
Life-gambling: Metaphor Elicitation in Consumers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

La vida en riesgo: elicitación de metáforas en los consumidores durante la pandemia de COVID-19

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Abstract

The objective of the research is to understand consumer emotions which have been encountered during the COVID-19 health emergency, and which affect marketing and business. The study considers perceived risk and fear as moderators which, when directly put in relation to a particular set of COVID-19 pandemic-specific anxieties and stress, may serve to account for the gathered empirical data and therefore contribute to explain and predict changes in shopping frequencies and preferences. The study comprises a qualitative analysis using the ZMET methodology with interviews considering 40 men and women questioned about their experiences as consumers. The results show changes in consumption, emotions, and lifestyles; creating a new social norm governed by positive and negative emotions and defining issues of significant concern to post-pandemic consumers, such as adaptation, protection, health, technology, and family connection.

Keywords: Fear, Consumption, Risk, Death, ZMET, Metaphor Elicitation, COVID-19.

JEL Classification: M31.

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación es comprender las emociones de los consumidores que se han encontrado durante la emergencia sanitaria de COVID-19 y que afectan el marketing y los negocios. El estudio considera el riesgo y el miedo percibidos como moderadores que, cuando se relacionan directamente con un conjunto particular de ansiedades y estrés específicos de la pandemia de COVID-19, pueden servir para explicar los datos empíricos recopilados y, por lo tanto, contribuir a explicar y predecir cambios en las compras, frecuencias y preferencias. El estudio comprende un análisis cualitativo utilizando la metodología ZMET, con entrevistas que consideran a 40 hombres y mujeres a quienes se les hicieron preguntas sobre sus experiencias como consumidores. Los resultados muestran cambios en el consumo, emociones y estilos de vida, que muestran la creación de una nueva norma social regida por emociones positivas y negativas, y definiendo temas de gran preocupación para los consumidores pospandemia, como la adaptación, la protección, la salud, la tecnología y la conexión familiar.

Palabras clave: miedo, consumo, riesgo, muerte, ZMET, elicitación de metáforas, COVID-19.

Clasificación JEL: M31.

1. Introduction

The following research aims to contribute to the current scientific studies brought about as a means to understand the dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for different aspects of social reality. In particular, we aim to elucidate new and diversified processes and mechanisms which relate to consumption habits and attitudes in consumer behavior as studied in marketing.

As we know, in December 2019 a new type of virus—labeled SARS-CoV-2—spread around the globe causing severe damage to health, and a major impact on the global economy in general. Governments prepared strategies to reduce contagion and mortality rates, which forced populations to drastically alter their lifestyles. As a result, people's consumption habits changed in response to COVID-19. New shopping trends, products and services were swiftly implemented and incorporated into daily life. These processes appear to reflect a shift in the presentation of newly developed priorities in relation to the purchase of products and in the mentality of consumers. Also, these changes have forced companies to initiate an internal transformation of their ways of doing things and in their way of designing marketing strategies.

We begin with the premise that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes both worldwide and at an individual level, causing each of us modify our way of living to a certain extent: from daily routines and activities to consumer habits during the months of confinement and social distancing. It is the concern of this study to define and implement qualitative techniques in order to generate insights pertaining to consumers' emotional life and behaviors as depicted by the empirical data gathered.

Following this introduction, we proceed with an account of the most significant findings of a literature review, which is expected to lay the grounds for the relevance of our empirical findings. This second part is composed of three sections. The first section deals with high-level research questions regarding the emotional aspects in times of crisis. By summarizing three wide-ranging theoretical frameworks stemming from varied disciplines and sciences such as philosophy, anthropology, and psychology we aim to bring to the fore issues relating to the *fear of death* as a perennial human phenomenon in times of collective dread. Therefore, in this section we attempt to cover questions such as *how do human beings tend to react to catastrophes on a global scale? How does the onset of loss, grief, and shock evolve*

in a social setting? How to accommodate variables such as anxiety, fear, and stress in a model for social recovery? Secondly, we compile recent findings about how fear alters consumption patterns, focusing our attention on marketing and managerial studies on consumer behavior, and in the specific instance of the COVID-19 pandemic. This second section aims to illustrate an array of methodological and theoretical approaches which, like ours, are concerned with the societal impacts on consumption habits in populations affected by a number of enforced restrictions. Lastly, the third section of our literature review focuses on one specific topic in consumer behavior, namely *risk perception*. It is here, we expect, that our empirical findings will be the most informative. We focus on literature relating to risk perception as an operationalized concept with components, for instance, in the area of online commerce, since this sector has grown considerably as a result of the lockdowns around the world.

