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### Human Possibilities in Bridging to the Prevalent Market Dynamics of the New Normal

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#### **Abstract**

Although unwelcome, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have and will become a core predictor of marketplace dynamics and consumer behavior. But with the prevailing coronavirus preventive measures like lockdowns, travel restrictions, movement controls, and social distancing among others are all new to humanity. In fact, the pandemic and its propagated preventive measures have culminated in market scarcities, trade restrictions, joblessness, reduced consumer purchasing power, and unprecedented price escalations. To adapt to the above precarious environment of the new normal, consumers should carryout significant information search to make rational choices so as to spend wisely during the spiraling global price indices. Humanity ought to willingly lessen on their demand for luxuries, social events, along with holiday travels or adopt e-tourism fantasies for now. It's additionally suggested that payroll tax cuts and increase government spending on health strategies will reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and boost citizens' demand for the much-needed health insurance products in the new normal. Lastly, provision of reliable internet infrastructure will enhance online exchange of value to curb scarcity tendencies of the new era.

**Keywords**: Covid-19, Purchase Decisions, Soaring Prices, Demand for Luxuries, Health Insurance.

#### Introduction

Although still counting, over 8.6 million cases and 450,000 deaths globally have been attached to the COVID-19 pandemic (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020; Nicola et al. 2020). To curb this viral spread, economies have had to painfully embrace lockdown measures (Goolsbee & Syverson, 2020; Bonaccorsi et al., 2020), travel restrictions (Ozili & Arun, 2020), movement controls (Karim, Haque, Anis & Ulfy, 2020), social distancing, self-isolation (Nicola et al., 2020), and mass quarantine strategies (Sohrabi et al., 2020). Commonly, this has ignited fears of an economic crisis and/or recession (Nicola et al., 2020). That's why governments and international agencies are offering financial bailouts to salvage production levels and keep companies afloat - at least for now (Elenev, Landvoigt & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2020; Meier & Smith, 2020). Such strategies have been almost a 'rule of thumb' for economies to survive in current challenging times (Mahajan, 2020), commonly dubbed as the "new normal" in recognition of efforts to transition to unprecedented ways (Buheji, Ahmed & Jahrami, 2020). After all, the phrase "new normal" has gained popularity after the COVID-19 pandemic,

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although it has been present as was applied to explain the changing food expenditure patterns and structure of food retailing in the US (Beatty & Senauer, 2013). Furthermore, after the Great Recession, many Americans had to re-evaluate their expensive consumption lifestyles to adopt to the shrinking economy by spending less, saving more, and living simplified lives (Etzioni, 2011). Irrespective of the above, scholars seem to be forgetting that coronavirus is forcing consumers to be rational in their purchase decisions. There is need to analyze how consumer choices are tilting towards price sensitivity, demand for increased product bundle of benefits, reduction in luxurious consumption, hyped demand for basic necessities, and unguaranteed fate of health insurance among others.

#### **Problem Statement**

Given the hypersonic speed that the COVID-19 pandemic has gathered, it's logical to assert that living human is a candidate to its direct or indirect effects (Yadav, Maheshwari & Chandra, 2020). The pandemic has made espouse stringent measures like lockdowns, social distancing, movement controls, and mandatory quarantine periods among others to curtail its spread as we dream of its vaccine in an unpredictable future (Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Nicola et al. 2020; Karim et al., 2020). Resultantly, considerable efforts have been directed towards curbing its spread and hence giving minimal thought to its marketplace detriment which casts doubt on how will consumers/mankind survive in new normal where punctuated by joblessness unprecedented scarcity and soaring prices of basic necessities, alongside the under-performance of the would-be mitigating factor of health insurance (Coibion, Gorodnichenko & Weber, 2020; Gostin, Friedman & Wetter, 2020; Iyanda et al., 2020). This created need to explore avenues that could be embraced to help mankind to adapt to the prevailing marketplace difficulties and act as a bridge to the new normal. This was because studies have observed that humanity was caught unaware and unprepared (Vanderpuye, Elhassan & Simonds, 2020).

