their survival and that of their families; even some consumers considered "digital illiterates" began a process of digital learning to face the situation represented by social isolation and the increase in productive activities from home, such as working or studying, to contain an aggressive health emergency (Akdin *et al.*, 2022).

From another perspective, the digital transformation of marketing practices was the tool that allowed companies to remain in the market (Béjar-Tinoco *et al.*, 2022; Dash & Chakraborty, 2021); the correct use of search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) practices were pillars for maintaining customer satisfaction. The pandemic showed the world the need to adapt to change and the exploitation of digital technology resources necessary

for communication and the generation of relationships with consumers (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). The reflection should be on how to strengthen that familiarity and consumer confidence for future technological developments (Bonisoli & Castillo, 2022).

Finally, and to present an advance on future perspectives, it should be noted that the pandemic modified the forms and processes of consumption worldwide, being clear that this change has no setback and that there are proving effects of the pandemic, as shown by changes in people's consumption through omnichannel means or the accelerated increase of e-commerce and social media (Mason *et al.*, 2021). This also implied logistical and supply chain challenges to make the delivery process in the time, manner and place required by consumers (Figueroa *et al.*, 2022). This is also true for the transactions between companies with the adoption of B2B e-commerce (Kang *et al.*, 2021) as a strategic channel in the face of the uncertainty of future pandemics that financially affect the physical channels, where the most relevant thing, regardless of an environment of uncertainty such as that generated by the pandemic, will be to strengthen the business values so that they are immersed in responsible and ethical sales processes, in order to create sustainable relationships and long-term bonds in the framework of trust (Martín-Castejón & Gómez-Martínez, 2022). All this is complemented by the innovation of products and services related to work and life from home, a trend that will continue to grow (Ding & Li, 2021) and that should be thoroughly studied.

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