Following our literature review, we present the details and procedural aspects of our qualitative research methodology, including its theoretical background, its strengths and limitations, its key steps, and also the characteristics of our sampling process. This methodology was implemented between March and May 2020 in Mexico City. Previously, in 2017, members of our research team successfully implemented this empirical methodology, and its results were published in *The Anahuac Journal* (Barajas *et al.*, 2017). Next, our paper proceeds with the presentation of the empirical results. To do this, we develop our analytical categories such as gender, and our resulting construct distribution, namely: attributes, functional consequences, psychosocial consequences, and values. These results are expected to comprehensively reflect the changes in consumption habits and behaviors in terms of deep metaphors and the expression of emotions and opinions. We accompany each construct with a sample interview vignette that quotes a participant. Additionally, we present the results in schematic form, including tables, and hierarchy and semantic maps. Finally, we conclude the paper with an analysis and discussion of our findings in the light of current literature and offer our conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Fear of death

As may be evident from a first glance at the relevant literature, *fear* has been a key player throughout this entire historic event. Concretely, as can be inferred from the frequency of searches in Google by word, it has been *fear of death*, no less (“death”

being the most looked-up word during 2020 by a large margin) (Barros, 2021). In light of this, a growing number of papers have circulated and are in production seeking to conceptualize the intricate process of strongly experienced emotions such as fear, when experienced on a massive scale at the same time. In effect, the lived experience of collective fear may have a certain constant set of variables which are repeated in distinct moments of collective dread and horror (the variables which unify the several instances as instances of fear, or the essence of this type of experience), however there also exist a number of spatiotemporal-specific variables responding to differences in cultural, economic, social and other contingent aspects which need to be accommodated and weighted in new models every time. It is ultimately this last set of variables that grant each experience of collective fear its specific aura and character.

In virtue of their relevance in different academic and public opinion circles, Giorgio Agamben's (2021) philosophical and archeological analyses have been effective in bringing fear of death into relation with a certain number of behaviors and beliefs that have proliferated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. He has emphasized how, throughout this whole pandemic, the technoscientific aspects of the health care and medical sectors have been enhanced and even sacralized by discourses and representations, thus elevating the whole idea of "health" and "wellbeing" to the realm of religion, with universalized dogma and ritual. In some respects, the Italian theoretician shares some basic notions with what in the USA has emerged as "Management Theory," stemming from the advances of social psychologist and psychoanalytic anthropologist Ernest Becker (1997). Agamben, like some of the supporters of this theory, has identified the fear of death as a leading causal factor which can explain the spread of a family of dispositions which include mental, behavioral, and collective patterns of evasion, denial and disavowal of any association with the idea of death; especially when this reality of human existence is brought to the forefront by devastating events. Both lines of theory agree that, if the society's representations of death are not carefully contained in specific codes and neutralized by mores and rituals within communities, and, on the contrary, they find themselves suddenly floating free as a result of a major catastrophe, such representations may become an object of rejection and one against which several *defensive deployments* (in the guise of discourses, fantasies, actions) are erected on the society's behalf in order to preserve its cultural identity.

Just as Becker's theory critic Carveth (2004) has noted, we can understand such *defensive deployments* as entire belief systems that aim to make sense of death's

sudden apparition on a massive scale, and that is why these contents may lean towards a very pessimistic side of the spectrum. Such a spectrum is supposed to contain the entire range of representations of death, where in terror or fear of death there exist fantasies of cruelty, abandonment, helplessness, ultimate pain, fragmentation, etc. However, at the opposite end of the spectrum we may find more positive associations, such as “reunion,” “eternal bliss,” “oneness” and reintegration with a wider cosmos, where fear is not being associated with the idea of death (Carveth, 2004). Comparatively, according to Agamben “fear prepares us to accept everything,” and therefore instances of sudden implantation of fear of death in people’s minds are often accompanied not only by diverse forms of escapism and denials, as Terror Management Theory predicates, but also aggressive appeals for an authority that is requested to put things back in order, on idealistic and desperate grounds.

