

# The Influences of COVID-19 on Korean Fashion Consumption

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## Abstract

The outbreak of corona-virus infections has not only adversely affected human health, but also disrupted all trade and economic activities. There are also similar problems with production stoppages due to global isolation and self-awareness isolation. To maintain a competitive edge, an entity should anticipate consumer behavior during this global crisis. In particular, the survey of online purchasing behavior of South Korean consumers is highly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigates how COVID-19 affects South Korean consumers by dividing them into consumption patterns, behaviors, perceived values, and purchase intentions. Furthermore, we investigate the relationship between entertainment and pleasure and normative motivation, and between the purchase intentions of South Korean consumers.

The expected results of this study may help marketers and companies in analyzing the pattern, behavior, perceived values, and intention of purchasing South Korean consumers who have changed to COVID-19. Besides, we provide e-commerce companies with recommendations on how to address consumers' purchasing motivations and strategically utilize them in South Korea.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, consumption patterns, fashion consumption patterns, consumer types, perceived product value, purchase intention

## 1. Introduction

The novel virus COVID-19, which began to spread around the world in early 2020, the first mass outbreak occurred in Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December 2019. The combination of the name and symptoms of the outbreak site was initially called "Wuhan pneumonia", however, according to data from the South Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it was officially named COVID-19. 'CO' means corona, 'VI' means a virus, 'D' means disease, and '19' means 2019 when the first outbreak was reported (COVID-19 Confirmation Status in South Korea, 2021, February 3). It refers to the respiratory syndrome caused by SARS-CoV-2 infection. As a pathogen, it is an RNA virus with a size of 27-32 kb belonging to the Coronaviridae family, and its honest name is SARS-CoV-2. Among the legal infectious diseases, the name code is U07.1, and it is the first-class infectious disease new infectious disease syndrome (COVID-19 Confirmation Status in South Korea, 2021, February 3).

To slow the spread of the virus, most countries have placed social distancing and restrictions on the daily life of individuals. There were various restrictions, ranging from the prohibition of large-scale events and the closure of public and educational institutions to temporary economic benefits. In the worst case scenario, most retailers and offline services had to close in the country where the shutdown occurred. This movement is carried out purposely for the safety of everyone. One consequence of this current pandemic refers to the deteriorating global economy that leads to the great depression. At the same time, consumers are faced with a level of economic uncertainty due to increasing unemployment rates and short-term labor (IMF, 2020). Online shopping has become the single way to satisfy consumers' consumption needs because of the closure of borders and retail stores.

E-commerce has been developed further during this epidemic, and off-line stores made great efforts to create, improve, and promote online stores. Some small businesses that did not manage web stores before closing their businesses have developed temporary solutions that sell their products to web stores, such as advertising their stuffs on SNS and providing delivery services. Others have offered discounts and launched promotional campaigns on SNS. For these efforts to be successful, it is important to investigate changes in consumers' online consumption patterns, types, perceived values, and purchase intentions during this epidemic.

Therefore, this study investigates changes in online consumption patterns, types, perceived values, and purchase intentions among the COVID-19 epidemic. We analyze how entertainment and pleasure motives and normative motives, which have been found to influence previous consumers' e-commerce purchasing behaviors, are applied in these particular situations.

## 2. COVID-19 in Korea and Abroad

The COVID-19 crisis, which seemed to end soon, is adding power to the world economy. Many things have changed and will change in the future due to Corona 19. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the highest level of "Pandemic" for COVID-19 on March 11, 2020 (Cho, 2020, March 20).

Now, the known propagation path is known to be infected by contact with droplets and COVID-19 contaminated by coughing or sneezing, touching the respiratory system and the eye area without washing hands. The incubation period is 4-7 days in the plain (COVID-19 Confirmation Status in South Korea, 2021, February 3).

### 2.1 COVID-19 in Korea

In South Korea, it was managed to some extent before February 18, 2020, but the first Korean epidemic, which began in late February 2020 due to the Shincheonji group infection, peaked in March 2020, showing the frightening contagious power of COVID-19. Since then, we wanted to enter a stable state, and in August 2020, when the National Liberation Day rally followed, the second trend of South Korea has arrived. As the winter virus has been activated and mass infections have occurred simultaneously, it has been undergoing the third pandemic period in South Korea since December 2020. The day when the daily number of confirmed cases was the highest was December 25, 2020, with 1,241 new confirmed cases a day. Although the number of confirmed people decreased somewhat through mid-January 2021, the number of confirmed people has risen to the 500 level again due to the surge in the number of confirmed people due to IM missionary work. The spread is still greater than that of the second wave in August last year, and it remains similar to that of the first wave (Yoo, 2021, January 28).

