

# Ouverture de ‘Covid-19. Management Perspectives’\*

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## Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex, disruptive event with many impacts beyond those related to health, national economies and global competition.*

*While many worldwide companies were challenged to survive, the pandemic also presented many development opportunities for the long-term. The digital transformation, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, require new skills (OECD, 2020) informed by greater attention to the applied ethics of responsibility.*

*Moreover, the development of the pandemic has generated an acceleration in a process of change in consumer behavior. Many businesses around the world have become aware of having to reconsider their market relationships starting from marketing channels, the use of marketing channels, from multichannelling, to omnichannelling, to metachannelling.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Pandemic; Global Management; post-COVID Era; Marketing Channels; Consumer Metamorphosis; Global Markets

## 1. Overture

The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex, disruptive event with many impacts beyond those related to health, national economies and global competition.

People around the world have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Since 1980, the industrial production of the largest global corporations depends on network production systems with components produced in numerous countries by a complex of companies. A production system that has proved to be very vulnerable in the face of activity blockades caused by the Pandemic.

The first mechanisms of the crisis were the interruption of many productions and the downfall of consumption in the periods of the most acute spread of the epidemic (the first quarter in China and Italy, the months from March onwards in the rest of Europe and the USA).

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Coronavirus brought the world to an arrest, and as a result, for many company and industries (such as air travel, transportation, tourism, and the restaurants industry) and it is still the most difficult problem they have ever had to compete against.

In addition to COVID-19's tremendous impact on global health, it has caused a major economic shock, pushing the biggest corporations towards an outburst of the new, basic drivers of global capitalism.

While many worldwide companies were challenged to survive, the pandemic also presented many development opportunities for the long-term.

## **2. New Challenges for the Post-Covid Era**

The digital transformation requires the implementation of technological innovations – in particular the enabling business 4.0 (Brondoni & Boccardelli, 2019; Fortuna & Risso, 2019) – accompanied by a process of cultural, strategic and organizational transformation. This process involves a clear evaluation and redefinition of economic, social, temporal, cultural resources, and especially a new understanding of the value of human beings involved in business processes and organizations in general. These transformation processes, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, require new skills (OECD, 2020) informed by greater attention to the applied ethics of responsibility, putting both the person and the common good at the centre of the new social-digital conformations (Freman & Dmytriiev, 2019; Civera & Freeman, 2019). The management of these processes requires a combined and multidisciplinary approach that reflects the challenges of complexity, synergistically aggregating knowledge belonging to different scientific-disciplinary areas to address frontier issues such as: the transformation of the market, the organisation of work, the behaviour of consumers and users, as well as problems relating to the complex man-machine relationship and the social impact of new information technologies.

Top managers will have to redouble their attention to people, workflows and technological infrastructure: we cannot underestimate the power of empathic leadership in guiding employees by contributing, in a context of continuous disruption, to promote trust, welfare and sustainability.

## **3. Reshaping Marketing Channels to Pursue the Continuous Consumer Metamorphosis**

The coronavirus era has broken most of the routines that were driving companies in their relationships with the market, especially for those producing goods or providing services to consumers. Although companies are used to managing difficult situations, the sudden arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic was an unexpected and difficult challenge to face. The development of the pandemic has generated an acceleration in a process of change in consumer behavior that was already underway (Druica *et al.*, 2020). Many businesses around the world have become aware of having to reconsider their market relationships starting from marketing channels. The shift to online solutions has been much faster than expected, pushing companies to rethink their strategies as regards the way of relating to the market, both in terms of

communication and in the use of marketing channels, from multichannelling, to omnichanneling, to metachannelling (Musso & Adam, 2020).

To ensure the maintenance of control on the relationships with the final demand, and facing the risk of disintermediation in favor of the leading retailers, especially online ones, the value of brands requires to be safeguarded by defining new strategies based on some key points. The first point is the relationship with online sales. As a result of the pandemic, the global sales scenario has deeply changed and the balance has shifted from the offline presence to the online presence of businesses. This is not a temporary change, but simply the acceleration of a change that was already in progress and that was previously slowed down by the evolution of technology and, above all, by cultural resistances to change. Widespread lockdowns globally have led consumers to change their shopping habits and rely more and more on online sources. This requires that many companies will have to get used to considering online channels in a double perspective: as a tool to gain visibility and as sales channels, to be used for managing the relationship directly with the final customer or, alternatively, by using online marketplaces.

Another key point concerns the way of communicating. Traditional tools, from advertising signs to television channels, to printed media, will assume a reduced role, even if still relevant, so they cannot be abandoned despite the growing importance of online communication and social networks.

A third point is the changes in the purchasing habits of consumers. The increase in online interaction has led to a quick decrease in the passive behavior of consumers facing manufacturers marketing policies. More and more, consumers prefer to solve their problems on their own, actively searching for products or services, rather than going to the points of sale. As a matter of fact, this is an advantageous situation for both customers and businesses because the matching between supply and demand occurs more quickly and in conditions of greater information symmetry. The consequence is a growth of self-service processes entrusted to the final customer, who takes on tasks that in the past were up to the supplier.

The point considered above pushes to a final key point: customer care. Currently many companies are focused on acquiring new customers, while in the future, in front of more informed customers, which are more able to compare the characteristics of competing products, it will become increasingly important to pursue customers' loyalty by providing qualified and timely services.

Starting from the key points described above, which represent critical steps in the strategies of companies, what needs to be redefined is the role of producers in the relationship with consumers and how manufacturers can continue to preserve their identity, starting with their brands, or how much they are destined to yield to intermediaries, especially online ones, the supremacy of the relationship with the final demand. Therefore, the theme of industry-distribution relations (Brondoni & Musso, 2010) is re-proposed with new players but always with the same gap between large companies, both at the production and distribution level, and smaller companies. The latter in any case suffer from the constraint of the reduced organizational size when they have to manage relationships made more complex by the multiplication of communication and distribution channels and by the acceleration of response times to the market, since customers require accurate, qualified and above all fast services.

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