#### **Main Study Objective**

To explore human possibilities in bridging to the prevailing market dynamics of the new normal.

#### **Specific Study Objectives**

- a) To examine how mankind will adopt to making purchase decisions (choices) under scarcity.
- b) To examine how mankind will deal with soaring prices of basic necessities.
- c) To examine how humanity will adapt to the unguaranteed fate of health insurance products.
- d) To examine how humanity will adjust to the probable fall in demand for luxuries.

#### **Literature Review**

Making choices under scarcity; since the industrial revolution (Xu, David & Kim, 2018; Mokyr, 2018), regional integrations and formation of economic blocks have empowered production and free movement of products to all corners of the world (Bouët, Cosnard & Laborde, 2017; Nshimbi & Moyo, 2020). This has led to increase in new product offerings on the market annually. Indeed, almost every product has a substitute or a direct competitor (Tziva, Negro, Kalfagianni & Hekkert, 2020). Complimentary to this, although there is buzzing conclusion that the internet has enabled consumption (Kumar, Varma, Sangvikar & Pawar, 2020; Zhu et

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al., 2020), there is also sufficient evidence that humanity – especially in developing or less-developed nations since they are constrained by poor connections and internet infrastructure (Kumar, Nim & Agarwal, 2020; Adzovie & Jibril, 2020). However, it was rightly observed that there were signs of unusual online purchasing behavior in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of information overload (Laato, Islam, Farooq & Dhir, 2020). This might be partly because there are warnings that online purchase might becoming a favorite choice in the new normal age (Sunarno, 2020).

With such enablers in the market, one would be tempted to reason that there will plenty of products on the market at all times. However, Nishimura (2020) opined that we need to strategize towards the new normal and new economy to curb effects like scarcity. For example, the consumers have been compelled to buy rationed health and medical products (Emanuel et al., 2020) and severe scarcity of health-related products is predicted in lowerincome countries compared to wealthier states in the new normal (Gostin et al., 2020). Further still, scarcity of crucial supplies/products in the new normal times will catalyzed export restrictions which will jeopardize poor countries' access to such supplies (Bown, 2020). For example, food scarcity is anticipated due to food protectionism (Espitia, Rocha & Ruta, 2020). Given that Russia, United States, the European Union, Ukraine, and Canada account for 75% of all global wheat exports in 2019-20 (Glauber, Laborde, Martin & Vos, 2020), what will happen globally to consumers of wheat if the above nations prioritize their citizens by restricting exports to suit the demands of the new normal? This will raise call for similar actions worldwide which might cause dire scarcity and food insecurity (Laborde, Martin, Swinnen & Vos, 2020). Although optimists may dislike such thoughts, Serbia for example has already restricted exports of cooking oil as a response to the effects of COVID-19 (Kerr, 2020) while about 75 nations have passed laws to restrict exports of medical medicines and supplies to adjust to the new normal (Evenett & Winters, 2020).

**Soaring of prices of basic necessities:** consumers were used to low prices for basic necessities like food and hence giving rise names like fast-moving-consumer-goods (Pourhejazy, Sarkis & Zhu, 2019), and convenience goods (Marshall, 2019) among other illustrations of choices that didn't require a lot price-related thinking before a purchase was made. The new normal has changed such simplicity in consumer perceptions after coronavirus out-break. In fact, the coronavirus pandemic scenario has dictated the fall in global gross domestic product by 2% where it stands at 2.5% in developing countries and at 1.8% in industrial nations (Maliszewska, Mattoo & Van Der Mensbrugghe, 2020). For example, it's estimated that the COVID-19 effects will lower China's agricultural output rate by 0.4%-2.0% in 2020 (Zhang, Wang, Yuan, Liu & Gong, 2020). Furthermore, as nations have imposed severe lockdowns to curtail the spread of COVID-19, such strategies have caused complexity in global supply chains which have magnified economic losses beyond the direct effects of COVID-19 (Guan et al., 2020). Relatedly, vegetable consumption declined by nearly 30% among Indian households and yet vegetables were also the single affordable food group where household consumption increased by 15% (Harris, Depenbusch, Pal, Nair & Ramasamy, 2020). Such falling consumption levels will attract reduction in production sooner or later. In that regard, approximately 43% of businesses are closed momentarily with approximately 40% employee layoffs (Bartik et al., 2020) in addition to being hard on African-American businesses where they witnessed a 41% drop in business activity in United States (Fairlie, 2020).