In the spread of COVID-19, the Korean government tried to prevent the spread of COVID-19, dividing social distancing by stages. Social distancing, divided into three stages, was carried out by differentiating according to the situation of coronics. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Pandemic in South Korea, it was recommended to suspend the operation of multi-use facilities and restrict personal activities such as banning private gatherings of more than five people. Research has shown how the South Korean people perceive the government's quarantine system. According to the Public Perception Survey on Social Distancing conducted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare on January 27-28, 2021, 81.3% of the respondents said, "Social distancing was effective in blocking the 3rd COVID-19 epidemic." "No" was 16.7 percent, with 81.2 percent saying they felt tired due to distance. However, there were mixed opinions on fairness in social distancing. When asked whether the distancing policy was fair to all citizens, 49.3 percent agreed and 48.3 percent disagreed (Lee, 2021, February 3).

Now, there are predictions that the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday and the opening of school in March could be a new crisis. It is time for systematic measures to prevent the fourth trend based on a precise analysis of the current distancing stage and the current status of spread.

### 2.2 COVID-19 in Abroad

On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared a pandemic of new infectious diseases. This was the third pandemic declaration worldwide since the Hong Kong flu (1968) and swine flu (2009).

As of February 3, 2021, there were 1437 million people worldwide, and 2.26 million people died. By country, the United States has the largest number of confirmed cases, and as of February 3, 2021, 27,076 million people were confirmed cumulatively, and about 457,900 people died, the largest number of deaths. More than 110,000 people are still being confirmed every day. India is the second most common victim, with a cumulative number of 11,078,000 confirmed cases and 154,600 deaths. Third, Brazil recorded 92.86 million cumulative confirmed cases and 56,200 deaths (COVID-19 Confirmation Status, 2021, February 3). India is the only Asian country in the top 10 infections in the world. It is a pandemic in the Americas and Europe and is spreading stronger and faster than China, the outbreak site. Mortality rates are also very high in most European and American countries, especially in Western European countries, where the social risk is very high. In Western Europe, the number of confirmed cases is increasing by 1 million every four days, and as of January 28, 2021, more than 30 million were confirmed. In Eastern Europe, including Russia and Poland, there are nearly 10 million cumulative confirmed cases (COVID-19 Confirmation Status, 2021, February 3; Kang, 2021, January 28). In this regard,

research by the medical community will be needed concerning the type, mutation of the virus, viral toxicity, infection route, quarantine, or government response.

### **3. Consumption Patterns Changed by COVID-19**

#### *3.1 Changed Consumption Patterns: Non-Contact*

Traditionally, spaces or places among various marketing communication means have been used as efficient communication means, and experiences have had a significant impact on consumers' final purchase decisions (Jeong-hee, 2014). However, after COVID-19, consumers became reluctant to buy face-to-face, leading to a culture of "non-face-to-face" and the experience no longer influenced consumers' final purchasing decisions. Without vaccines and treatments being developed, the only countermeasure of COVID-19 is physical and social distancing. However, the trend of the consumer in South Korea sentiment is changing significantly due to the prolonged social distancing. As consumers in South Korea prefer safe non-face-to-face consumption from COVID-19, offline distribution is gradually decreasing, while sales in the distribution and delivery industries are growing. In the first half of 2020, when the epidemic became popular, the recognition that there was no cure and a high fatality rate is causing sales slowdown for large retailers such as department stores and outlets where luxury brands are located. To cope with this, industries actively sought strategies to cope with consumer sentiment that has changed to COVID-19, especially marketing for e-commerce.

The usefulness of e-commerce during the COVID-19 epidemic is significant for two reasons. Initially, in these situations, online shopping provides the most convenient means of purchasing clothes. During the closing period, offline stores were forced to close, and distribution channels such as home shopping are widely used among consumers. Second, online shopping is useful because it reduces the risk of infection in consumers by preventing physical contact (Oh, 2020, October 15). We assert that the perception of the practicality of online shopping during the COVID-19 shutdown is positively associated with consumers' intention to attract by online purchasing behavior. MZ Generation (millennials and Z generation) are distinctly friendly with the use of electronic tools. Since using electronic tool is not uncomplicated for them, they can do online purchasing much more useful during COVID-19.

