

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: THE BOOM TIME

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 crisis has given a formidable challenge to governments across the globe to keep their people pandemic free and at the same time ensure their livelihood safeguarded. However, many small and tiny business men have shut their business for want of customers who have been locked down. Interestingly, business analysts have found a pattern on the impact of the infectious virus on the existing businesses. They find all businesses hit by Covid-19 have one factor in common i.e the proximate businesses wherein people come nearer like, school education, restaurants, real estate services, travel and hospitality and so on. There are other businesses where the final product is consumed singularly without other's physical presence like, on line education, digital payments, video conferencing and ecommerce. In addition to these singular businesses there is one more business category which has seen exemplary boom – the health care products sector and also the innumerable start-ups which rely on apps and people's immobility. The present article deliberates on the boom in the health care products such as hand sanitizers and facemasks and the innovative start-ups of the pandemic period.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19, proximate business, singular businesses, ecommerce, innovative start-ups, boom

1. INTRODUCTION

Way back in early 2000s, our former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam had a bright and impressive vision of 'India 2020' towards which he motivated the young Indians to strive. We have seen the times of jubilance at the success of Chandrayaan 1 and 2, glories like Wimbledon Cup and Olympic Gold that men in power and on the road alike rejoiced. But now the scenario is completely changed. The Covid-19 Pandemic times is difficult in terms of dislocation of labourers and their disabled livelihoods. For many the lockdown is stressful as they visualise the pandemic as a destroyer of hopes with no scope for near future recovery. Never the less, the current study entails interviews and other newspaper reports to analyse the positive impact of COVID-19 in the business environment in the Indian subcontinent. It has a special message to those who feel scared about the future business scenario. For them, the entrepreneurs with their risk taking and resilient attitude, innovative spirits and organising ability remain a beacon in the pandemic darkness.

1.1. Entrepreneurs and their attitude

An entrepreneur is someone who initiates and actively operates an entrepreneurial venture. The Covid-19 pandemic has synthesised and synchronised the available definitions of an entrepreneur in all possible forms. Prof. F. Drucker says, "An entrepreneur is one, who always searches for change, responds to it and exploits it as an opportunity. Innovation is the basic tool of entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or service". The given statement informs that an entrepreneur has three indispensable elements namely, risk-bearing, organising and innovating. F. H. Knight described that entrepreneurs are a specialised group of persons who bear risk and deal with uncertainty. He adds that uncertainties in business can be minimised by using the technique of consolidation and thereby profit can be increased. An entrepreneur can be an inventor and innovator. An innovator is an enterprising person. He applies inventions to make new combinations and thus manufactures new goods for better profits. [1] The novel corona virus has shown innovative entrepreneurs against the backdrop of confusion and calamity. They have thought about businesses which were never ever thought about.

2. COVID-19 AND THRIVING BUSINESSES

The COVID-19 crisis has given a formidable challenge to governments across the globe to keep their people pandemic free and at the same time ensure their livelihood safeguarded. However, many small and tiny business men have shut their business for want of customers who have been locked down. Until the novel Coronavirus started its spread across the globe, the year 2020 appeared to be a year of promise for the plastic use protesters. But it is otherwise, because we reconsider plastic ban for food and personal hygiene. Interestingly, business analysts have found a pattern on the impact of the infectious virus on the existing businesses. They find all businesses hit by Covid-19 have one factor in common i.e the proximate businesses wherein people come nearer- school education, restaurants, real estate services, travel and hospitality and so on. There are other businesses where the final product is consumed singularly without other's physical presence like on line education, digital payments video conferencing and ecommerce. In addition to these singular businesses there is one more business category which has seen exemplary boom – the health care products sector and also the innumerable start-ups which rely on apps and people's immobility. The present article deliberates on the boom in the sales of health care products such as hand sanitizers and facemasks and the innovative start-ups of the pandemic period.

2.1. Hand Sanitizers and Liquid Soaps

World Health Organization (WHO) has advised the world citizens to protect themselves and others against COVID-19, by cleaning their hands frequently and thoroughly. It also advocates the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer as it decreases the count of infectious agents on the hand with all most 99.9% of germs killing efficacy or washing hands with soap and water. Consistent with other reports that have tested hand hygiene products against a variety of microorganisms it has been found that a simple water rinse or use of an antibacterial liquid soap can reduce contamination effectively on our hands. Sanitizing experts advise that hand sanitizer should be used before preparing food, treating wounds; before inserting or removing the contact lenses from the eye; after using toilet, changing a diaper; after handling garbage; to keep away from micro-organism as well as to be resistant to bacterial flora.