With such extraordinary fall in production, it's only logical to envisage resultant unprecedented escalations in prices. Indeed, significant correlations were predicted between

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increasing food prices and stay-at-home restrictions as demanded by the new normal where significant rise in prices are being evidenced in meat, fish and seafood, and vegetables (Akter, 2020). This has been accompanied by upsurge in the prices of milk, eggs, oils, bread, cereals, and fruits (Akter, 2020). Similarly, medical supplies have witnessed soaring prices as well (Bown, 2020). In fact, despite presence of government subsidies to mitigate the economic effects of COVID-19, this has not quenched firm exit in Japan since many have closed while those that have remained have continuously increased prices to meet costly business environment of the new normal (Miyakawa, Oikawa & Ueda, 2020). But are consumers be ready to live such expensive lives given the prevailing job losses and increase dependency ratios (Montenovo et al., 2020; Coibion, Gorodnichenko & Weber, 2020; Blustein et al., 2020)?

Unguaranteed fate of health insurance products; although it is undeniable that COVID-19 has had a detrimental effects on the health care systems globally (Iyengar, Mabrouk, Jain, Venkatesan & Vaishya, 2020) and hence one would predict increase in health insurance demand to reduce the uncertain health effects of the pandemic. But then again, it's prudent to note that job losses will make countless employees and their dependents to correspondingly surrender their employer-sponsored health insurance coverage (Garrett & Gangopadhyaya, 2020). Similarly, this kind of joblessness was predicted to increase lack of insurance rates in countries like USA (van Dorn, Cooney & Sabin, 2020; Millett et al., 2020). However, negative trend is contradicted through estimates made by Banthin, Blumberg, Simpson, Buettgens and Wang (2020) who opined that losses of employer-based health insurance coverage will be lower than what some experts predict since such a scenario is happening among workers who never had access to such employer-based privilege before the pandemic and that the COVID-19 recession is greatly affecting people with less-education and income levels in America. The predictions of Banthin et al. (2020) could be true for in the America context since it tallies with predictions that Covid-19 was to affect vulnerable Black American communities more (Poteat, Millett, Nelson & Beyrer, 2020). In the era of the new normal, although cases of the COVID-19 pandemic have been sluggish crippling the world's poorest countries line in Africa, there are decent reasons to fear that the magnitudes on the continent might be too severe than elsewhere (Martinez-Alvarez et al., 2020). This prediction has heavily reliant on the weaknesses in healthcare systems and poor economies (Blanton et al., 2020). This is worsened by the evidence that even the prevailing state-funded health insurance schemes are failing to the needed provide financial protection (Nandi & Schneider, 2020; Erlangga, Suhrcke, Ali & Bloor, 2019; Allcock, Young & Sandhu, 2019). Further, it was evidenced that, even though the national health insurance schemes gains are not equally distributed across regions (Bagnoli, 2019).

Although nations were gaining tremendous strides in depending health insurance penetration, the dynamics of the new normal after the coronavirus pandemic has seems to have halted such progress (van Dorn et al., 2020; Millett et al., 2020; Poteat et al., 2020; Blanton et al., 2020). Even though, Statesmen have adopted measures like payroll tax cuts to improve health insurance, millions have still remained uninsured (Tanne, 2020) and yet such services/products are expected to be trending in the new normal environment as a response to the hyper speed of the coronavirus pandemic in addition to the already existing health challenges. Further shocking revelations portrayed that increase in out-of-pocket expenditure increased COVID-19 spread in 175 countries (Iyanda et al., 2020) which tends to suggest that health insurance would be key to mitigate such spread as a bridge to the new normal.