Mobile shopping in South Korea has increased noticeably during online shopping. It is estimated that mobile shopping increased by 16.6% compared to the first quarter of 2019 and 21% compared to the second quarter of 2019. Also, the proportion of mobile shopping compared to total online shopping increased from 65 percent to 67.8 percent in February after the Korona19 outbreak. Amid the growing use of mobile shopping, Live Commerce1), a new mobile-based commerce platform, has emerged, drawing attention as an alternative to COVID-19 (Oh, 2020, October 15).

However, "Alternative Consumption" that consumes overseas travel and other costs that cannot be done with Covid-19 is frequently seen in Korea, and "Revenge Spending" in which pent-up consumer sentiment erupts. Analysts say that the "Revenge Spending" phenomenon, in which the desire for suppressed consumption emerges due to the prolonged COVID-19, has been influenced by the Veblen effect), with "Flex3)" emerging as a buzzword. It means to relieve stress by boasting luxury goods and premium products online. Due to COVID-19, different consumption patterns are reflected in online consumption, and companies in various fields are putting forward services and sales strategies specialized in online shopping in line with the trend of non-face-to-face consumption. The online consumer market in South Korea is expected to grow further with the emergence of online commerce platforms that reflect consumers' media usage trends, such as Live Commerce.

#### *3.2 Changed Consumer Type: Narrative Branding*

Generations in their 20s and 30s, called millennials, play a leading role in self-compensation consumption. The characteristic of this generation is that it is self-centered and aims for a personal life for oneself rather than the eyes of others (Shin & Lee, 2018; Lee, 2018). Another generation who invests time and money for themselves is middle-aged. They are often baby boomers and OPAL (old people with active lives). They are a different generation from the middle-aged generation in the past, who sacrificed for their families and did not know how to spend money for themselves, and they have a higher desire for quality of life as well as more time and money than younger generations (Lee & Ha, 2015). Generation Z, a generation that has been growing since birth with the development of the digital age, plays a major role in consumer decision-making based on the information gained through digital media (Shin & Park, 2018, October 12).

Various consumer behaviors emerged in the next generation depending on the changed consumption pattern. With COVID-19 making individual time more precious and more than ever, more consumers prefer self-directed expressions. People who like a particular brand see various factors such as brand value, design, and image

philosophy, but loyal customers are more interested in 'narrative branding' that shows the brand's identity than in its simple appearance.

In general, it is assumed that various external or psychological factors influence purchasing decisions in such a complex environment. Previous research on customer behavior during the pandemic demonstrates this approach and shows that COVID-19 is transforming consumer analyzing and behavior. In the beginning of the pandemic, customer behavior reflected the behavior commented on earlier historical shocks and led to impulse purchase (Loxton et al., 2020). Consumers in South Korea are in two minds to purchase goods at fixed retail stores because of government regulations and fear of infection. Another study said that there was a positive relationship between self-isolation intention and abnormal purchasing behavior. According to a survey that surveyed customer behavior in South Korea before and after the COVID-19 crisis, it can be said that the epidemic affected purchasing behavior because individuals increased their online shopping use significantly. Changed consumer behavior is expected to continue to change until the end of COVID-19.

### *3.3 Changed Perceived Value*

We assert that in this special situation of COVID-19, there was a high level of instability among South Koreans about the economic consequences of the crisis. The COVID-19 epidemic is given thought to be the most remarkable global health crisis in recent decades. We discuss that South Korean consumers in MZ Generation have little experience dealing with these exceptional situations because they have never been exposed to similar global crises before. Therefore, we expect a high level of instability among these South Korean customers during COVID-19.

As a result, we argue that South Korean consumers in MZ Generation can steadily more rely on other people's opinions to guide their purchasing behavior. This can be interpreted as meaning that consumers gain perceived value for the product from other people before making a purchase. Previous studies have conducted several studies on perceived values. One study defined perceived value as involving a transaction relationship between the customer's perceived value from the customer's perspective and the assessment of the utility gained by the customer's use of the service and the costs invested to obtain it (Zeithaml, 1988; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). Other studies have shown that satisfaction with a product creates a preference for the product and a perceived value for the product (Othman et al., 2017; Tee et al., 2015).