We therefore identify Becker’s and Agamben’s readings as pessimistic. They depict an image of the fear of death as a Pandora’s box which, when opened, clashes with human dispositions and virtues such as autonomy and clarity of thought which, in turn, makes us easy prey for authoritarian mechanisms. Alternative readings may argue that, despite the seemingly inevitable fear of death in cases of global pandemic, it is possible to build new structures for international and communitarian cooperation and solidarity. They present us with the opportunity to reach out to others. To illustrate this point, we may turn to psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s classic grieving or trauma model according to which we may divide the normal evolution of grief into five stages, namely: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1973). The first two stages encompass a gamut of subjective emotions where fear is constantly present and in which erratic, desperate and inarticulate thoughts and behaviors seem to prevail immediately after the traumatic or dreadful encounter or threat. It is admissible that, during these stages, we become impulsive and even self-destructive. The following two phases, unlike the previous ones, are rarely accomplished and overcome in isolation: we require helping hands and enough time in order to process the new reality in which we are forced to start over.

Fear as Moderator of Consumption

In terms of marketing research during the COVID-19 pandemic, fear was studied as a quantitative variable as early as February 2020 by a team in China, finding a positive

correlation with the presence of this emotion in the consumers and the purchase of personal protective equipment (Addo *et al.*, 2020). In Saudi Arabia, based on an exploratory analysis with a sample of 360 people, a factor analysis revealed that gender and age were important variables for the presence of fear and anxiety and, consequently, patterns of consumption. Women behaved more cautiously than men in the face of risk of contagion and took greater care with the quality of the products their families were consuming. Fear was greater among the older populations, resulting in less exposure to the outdoor environment; especially stores, restaurants, and markets (Hesham *et al.*, 2021).

Fabius *et al.* (2020) from McKinsey & Company have noted an important and long-lasting preference for well-known and established brands that have made a name for themselves indicating authority within competing markets. In their study, the purchasing of trusted brands is accompanied by a decrease of “on-the-go consumption” and a reduction in “discretionary spending” which indicates a pattern of quality sensitivity and also price sensitivity, present now and foreseeable into the future. This is consistent with Agamben’s analysis discussed above since it reveals a tendency to consume well-established and solidly branded products in the face of an increased perception of risk.

In Finland, a group of researchers (Laato *et al.*, 2020) has found that fear functions as a consumer moderator according to people’s perceptions of personal threat and coping mechanisms. These two factors, the authors indicate, may explain the underlying substrate behind consumer decisions. In the specific case of the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on their empirical observations in said country, such perceptions (of danger and vulnerability) were primarily conditioned by an overload of information concerning the pandemic which resulted in fear induction and thus brought about the appearance of “cyberchondria,” which the authors define as “a situation when an individual is overly stressed or anxious about their health, which leads to excessive, compulsive, and repeated health-related online searches that fuel anxiety, distress, and fear” (Laato *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). This presentation implies an excessive consumption of information available on social media, journalism, and other media whose accuracy was indirectly correlated with the damaging effects of cyberchondria on people’s emotional lives. In their model, once cyberchondria became established in a significant number of consumers, there was an increase in the *intention* to self-isolate and take safety measures. Purchasing behaviors were altered in two main ways; there was an increase in panic buying (“a strong urge to go and buy products, often in excess

of what would be reasonable,” (Laato *et al.*, 2020, p. 5) and *unusual purchasing* behaviors (“in several countries, grocery stores and convenience stores ran out of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and canned food products,” (Laato *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). In the end, they detected that “the panic buying phenomenon was brief, and consumer markets quickly stabilized to unusual purchasing and then further to the new COVID-19 consumer status quo” (Laato *et al.*, 2020, p. 10). Additionally, they predicted that “as long as people keep self-isolating, they will also keep making unusual purchases” (Laato *et al.*, 2020, p. 10).