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Projected fall in demand for luxuries. Initially, consumers had been taken up by luxury consumption where they paid higher prices and craved for distinction and hence one's valuation of a good would decrease with increase of buyers (Bochanczyk-Kupka, 2019). This luxurious habit has been prominently moderated by individual, psychological, cultural, and social factors (Dhaliwal, Singh & Paul, 2020) which factors unfold in form of a consumer's age and gender (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019), status, prestige, and income (Shao, Grace & Ross, 2019). However, in anticipation of possible future price discounts, exposed consumers regret as to why they purchased at full price when they find the same product going for less value they paid (Zhou, Xu & Shen, 2018). As the globe is migrating to the new normal, the lasting consequences of COVID-19 are being predicted to have drastic and unimaginable negative effects on the international travels, hospitality and tourism demand (Chang, McAleer & Ramos, 2020; Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Indeed, countries that still lag behind in technology might fail to adopt to the new normal where e-tourism will take over (Gretzel et al., 2020).

Therefore, since vacations and holidays are not necessities of life, consumers might be compelled to do without such consumption for now. This is because of the existing movement controls and mandatory quarantine being attached to entries across borders (Karim et al, 2020; Sohrabi et al., 2020). Additionally, the entertainment industry consumers will have to willingly limit or give up on their socialization habits given the prevailing social distancing and movement restrictions (Moon, 2020). Indeed, related social events like watching live football games in stadiums (Mohr et al., 2020) will be under strict social distancing to the dislike of most football fanatics/consumers although they must be compelled to oblige. Moving on in the new normal, consumers should be prepared to live with little or no visits to night clubs irrespective of their purchasing power (Kang et al., 2020). Consumers who had converted alcohol consumption from a luxury to a basic necessity have already adopted to the new normal by thinking that drinking from home is more fun than ever before (Callinan & MacLean, 2020). Surely, even if consumers would have liked to keep consuming luxuries, their purchasing power has been crippled by loss of jobs due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic (Montenovo et al., 2020).

#### Methodology

This was a literature review survey whose scope mainly concentrated on previous studies published since the outbreak of the pandemic in late 2019 to date.

#### **Results & Discussion**

After the unquestionable rage of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on all human domains that has threatened man's sustainable existence (Yadav et al., 2020) and the fact that mankind was not prepared for such magnitude and catastrophe (Vanderpuye et al., 2020). This current study has established that there is need for humanity to adapt to the contemporary circumstances availed by the new normal in order to survive the detrimental effects of the pandemic.

It has been confirmed beyond doubt that mankind has to get used to making choices under scarce supply. In fact, although factors like globalization, regional integrations, economic blocks (Moyo, 2020), and technology (Kumar et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020) had empowered production and free-flowing movement of products to all corners of the world, scarcity will still prevail. This unpleasantness will be greatly attributed to the coronavirus pandemic which has led to product rationing especially in low-income countries (Emanuel et al., 2020; Gostin

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et al., 2020), and export restrictions (Bown, 2020; Kerr, 2020; Evenett & Winters, 2020) food protectionism (Espitia et al., 2020) to curb severe food insecurity (Laborde et al., 2020). However, not all hope is lost for consumers since online purchases behavior has seen tremendous boost since the pandemic (Sunarno, 2020; Laato et al., 2020). Therefore, in adapting to online purchases, consumers should be cautious of information overload (Laato et al., 2020) and ensure to have good internet connections and infrastructure especially in less-developed nations (Kumar et al., 2020; Adzovie & Jibril, 2020).

Furthermore, it has been revealed that there will be a prolonged and sustained upsurge in prices of products in the new normal. This is because the coronavirus out-break has culminated into fall in global gross domestic product across nations (Maliszewska et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020) and fact that nations have responded by imposing severe mechanisms like lockdowns which have caused economic losses and complicated global supply chains (Guan et al., 2020). Such measures have catalyzed decline in production (Harris et al., 2020) and closure or drop in business activity (Bartik et al., 2020; Fairlie, 2020). Indeed, fall in production will trigger significant escalations in prices for example meat, fish and seafood, vegetables, milk, eggs, oils, bread, cereals, and fruits (Akter, 2020). This trend will not spare medical supplies (Bown, 2020). Price accelerations in the new normal will not be easily quenched by government subsidies (Miyakawa et al., 2020). Given the accompanying unprecedented job losses and increase dependency ratios (Montenovo et al., 2020; Coibion et al., 2020; Blustein et al., 2020), consumers need to carryout considerable information search to sanction rational choices even those of basic necessities like food (Pourhejazy et al., 2019) that had been turned into convenience goods (Marshall, 2019) to maximize utility in the new normal.