Figure 1 Hand Sanitizer and Medical Face Mask

The COVID-19 impact has resulted in demand for hand sanitizers up 400%. FMCG companies, which manufacture hand sanitizers and liquid soaps, have increased their production to make the most of the situation of Coronavirus spread. "We have ramped up production of 'Protekt' handwash and sanitizers in our units as well as through our vendor partner units," said Sunil Kataria, chief executive officer, India and SAARC, Godrej Consumer Products. Companies such as Dabur and Hindustan Unilever and Himalaya Drug have also decided to double their production of hygiene products. Himalaya Drug has already ramped up their production to match with the country-wide demand for products used as precautionary measures. These companies are also stepping up efforts online to run awareness campaigns over the Corona-virus outbreak. While Hindustan Unilever has already advertised in newspapers about its Lifebuoy soaps, handwash and hand sanitizer and published a precautionary advertisement amid the onset of COVID-19 crisis, other companies also follow suit.

However, customers are complaining that these hygiene products are not available in the market despite their claims about production boost. The demand has gone up by 400 per cent; it is selling like a hot cake. Nine out of 10 customers ask for hand sanitizers and liquid soaps. People are asking for these products in bulk but they are not given more than two bottles so that others may also get them claimed a pharmacist in Delhi reported when the corona spread was at its peak. However, Sanitizers can't keep flu viruses away as they have antibacterial properties that kill bacteria but not viruses; the bacteria that survive tend to

develop a form of immunity against the particular anti-bacterial gel. Some experts state that the more we grow in a sterile environment, the more allergies we may develop in the near future. Doctors observe that exposure to different types of bacteria, especially early in life, helps kids' immune systems develop.

2.2.Face Masks

Various types of face masks available to the general public, are worn for protection against inhalation of dust, pollutants, allergens, and pathogenic organisms. Recent news stories have illustrated the widespread use of face masks for protection against Swine flu (H1N1), Severe Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (SARS), Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus outbreaks in Asia, and dust from the collapse of the World Trade Centre. However, the level of protection provided by face masks is still fully not known. A face mask may help reduce the spread of infection in the community by minimising the excretion of respiratory droplets from infected individuals who may not even know they are infected and before they develop any symptoms. In this respect, wearing mask by asymptomatic persons can be taken as an extension of the current practice of using face mask by symptomatic individuals.

For ordinary citizens, whose functions are normal chores like shopping and going to office non-medical masks are more than enough. The criteria for a non-medical mask is that whatever material a face mask is made from, it should fit well and cover the nose and mouth that the wearer's ability to breathe is curtailed. Face masks should be washed routinely with soap and water or laundry detergent to prevent contamination. Wearing a mask in public should always be accompanied by remaining at least 6 feet away from others and practicing good hand hygiene. Before wearing and after removing the mask one needs to wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer).

While social distancing and good hand hygiene are the most important methods to prevent virus transmission, new guidelines state that healthy individuals can consider wearing masks in public settings, particularly when physical distancing is difficult as in grocery stores or pharmacies.Till recently nobody knew that the masks will become a regular accessory like handkerchief when one steps out of the house. Being a preventive measure aside, the masks also remind the other public to continue practicing physical distancing. This can make masks, symbols of altruism and solidarity. In Hong Kong, for example, a community-driven focus on epidemic prevention started in the early days of Covid-19, and included community activists acquiring and distributing masks especially to those without resources and the elderly, even before it was officially declared a pandemic or even before the government ordered wearing masks in public compulsory. It is widely believed Hong Kong has not only a relatively contained epidemic compared with many other countries, but a significant reduction in influenza cases as well which their health authorities attribute, among other factors, to the near universal mask wearing and strong norms around it.It is needless to say a number of countries have distributed surgical masks or cloth masks to their entire populations free of cost.

Most cities in India, including its capital Delhi are running out of protective masks and hand sanitizers after the government has declared them as essential commodity, mainly due to hoarding by people as well as shopkeepers.Entrepreneurs have used this demand and supply principle in producing face masks. The innovative entrepreneurs look at this opportunity for making face masks in the times of pandemic, as a new commodity and enlightened public as a new market or to reorganise their enterprise. They are competitive and possess inventiveness which enable them to identify the product and an appropriate market for it. These innovative entrepreneurs keenly watch the instructions from the governments and health authorities who provide clear guidelines for the production, use and sanitization or re-use of face masks.