Zwanka & Buff (2021) state that after catastrophes such as terrorist attacks, tsunamis, earthquakes, major floods and devastation, pandemics, and wildfires, “increased acquisition and buying demonstrated immediately after the event was followed by decreased consumption in the long-term; with some respondents indicating they were no longer willing to over-consume, less likely to overspend, and more careful in their choices” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 2). According to the authors, this was also the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first part of the chronological development of consumer behavior described here is explained as a result of a “stock-up mentality,” determined by fear. The first line of products consumed in this first stage consisted of “medical supplies, rubbing alcohol, antibacterial wipes, first aid kits, antiseptics, cold and flu remedies, and cough remedies” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 3). Subsequently, the most bought products were “powdered milk, dried beans, canned meat, chickpeas, rice, tuna, black beans, biscuit mix, water, and pasta” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 3). However, it is only once the basic necessities are satisfied that more permanent and complex changes in consumer behavior start to emerge, which are difficult to predict to the extent that the authors suggest that this pandemic may give rise to a whole new theoretically determined generational cohort (similar to Baby Boomers, Millennials, Centennials, etc.). It is the authors’ hypothesis that this new generation would present significant changes in “global consumer traits, buying patterns, global interconnectedness, and psychographic behavior” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 1), among other qualities. It is significant to note how the construct of fear appears as implicit as part of the changes that the authors ascribe. For example, it is deemed probable that national border policies will be further strengthened regarding the circulation of merchandise and visitors, displaying a positive correlation with the promotion of “nationalism and closed ranks around the country’s border” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 4). The authors claim that such developments would begin as a means to secure a safe supply of goods in the case of future catastrophe. In terms of retail, the authors foresee an increase in the consumption of domestically

produced goods. The authors also project a widespread preference to remain physically distanced from each other, which translates into a relative continuation of home-based work, entertainment, and socializing. Virtual reality is anticipated to take over “aspects of life that previously involved in-person interaction or travel” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 6), resignifying in turn the notion of brand experience. However, fear of enclosed spaces—due to possible contagion—may serve to “revitalize the nation’s parks and public recreational areas” (Zwanka & Buff, 2021, p. 7), and we may anticipate that this will be accompanied by an increased valuation of nature as a whole. They also coincide with Agamben’s idea that fear alters the correlation between what they term “Psychographic long-term shifts in beliefs” and “Greater Good versus Individual Liberties.” This means that, in the eyes of this purported new generation of consumers, the presence of bio-surveillance with the use of tracking and measuring devices for personal location and monitoring of vital signs will be normalized and encouraged in exchange for an idea of protection and immunity against new threats.

Perceived Risk

From the point of view of consumer behavior, perceived risk is defined as “the consumer’s perception of uncertainty and unknown consequences of acquiring services, trades and products” (Dowling & Staelin, 1994). The concept of perceived risk is not new; it has been used in various studies of consumer behavior. From the beginning, several multidimensional variables were assigned to this construct regarding shopping behaviors, such as financial, physical, functional, psychological, and social variables (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972).

In the context of the present research, we propose that the concept of perceived risk, when placed directly in relation with a certain set of COVID-19 pandemic-specific anxieties and stress may serve to account for the empirical data gathered, and therefore contribute to explain and predict changes in shopping frequencies and preferences.

Previously, some studies have shown that panic shopping is positively correlated with impulsive buying and risk perception (Lins, 2020). Another different study has emphasized that, while Internet usage may have many positive aspects, it can also have a negative impact on some individuals, such as an overexposure to information that refers to potential life-threatening risks, even when the information may not strictly adhere to the facts (Laato *et al.*, 2020). A prevalent aspect of risk perception

involving, again, the use of the Internet relies on the seemingly immaterial character of monetary exchanges that take place online, increasing the sense of risk, especially among inexperienced users. However, due to the temporary closure of supermarkets and stores during lockdown, we may expect that many consumers have already switched from offline to online shopping (Fabius *et al.*, 2020).