Equally important, it has been found that tougher times await health insurance products. This is irrespective of the fact that COVID-19 has had a detrimental effects on global health care systems (lyengar et al., 2020). Such assertions are based on the fact that job losses will make countless employees and their dependents to resultantly surrender their employer-sponsored health insurance coverage (Garrett & Gangopadhyaya, 2020; van Dorn et al., 2020; Millett et al., 2020). Indeed, health insurance products will remain low in the already vulnerable groups like Black American communities with low income and education levels (Poteat et al., 2020) and in the world's poorest nations like those on the African continent (Martinez-Alvarez et al., 2020). Moreover, even the on-going state-funded health insurance schemes will continue failing to offer such financial protection (Nandi & Schneider, 2020; Erlangga et al., 2019; Allcock et al., 2019) and are not equally distributed across regions (Bagnoli, 2019). Nevertheless, adopting measures like payroll tax cuts to improve health insurance (Tanne, 2020) and increase in government funding of health will reduce out-of-pocket expenditure (Iyanda et al., 2020) which will in turn avail health insurance purchasing power to citizens to act as a bridge to the new normal.

Further still, the study predicts a drastic fall in the demand of luxury products. This revelation is premised on the prevailing lockdown measures (Bonaccorsi et al., 2020), travel restrictions (Ozili & Arun, 2020), movement controls (Karim, Haque, Anis & Ulfy, 2020), social distancing, self-isolation (Nicola et al. 2020), and mass quarantine strategies (Sohrabi et al., 2020) which will curtail consumption of travel-related products/services like holidays, vacations (Karim et al., 2020; Sohrabi et al., 2020), and tourism(Chang et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2020). In the same way, entertainments products will keep performing poorly in the near future given the social distancing, movement controls, and fall in personal incomes (Moon, 2020). This will witness decline in demand of social events like football (Mohr et al., 2020) and night clubs (Kang et al., 2020). Therefore, moving forward into the new normal, e-tourism will grow as a

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possible alternative (Gretzel et al., 2020) and hence calling on nations to enhance their technology in support. Additionally, consumers who had converted alcohol consumption from a luxury to a basic necessity will have to change their behavior to drinking from home (Callinan & MacLean, 2020).

Subsequently, although some optimistic scholars dream of stepping out of COVID-19 (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020), pessimistic ones fear that the pandemic is here to stay and thus swear that this current generation will come to relate to it in terms of 'BC' and 'AC' while referring to humanity Before Corona and After Corona (Friedman, 2020).

#### **Conclusions and Contribution towards New Knowledge**

Conclusively, the study demonstrated – like earlier studies - that humanity was not prepared for the crippling effects of coronavirus pandemic. Most importantly however, it has been revealed that there is need for mankind to bridge to the marketplace environment to survive the wrath of the new normal and the unfavorable effects of the pandemic. It's therefore apparent that provision of reliable internet connections and infrastructure by industry players would help in boosting online exchange of value to curb scarcity. Additionally, the study fronts that consumers should carryout substantial information search to sanction rational choices so as to spend wisely amidst the soaring global price indices and reduced purchasing due to fall in incomes and increase in joblessness. It's further suggested that measures like payroll tax cuts and increase government spending on health will reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and will resultantly boost citizens' health insurance purchasing power in the new normal. Furthermore, humanity ought to willingly reduce on their demand for non-essential products like luxuries and forfeit social events like football, night clubs, along with holidays and unofficial travels.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

There was no conflict of interest encountered while preparing this paper.

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