Most of the successful marketing strategies consider the product life cycle before they price the product. Each product has a certain length of survival time. There are six different stages namely, introduction, growth, maturity, saturation, decline, and abandonment. The product life cycle is an important concept in modern marketing. It enables the management to understand what typically happens at different stages in a product life. More importantly, the understanding helps to equalise the profit or return and different price policies can be formulated for different products passing through different stages. The product life cycle analysis finds the demand for masks will be ever increasing even after the virus spread stops which of course is not visualised in the near future.

2.2.1. Transparent face masks for persons with disabilities

Face mask, as a profitable product derives its merit from the analysis that the market demand for it is high.Face masks are brought under essential commodity blanket and are also

licensed to be produced by industries of different sectors. Under tiny sector the face masks are manufactured by Self-help women's groups under different panchayats. Government organisations like Khadi-kraft are involved in the marketing of masks.



Figure 2 Transparent face masks

The Kerala State Commissionerate for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities has launched transparent face masks to ensure that persons who are hearing impaired and have speech difficulties are able to communicate without any barriers. A total of 81,000 masks are to be distributed as a part of a pilot project. Johny Tom Varghese, Director for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities said that the Social Welfare Department had been inspired to produce these masks in the State because of their popularity among hearing impaired [2].

There are many more innovative entrepreneurs who have risked their fortune in masks and earned a treasure. We salute them because, generating ideas is easy but implementing them in a viable and sustainable business mode is difficult, and that is done by them. Gender differences as evident in innumerable fields of human activities is also obvious in the business and entrepreneurship circles. But many women have proved they are not inferior to men in strategic innovation, and entrepreneurial mindset. One such instance is how Shanida, a small-time entrepreneur was struck with the idea of producing fancy face masks after she came to know about their shortage through media.

2.2.2. Designer Face Masks

A young woman entrepreneur Shanida had to close down 'Trendzsport', her sportswear production unit-cum-shop at Kavumannam near Kalpetta—when her workers, most of whom hail from Tamil Nadu, had left for their homes even prior to the nationwide lockdown announced on March 25. She came to know about the demand for face masks through media.



Figure 3 The Printed Face Masks

She decided to utilise her production unit to make masks when her clients in Tamil Nadu also enquired whether she could supply masks in bulk. The entrepreneur says it was her husband, who gave her the idea of manufacturing designer and custom-printed masks. Besides their trendy look, the masks are easy to be looped around the ears with the stretchable band which gives wearers more comfort. Moreover, the colour and comfort virtually light up the mood of people, that they get a feel of wearing a facial accessory rather than as an imposed requirement. Since, the masks are made of a blend of polyester and cotton material, which is used to make sportswear, they are lighter, softer and durable than the usual cotton masks. The masks, sold at a price of Rs 10/- for the ordinary and Rs. 15 for the custom-printed, have good demand during and post COVID-19 days [2].

2.2.3. Three-Ply Surgical Masks

Suhani Mohan, a former investment banker at Deutsche Bank and an IIT-Bombay graduate co-founded the social venture 'Saral Designs' with IIT-Madras graduate Kartik Mehta in June 2015 to ensure women in lower-income families have access to affordable

sanitary napkins. The duo developed in-house automatic and compact machine to manufacture low-cost sanitary napkins and could launch the product in just six months. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the start-up repurposed its sanitary napkin-making machine to manufacture three-ply surgical masks. They worked from the Mahindra unit in Kandivali in Maharashtra and successfully distributed more than a million masks across hospitals in Mumbai. Priced between Rs 4 and Rs 10, the start-up received a grant of Rs 40 lakh to increase production and distribute another million masks. [3]

2.2.4. Customizable Face Masks

Murali, a photographer in Coimbatore was into a novel idea of designing customizable face masks for people amid COVID-19 pandemic since he could not find business opportunity as the gatherings were banned and his photo studio was also closed. With the lower half of the wearer's face printed on the mask, his idea of customizable face masks seems to have evoked a positive response from the public. There is a huge demand, particularly in school-going children. Many students go to school by private vehicles and vans. With an ordinary face masks, the drivers may not be able to recognize the children who are boarding the van. But with the image of the lower half of their face on the masks, along with their name and the name of their school, the drivers will be able to easily identify the little masters. Murali's innovative idea seems to have gathered several positive reactions and he feels if his skills could be used to benefit people while keeping them safe, it is a "win-win situation"[4].