After COVID-19, direct satisfaction with the product and perceived value of the product is obtained through other people. It means that they look at online reviews written by others and make them feel as if they have experienced it themselves. In particular, as non-face-to-face shopping gained momentum after the COVID-19, "Live Broadcasting" and "Video Review," which introduced content-based communication, have a positive effect on South Korean consumers in that they can purchase satisfactory products without visiting the store directly. Now, it can be interpreted that the perceived value of the product is changing positively under the influence of others, even if it is a product/service that has not been experienced directly, as it can be seen vividly not only through purchase but also later on. Video review operations are a trend introduced to strengthen reviews because "Reviews" have a lot of influence when purchasing products.

Demand for live commerce platforms is expected to continue to increase even after the end of COVID-19. It is also expected to contribute a lot to shaping the perceived value of South Korean consumers' products/services in the future. However, it has implications for South Korean consumers to believe that the perceived value of other people's products/services is as if they were the perceived value they thought.

### *3.4 Changed Purchase Intention*

We are continuing our consumption even for pandemics such as COVID-19. However, it has changed significantly from the general purchase pattern before COVID-19. Previous studies have shown that clothing purchases often stem from emotional rather than rational motivation (Koch et al., 2020). Furthermore, it has been shown that young adults recognize fashion shopping as leisure activities, emphasizing the importance of enjoyment and entertainment as determinants of purchase intention. We suppose that this epidemic is an important determinant of e-commerce purchases because the closure of restaurants, bars, and movie theaters due to COVID-19 limits opportunities for leisure activities. This led to a 50% increase in the percentage of online shopping more than once a week since COVID-19. South Korean customers cannot pursue their daily leisure activities, so they purchased or shopped online as a hobby. We discuss that the motivation for entertainment and pleasure influenced the intention of MZ Generation South Korean consumers to purchase e-commerce with sufficient free time during the COVID-19 shutdown.

Recent studies have found a positive relationship between normative pressure and willingness to purchase online

(Koch et al., 2020). We argue that normative pressure during the COVID-19 epidemic was an important determinant of online purchase intentions. The greatest normative pressure in South Korea is social distancing. They are physically distancing themselves from preventing large gatherings such as travel, marriage, sports events, and live concerts. This physical distancing makes interacting online a new norm. Since COVID-19, the time spent at home has increased, and consumers in South Korea naturally looking for "one-mile wear" have emerged. This is largely due to the increased number of consumers looking for home-ware for "Daily Distinction" rather than being stylish at home. According to research, among sales in December 2020, "Pajama, Home-wear" increased 17% year-on-year, and "Training Clothes" increased 32% (Jung, 2021, January 12). This is expected to increase in a constant trend if telecommuting is activated even after the end of COVID-19.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a result of COVID-19, we are being forced and experiencing unprecedented changes around the world. COVID-19, which was initially thought to end locally and temporarily, is somewhat mitigated, however, it will be longer than expected, and accordingly, changes in consumption behavior will accelerate and lead to fundamental changes.

The existing behavior and structure are being questioned due to the COVID-19 epidemic. It can trigger fundamental economic and social changes in times of crisis. An entity should realize customer behavior at this particular point in time. The tendencies established during this epidemic can continue to exist stable in the future, with a significant impact on offline retailers due to the rapid increase in e-commerce. We assume that customers are spending more time online during the current crisis, and we find that the motivation for entertainment and pleasure and the intentions of consumers in generation Y and generation Z to shop online have the strongest impact. Besides, we can say that while normative pressure influences individuals' willingness to purchase, it has served as an opportunity for consumers to realize that this situation will last for a long time. The social norm of social distancing is changing the way people interact with each other and with companies. Our new work suggests that companies can strategically leverage normative influences to drive purchasing behavior, and that knowledgeable online platforms and clear communication are critical in COVID-19.

As the accelerator pedal of change caused by COVID-19 is getting faster, close observation and understanding of the interface with consumers are becoming more important than ever. We hope to understand the global trend that reflects changes in the behavior of South Korean consumers, which is emerging as various indicators and to establish countermeasures for South Korean companies.

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