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Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching your face.

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it’s important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow).

At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19.

The reality of this new pandemic took the world by surprise. People worldwide are still trying to adapt to the idea of prolonged indoor stays. So, now that we are all trying to avoid going out to shop in brick and mortar stores, how has this changed our approach in purchasing goods? Furthermore, will these adjustments establish new and lasting habits?

In countries heavily impacted by COVID-19, consumers are stockpiling food and other essential items, while isolating themselves from crowds. To find out how and when consumers started showing these behavioral changes, Nielsen1 conducted shopper behavior research that started during the beginning of the pandemic in China and extended to other countries that have also been affected. They monitored consumer trends, as COVID-19 news reached the general public and found out that consumers go through six behavioral stages based on their awareness of the COVID-19 spread in their communities: Proactive health-minded buying: Increased interest in the acquisition of products that maintain well-being or health, Reactive health management: Prioritization of products for infection containment (e.g. face masks), Pantry preparation: Higher purchases of shelf-safe products and increased store visits,Quarantined living preparation: Increased online shopping, decreased store visits and first signs of strain on the supply chain, Restricted living: Possible price gouging due to limited supplies and deterred online fulfillment, Living a new normal: Increased health awareness even as people return to their typical daily activities.

The study also found out that consumers typically moved from one stage to another in a period of two weeks in areas close to the initial outbreak. However, this happened much faster in other countries where the outbreak started later, such as Italy and the US.

Currently, the only country where consumers are starting to transition to the sixth stage is China, while the US has begun to move towards restricted living. So, what kind of possible long-lasting consumer behavior shifts can we expect as a result? It’s still too early to tell, but clear trends can be seen, which, if sustained, could lead to significant shifts in how consumers shop in the future.

When consumers are faced with shopping restrictions, they find and adopt newer ways to shop through technology. This is especially true when it comes to health and essential items. In 2019, the online grocery shopping market generated about $28.68 billion or a 20% increase from 2018. Despite this growth, food and beverage were still one of the smallest e-commerce categories. Last year, it was mostly the younger population segment that tried online grocery shopping, with 55% of 25 to 34-year-olds considering themselves likely to purchase groceries online, in contrast to only 35% of 45 to 54-year-olds expressing the same sentiment. However, due to the pandemic, older generations are starting to see online shopping as a valid and safe option to obtain groceries. For example, Alibaba reported that in China, online grocery orders placed by people born in the 1960s were four times higher than normal during the Spring Festival or the period were China was still discovering new cases of COVID-19 each day.

With so many consumers entering restricted living situations, there has been a spike in other categories, especially in entertainment and media. That’s not surprising given that staying home increases the amount of content people watch by 60%. Video games and video-game internet traffic have seen a 75% increase since restrictions were imposed in the US. Of course, not everyone is seeing increases in traffic or purchases, in fact travel sites are experiencing the opposite.

So, do these changes signal a shift into how consumers will behave in the long term? If the holidays are any indicator, even short-term adjustments in behavior can have long term effects. For example, during holidays, there’s an increase in the number of consumers purchasing online or on their mobile devices. We then see this behavior being sustained as new holiday seasons roll in, which means new habits have been established.

Despite the rise in e-commerce activities due to the pandemic, most retailers have a bleak outlook for the rest of the year. This is because e-commerce typically represents only about 16% of their sales revenue. With many stores shutting their doors, it is in the best interest of businesses to maintain and grow their e-commerce strategy. As the population of most countries starts to move from quarantine preparations to restricted living, online fulfillment will be challenging due to strains in the supply chain. This has prompted many consumers to turn to Direct to Consumer (D2C) manufacturers to order and receive goods within a normal timeframe.

These D2C manufactures are a growing segment that caters directly to consumers by bypassing standard distribution channels, effectively gaining direct access to consumers. Several of these manufacturers have seen a significant boost in sales due to the pandemic. For example, Peach, a brand that manufactures high-end bath tissue saw new customers increase by 279% over the last two weeks compared to the two weeks prior.

Awareness of D2C manufacturers has increased in the last few years, with almost 48% of manufacturers racing to build D2C channels, and 87% seeing these channels being relevant to their products and consumers. Initially boosted by younger audiences, D2C manufacturers have found success by focusing on specific target audiences and catering to their needs and identities. This D2C trend is expected to continue, and perhaps accelerate, as manufacturers that are still on the fence might finally see the benefits of D2C and make themselves directly available to consumers

However, even D2C manufactures that have found themselves positively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be affected by supply chain issues as consumers start living in quarantine. This means they can’t afford to stand idly by and must find a way to maintain their e-commerce growth once the pandemic is over as well.