At present, and with the relatively recent emergence and ongoing evolution of e-commerce, some researchers have warned that the perceived risk is one of the major concerns of payment transactions using mobile phones (m-payment) that affect the financial security of the buyer (Slade *et al.*, 2015). Hence, the perceived risk of buying products online becomes an important and new variable in consumer behavior. For some authors, this perceived risk includes the following dimensions: financial risk, seller risk, privacy risk, risk linked to the illegal use of personal information and security risk (specifically in relation to credit cards) (Pavlou, 2003). Comparatively, other authors have grouped the perceived risk of online shopping into five different factors: financial, product, convenience, non-delivery and return policies (Kierkegaard, 2008; Tham *et al.*, 2019).

Perceived risk has also been studied by gender; the results indicate that “females are more likely to be concerned with online shopping risks than males” (Alreck & Settle, 2002; Forsythe & Shi, 2003). Lastly, the literature has been careful to point out that in order to “encourage consumer online shopping intention,” retailers need to “manage a way to minimize consumers’ real and perceived risk” (Ha, 2020) because there is, clearly, “an inverse relationship between perceived risk and online purchase intention” (Chang *et al.*, 2016).

3. Methodology

Our wide-ranging literature review elicits major questions and difficulties about the future direction of our communities and the economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned above, we aim in particular to elucidate new processes and mechanisms involved in consumer behavior. For this purpose, we have dealt with the specific empirical problem of assessing the influence, implications, and consequences of collectively pervasive emotions, such as fear. We selected a qualitative methodology called the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) in order to compile consumer insights about purchasing motivation, attitudes and changes in livelihood among a Mexican population.

The ZMET, created in the 1990s by Professor Gerald Zaltman at Harvard University, is based on the analysis of deep metaphors, which in this case refer to the different ways in which consumers changed their consumption patterns, their lifestyles, and their preferences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a main premise of this methodology that metaphors constitute a privileged route of access to non-linear thought which, according to cognitive research, is predominantly instantiated in decision-making (van Dessel, 2005).

Unlike behaviorist models, ZMET considers not only the stimulus-response dichotomy in order to explain a given reaction in consumer behavior. It also aims to capture and consider indirect and unconscious thought processes such as emotions or semantic associations within the person's memory and other mental processes. Participants are requested to select around 8 to 12 pictures or images which they feel may represent and evoke their thoughts, emotions, and deep feelings about the changes their lives have had to go through as a result of the pandemic. Such images may be taken from magazines, newspapers, books and other media or they can be produced by the participants themselves. They are later interviewed in depth by an experienced researcher following a structured procedure.

This qualitative method allows for a wide range of expression on the participants' behalf, with a potential high degree of authenticity and depth in comparison with other techniques that focus on narrower thought processes. Hence the fact that it takes a considerable amount of time and resources in its planning and set-up. This is because participants initially communicate their points of view using the selection of images, and later elaborate verbally about them in the structured interview. This interview consists of 10 steps: storytelling, missing images, sorting task, construct elicitation, most representative picture, opposite images, sensory images, mental map, summary, and personal vignette (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995).

Between March and May 2020, we invited 40 participants to engage in the realization of a ZMET on the COVID-19 pandemic and their experiences as consumers. All of them accepted, and the interviews were scheduled seven to 10 days after the call. The participants were asked to reflect about the topic in question and to indicate slogans, sentences, images, advertisements, words and photos which may be suitable to convey their personal meanings about the events related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once at the interview, each participant brought the materials they collected. Each interview lasted an average of one hour and was individually conducted. Accordingly, they were asked to place their materials on a table where both interviewer and interviewee were able to see them. Following the 10 steps,

they were invited to present and describe each piece separately and then jointly in order to create the narratives and constructs.

In this research, 20 women and 20 men participated, with a mean age of 28.6 (ranging from 17 to 82 years-old). The participants live in different parts of Mexico including Mexico City, Veracruz, Celaya, Irapuato, Tijuana, Hermosillo and Chihuahua. According to the AMAI (2018) standard classification, the interviewees pertain to the A/B socioeconomic level (monthly household income of more than 5000.00 USD), and C+ (monthly household income of 2058.00 USD to 4999.99 USD).

