

COVID-19 GENERATION: REVISITING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CONSUMER BEHAVIORAL SHIFTS TO BE CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cheryl L. Buff, Siena College, Loudonville, New York, U.S.A.
Russell F. Zwanka, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, U.S.A.

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ABSTRACT

As the pandemic of 2020 was unfolding, the pandemic was just beginning to shape our lives, and the full extent of mandates, masking, social distancing, and chaos was seen as a response to an unknown. The conceptual framework predicted consumer behavior changes based upon trends and results we were already seeing take hold. Plus, the paper endeavored to link cataclysmic events to where each person experiencing the event was in terms of lifestage and belief formation. The paper coined the term “COVID Generation”, suggesting major events had stronger connections to our consumer behavior than the more widely used generational groupings (Baby Boomers, Millennials, etc.). In many cases, the predictions came true, as evidenced by the increase in online ordering, entertainment, and work from home and hybrid workplaces (probably the most drastic change to come from the pandemic). In other cases, the predictions did not hold true, namely in the shift away from restaurants, social safety nets, and long-term spiritual beliefs.

The pandemic served as a real-life test on generational and major events groupings of people into consumer behavior “buckets”. The pandemic accelerated many trends that were already happening, solidified downward trends that were already in motion, and ushered in a new era of work from home/hybrid workplaces, a gig economy (where experiences weigh heavier than long-term locked in careers), and a desire to use technology to improve our lives. This revisiting of the conceptual framework analyzes the predictions three years after the original paper was written.

Keywords: COVID-19, generational cohort, consumer behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2020, as COVID-19 was ratcheting up in the US, we began researching the impact that major events have on consumer behavior. In our original paper, eschewing the branding of generational cohorts by their birth segments (Baby Boomers, Millennials, Centennials, etc.), we focused upon major historical milestones (JFK assassination, Vietnam War, Iran Hostage Crisis, Terrorism, 2008 worldwide economic contraction) and how those milestones had more effect upon future behavior than simply being born during a certain segment of years and labeling entire cohorts in that manner. We suggested the long-term behavioral shifts we could see from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and the resulting shifts in consumer behavior.

Specifically, we reviewed the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 on global consumer traits, buying patterns, global interconnectedness and psychographic behavior, and other marketing activities. In our conceptual framework, we proposed changes that would be seen as the public re-emerges from quarantine into a post-pandemic existence. Those changes are related to nationalism, stock up mentality and online ordering, return to experience and hedonism, work from home and worker status, online transactions previously not available, shift to cooking at home and away from sit-down restaurants, environmental stewardship, social safety net, psychographic shifts, and greater good vs. individual liberties.

The current research returns to the proposed framework to assess where we currently stand “post-COVID”. What is notable for many of the constructs in the conceptual model, is both changed and evolving behaviors as COVID-19 persisted. Consumer behavior has been, and continues to be, impacted by the COVID-19