As the coronavirus outbreak continues to wreak havoc across the globe, people’s time that would have otherwise been spent perusing malls or going to live events, is now being spent on the sofa.

During this period of pandemic-induced social isolation, it’s no surprise that people are consuming vast amounts of media. Today’s graphics use data from a Global Web Index report to explore how people have increased their media consumption as a result of the outbreak, and how it differs across each generation.

Understandably, people are becoming increasingly worried about how much time they are dedicating to their screens. However, research suggests that screen time itself is no cause for concern. Rather, it’s the content we choose to consume that could have a significant impact our psychological well-being.

Perhaps most intriguingly, the TV shows and movies that are increasing in popularity on Netflix are about pandemics—which could signify the need for people to fictionalize the chaos we find ourselves in.

Regardless of what type of content we are consuming, the fact is that every generation is relying on their devices during this pandemic to inform and distract more than ever before, creating a huge opportunity for media companies to engage a captive audience.

We also learned that all consumers, even in that first week, had already begun to change how they worked, shopped, ate, played and traveled.

Those changes in behavior were more or less aligned with the consumer’s level of concern over their perceived risk of contracting the virus, and those changes were more or less done of their own volition.

More consumers did more of their shopping online. We observed a dearth of shopping of any kind among those with incomes of less than $50,000, particularly in physical stores. Seventy percent of these lower-income individuals also expressed the highest levels of concern over contracting the virus, so not spending money seemed to be key. More affluent consumers seem focused on avoiding public spaces, while going online to buy what they needed and wanted.

Not surprisingly, we observed that consumers had already made their own decisions to travel less by plane anywhere, but particularly to New York, the Pacific Northwest and most international ports of call. For those who continued to travel that week, it’s interesting to note that more consumers (14.3 percent) felt more comfortable staying in someone’s home — aka home-sharing properties — than in large or small places with other people, specifically large name-brand hotels (9.7 percent) and B&Bs (11.4 percent).

Consumers also reported eating at home more than they did before reports of the outbreak in the U.S., and were using meal delivery services, aggregators and mobile order-ahead services less often.

Consumers voluntarily put themselves under partial quarantine by working from home and by commuting via car rather than using public transit if they were going to work. They also made decisions to cancel work-related gatherings and leisurely plans of all sorts, from attending sports events and concerts to watching films in theaters — even before the sports franchisees decided to take unprecedented measures and do that for them.

We wanted to dig deeper into how the fear of contracting the virus that week had begun to impact the behaviors of consumers in how they work, shop, eat, and travel for business and leisure. This window, we suspect, will be important in helping us better understand the degree to which consumers shift to a “new normal” once the COVID-19 crisis dissipates.

Our week-one respondents gave us that baseline insight.

Not surprisingly, we observed big pullbacks in corporate travel, with 31 percent of consumers reporting that they had curtailed their business trips.

For the 48 percent of consumers who say they are slightly or somewhat concerned about their COVID-19 risk, that pullback is even more stark.

For this group, 55 percent reported cutting back on domestic travel for business, 47 percent on using public transportation, 44 percent on using Ubers and 53 percent on traveling internationally for personal reasons, which we suspect involved changing spring break plans. This behavior proved to be much more restrictive than what we observed in the sample at large — motivated in part by businesses advising employees to limit their travel to essential business trips, and in part by people deciding to use a call or video chat instead.

During the week of March 2, more consumers reported going to the office to work than not, particularly among those who were slightly or somewhat concerned. Only 6 percent of the somewhat concerned reported that they were going to the office less, versus the 12 percent of the overall sample who said they had taken steps to work from home.

That week, consumers were already giving up on movie theaters, live sporting events and concerts, with 37 percent, 33 percent and 3 percent of consumers, respectively, reporting a reduction in those activities.

Consumers across the board had also begun to change how they shopped.

Thirty percent of consumers reported going to physical stores less, and 19 percent reported that they shopped online and via mobile devices much more. There was an interesting paradox with respect to their grocery store behaviors: More consumers reported a decline in curbside pickup (19 percent) than those who reported an increase (16 percent). Only 5 percent of all consumers reported going to the grocery store more often that week — a decision that many likely lived to regret when they found themselves standing in five-hour lines at those stores the following week.