2.2.5. Training for producing Breathable Face mask

Face masks designing, stitching and marketing apart, creating YouTube channels for teaching face mask stitching and face masks without stitching also offers a viable business option for young and enterprising men and women. The YouTube channels which show the art of stitching a breathable face mask/ designer face mask, with their step by step instructions and transcriptions on the screen are ready reckoning and source of income for many; both the YouTube and the channel partner earn money for the number of times the video is viewed [5].

2.2.6. Filtration Efficiency Vs. Mask Fabrics

There is limited knowledge available on the performance of various commonly available fabrics used in cloth masks. Importantly, there is a need to evaluate filtration efficiencies as a function of aerosol particulate sizes in the 10 nm to 10 μm range, which is particularly relevant for respiratory virus transmission. And hence,[6] a study was made to evaluate filtration efficiencies of several common fabrics including cotton, silk, chiffon, flannel, various synthetics, and their combinations. Although the filtration efficiencies for various fabrics when a single layer was used ranged from 5 to 80% and 5 to 95% for particle sizes of <300 nm and >300 nm, respectively, the efficiencies improved when multiple layers were used and when using a specific combination of different fabrics. Filtration efficiencies of the hybrids (such as cotton–silk, cotton–chiffon, cotton–flannel) was >80% (for particles <300 nm) and >90% (for particles >300 nm). The researchers speculate that the enhanced performance of the hybrids is likely due to the combined effect of mechanical and electrostatic-based filtration. Cotton, the most widely used material for cloth masks performs better at higher weave densities (i.e., thread count) and can make a significant difference in filtration efficiencies. The study also implies that gaps (as caused by an improper fit of the mask) can result in over a 60% decrease in the filtration efficiency, implying the need for future cloth mask design studies to take into account issues of "fit" and leakage, while allowing the exhaled air to vent efficiently. Overall, the combinations of various commonly available fabrics used in cloth masks can potentially provide significant protection against the transmission of aerosol particles.

2.2.7. The Trend and Govt. Guidelines

It has also become a trend with men and women to use washable face masks matching the colour of the dress they are wearing. It is a common sight now a days, using matching masks. Face masks are not well tolerated by certain population groups (e.g. children) or by persons with chronic respiratory disease. There is only limited indirect evidence that non-medical face masks are effective as a means of source control. Non-medical face masks and other face covers made of textiles have the advantage that they can be produced easily; they are washable and reusable. There are no established standards for non-medical face masks used as a means of source control or personal protection.

In such a context, it is important and imperative for health authorities to provide clear guide lines for the production, use and sanitization or re-use of face masks, and consider their distribution as shortages allow. A number of countries have distributed surgical masks (South Korea, Taiwan) from the start of the virus spread, while Japan and Singapore decided late to distribute cloth masks to their whole population. Clear and implementable guidelines can help

increase compliance in the manufacture of masks and sanitizers, and bring communities closer to the goal of reducing and ultimately stopping the spread of COVID-19.

2.3. The Supply Chain Companies and Alternative Ideas

For instance, analytics companies are now mining alternative data such as traffic jams, food orders etc. to track Covid-19 shock. This trend is only expected to pick-up. Supply chain resilience is key. While localisation is a trend, individual companies will want to ensure their supply chains are resilient to remain competitive. Risks to supply chains are numerous and continuously evolving. Hence, it is imperative that resilience capabilities are developed in order to respond to repercussions of unexpected events and either quickly return to original state of business or move to a new and better state after being affected by the risk and continue business operations as efficiently as possible.

2.4. Start-Ups - Innovative Products and Services

Start-ups expect to benefit from innovative products in a post-pandemic world. With social distancing and personal hygiene becoming the new normal, the new-age companies are coming up with solutions, keeping in view, the needs of customers in this pandemic times.

2.4.1. SWIGGY

Swiggy, the online food delivery start-up was originally involved in delivering food items; of late, it has shifted to delivering essentials, pickup and drop service for, food, meat and chicken within the cities.