Having gathered the material from each interview, the researchers produced schematic mental mappings based on the respondents' views about their experiences during lockdown and throughout the other aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in general. Based on this process, it is possible to assess the represented concepts in light of previous key variables found throughout the literature review. In the end, the analysis of our results aims to capture important relations in the study of consumer behavior in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Results

According to our research, the interviewees were able to express, through images and metaphors, the feelings, thoughts, and emotions towards their consumption habits, the changes that they have experienced in times of COVID-19. As for the initial results of the research, we codified the resulting constructs and assigned numerical values to the words, phrases, and ideas according to their recurrence in the participants' utterances. The research results were divided by gender. In addition to identifying the similarities between both genders, the most relevant findings were coded and classified in four different constructs corresponding to: 1) attributes, 2) functional consequences, 3) psychosocial consequences and 4) values.

The changes in consumption habits in times of COVID-19 have caused both positive and negative feelings and emotions in the interviewees. The tables below show the codification and classification of constructs in men (see Table 1) and women (see Table 2) and the similarities between both (see Table 3). In these tables the words and ideas mentioned during the research are presented with their corresponding number of mentions, classified by the authors.

Table 1. Codification and classification of constructs in men

Attributes	Functional consequences	Psychosocial consequences	Values
Connection with family and others (10)	Thanks to technology I can continue to connect (8)	Anger (8)	Sadness (16)
Availability	Work (3)	Frustration (6)	Distrust (3)
Product Online (5)	Effort	Belonging / Connection (2)	Emotion (9)
International connection (8)	Thanks to fast food, I can still order food from restaurants (3)	Anxiety (5)	Doubt (4)
Comfort (9)	Hygiene, feeling clean when using sanitizing items (5)	Uncertainty (2)	Relief (4)
Enclosure (4)	Consumption habits are not the same (3)	Demotivation (7)	Relaxation (6)
Customs (3)	Depend on and adapt to technology (8)	Impotence (3)	Achievement (2)
Organization (5)	Shopping Online (6)	Stress (11)	Happiness (14)
Socialize (4)	Family coexistence (3)	With the creation of new technologies and devices with the pandemic, social interaction is being lost (2)	Despair (5)
Time (4)	Better eating habits (3)	Joy (3)	Enderment (3)
Materialism (4)	Travel virtually (5)	Tranquility (2)	Protection / safety (17)
Adaptation (3)	Apathy (4)	Belonging / Connection (4)	Freedom (3)
Restlessness (3)	Lack of connection (3)	Insomnia (2)	Restlessness (4)
Technology (6)	Limiting activities (3)	Satisfaction (13)	Insecurity (3)
Satisfaction (3)	Information (5)	Scary (12)	Trust (3)
Tranquility (3)	Entertainment (5)		Gratitude (2)
Boring (12)			Responsibility (4)
Learning (2)			Concern (7)
Exercise (2)			

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2. Codification and classification of constructs in women

Attributes	Functional consequences	Psychosocial consequences	Values
Lightened (2) Connection with family and others (12) Enclosure (4) Insecurity (4) Socialize (6) Organization (3) Technology (5) Disinfect (2) Time Process (2) Different (2) Learning (5)	Being at home has made me feel more comfortable (3) Buying online makes us feel different (16) Saving makes me feel calm for my old age Depend on and adapt to technology (6) New Reality (12) My consumption habits have changed (4) Home deliveries (2) Useful information (2) Learning (3) Entertainment (9)	Anger (7) Uncertainty (5) Emotion (7) Having spent large amounts of money I feel guilty that I have overdone it (2) Membership / Connection (6) Confusion Stress (6) Anxiety (3) Remoteness Scary (20) Shopping connects me with others (5) When buying I must control my impulses (2) Joy (10) Want to go out (8) Nostalgia (5)	Sadness (12) Concern (10) Boredom (3) Happiness (16) Endearment Liberty Despair (6) Impotence (2) Confusion Anguish (5) Trust (2) Learning Responsibility (7) Respect (2) Wisdom (2) Patience (2) Insecurity (2)