2.4.2. DUNZO

Originally founded in July 2014, the Online Product delivery Start up takes up instructions from the customers to take the products from specific shops and deliver them at their place for a nominal delivery charge. In May 2020, Dunzo partnered with FMCG major PepsiCo to deliver its snacks brands such as Lay's and Kurkure to customers' doorsteps in Bengaluru amid the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic in India in keeping with Pepsico's 'Direct-to-Customer' initiative. It has also partnered with digital payments app Google Pay to provide services such as grocery and medicine delivery, bike pool, pickup-and-drop facilities among others [7;8;9]

2.4.3. DINGG

Pune-based start-up DINGG has come up with a queue and booking management platform, which has become an instant hit among customers. During and post the lockdown, the start-up has visualised a significant surge in the customers whose needs may be anything like book an appointment at a hospital, salon or even in a wine shop. DINGG provides market place for customers to book an appointment at these service providers. It uses wait time prediction engine that effectively helps to reduce customer-waiting period and manage the flow of customers. Due to the social distancing norm, people and even vendors struggle to deal with such situations. The desirous customers can book appointments through online/App, SMS or a missed call and it reduces their waiting time, considerably. Further, clinics, private hospital, spas, boutique are provided with Dingg's customized services with queue management and token system to manage their customers. The start-up is doing business in over eight cities in India thatit has been shortlisted for the H56-crore 'Cawach' programme, launched by the Centre, to identify and support start-ups tackling covid-19 challenges. The flourishing start-up has plans for expansion also [10].

2.4.4. PARK+

Similarly, Park+ is a start-up offers an app-based platform with cloud-based automated parking systems for establishments and malls in big cities that their customers drift away from them for want of parking facility for their vehicles. It provides a unique real-time experience in parking discovery, booking, payment, and tracking. [11]

2.4.5. STAQU

Gurgaon-based start-up, Staqu, has been facilitating Covid-19 response, using artificial intelligence in businesses. The brand has leveraged its video analytics platform by providing businesses with refined and enhanced platforms for large scale analytics, systematic data extraction and processing across all domains. This amalgamates textual and image data and results in the creation of heterogeneous neural network models. The company says that utilising their AI prowess, they have developed a product, JARVIS that automates the whole process of monitoring the workplaces and ensuring that everybody is following these guidelines to minimise the spread of infections. This product utilises, existing CCTV cameras and gives real-time alerts in case a person inside the premises is violating any of the norms and that it doesn't require any human interaction. It is a good news that JARVIS is used to monitor CCTVs in Uttar Pradesh Prisons. [12; 13]

2.4.6. MAGNETO CLEANTECH

Magneto Cleantech has also launched an air filtration that comes with filterless magnetic air purification and ultraviolet technologies that decontaminate the indoor air, by killing over 90 per cent of viruses. The COVID-19 pandemic offers wide scope for air cleaning services in the house holds and corporate and business establishments [14].

2.4.7. DEALSHARE

The e-commerce company is a Jaipur based start-up which is targeting middle and lower middle-class families falling under the Rs.25,000- Rs. 50,000 monthly salary bracket, who mostly go to the neighbourhood small shops. It promotes local manufacturers providing quality products and ensures the same are available at affordable prices for the customers. Besides groceries, the company recently added electronics, stationery and personal care products in its portfolio. It has tied up with about 300 and odd local producers for procurement and has planned to pull in nearly 1,000 manufactures or business houses with plans to function in 100 more cities in India by December this year [15].

3. CONCLUSION

Our late President, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's vision of 'India 2020' stands shattered and fragmented not by our inability to stand together and work together but by an invisible virus called COVID -19. If we go by the industry reports, the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) has infected millions of people around the world and has made a deadly impact on humanity, lifestyles, businesses, education, entertainment, aviation and tourism and lastly and more poignantly the healthcare and the welfare of the global economy. The global economy experts feel that once the pandemic is controlled, the shape and speed of the recovery in the U.S. and China will determine the traction of global economy recovery. The prediction is, India will recover more softly and faster than many other advanced countries [16].

While the Indian government is focused on guarding the population from health hazards and on providing relief, especially to the poor, it needs to think about the health of the economy, the viability of businesses, and the livelihoods of people. Apart from providing strong safety nets for the vulnerable, a focus on ensuring job continuity and job creation will be imperative. The government also needs to mobilise resources to stimulate the economy for pushed up demand and employment. In sum, this crisis is a story with an uncertain ending. However, what is clear is, Covid-19 has introduced new challenges to the business environment which call for a measured, practical and informed approach from political and business leaders. We also need to realise that Covid-19 is likely to lead to a new normal – being aware of and preparing for these shifts will help businesses and economies navigate in the post Covid-19 world [16].

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