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. Codification and classification of constructs similarities between men and women

Attributes	Functional consequences	Psychosocial consequences	Values
Connection with family and others (22)	Consumption habits have changed (7)	Anger (15)	Sadness (28)
Socialize (10)	Depend on and adapt to technology (14)	Stress (17)	Concern (17)
Organization (8)	Home deliveries (5)	Anxiety (8)	Happiness (30)
Enclosure (8)	Entertainment (14)	Scary (32)	Freedom (4)
Time (5)	Buy online and feel different (22)	Membership / Connection (10)	Despair (11)
Technology (11)	Information (7)	Uncertainty (7)	Endearment (4)
Learning (7)		Joy (13)	Insecurity (5)
			Trust (5)
			Responsibility (11)

Source: own elaboration.

Subsequently, in the following results, hierarchy maps were obtained by deriving data from the information in the codification and classification of constructs in Tables 1, 2, and 3. According to Zaltman (1997), the thoughts and words that were mentioned at least four times by the participants were considered. Figures 1, 2, and 3 show the hierarchy maps that contain the most relevant findings expressed by the participants through metaphors, stories, and images in the course of this research (See Figure 1; see Figure 2; see Figure 3). Additionally, the numerical values of the mentions that each construct obtained from the different interviewees are presented in parentheses.

Regarding our first category of constructs (Attributes): the most relevant positive findings in both genders were “Connection with family and others” (22) and “Technology” (10). In men, “Comfort” (9) was a positive attribute and in the case of women, “Learning” (5) and “Socialization” (6) were outstanding positive aspects. Conversely, the most significant negative attribute was “Boredom” (12) during the pandemic in the case of men.

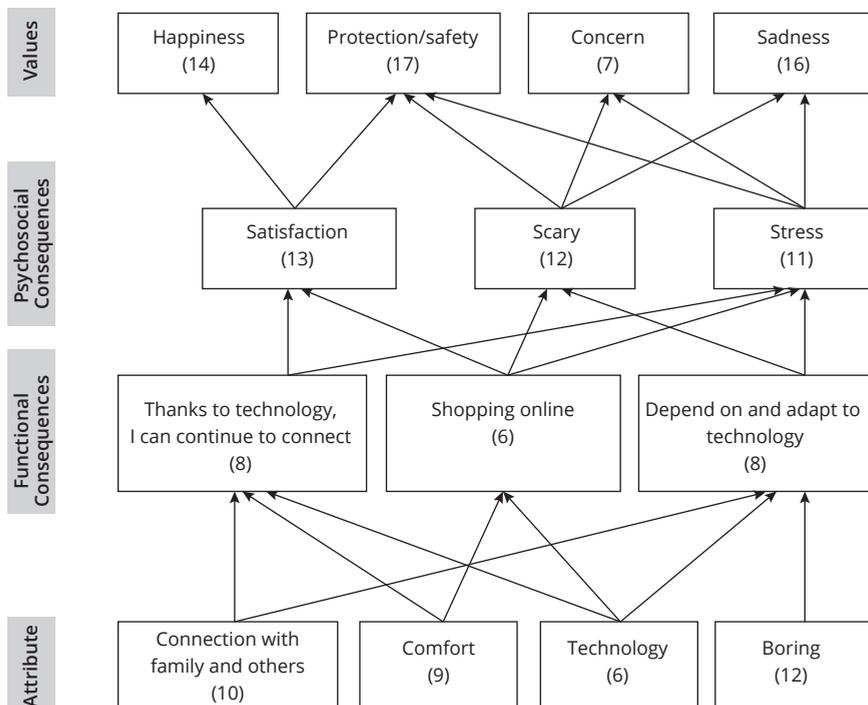
Regarding “Functional Consequences”, the findings mentioned by both genders were mostly positive, since despite depending on and adapting constantly to “Technology” (14), buying online “Feels different” (22), and offers an aspect of “Entertainment” (14).

These are consumption habits that have changed in a positive way (7). In the case of men, they expressed that, thanks to technology, they can continue to “Connect” (8) and in the case of women they expressed that it is a “New Reality” (12).

The Psychosocial consequences in both genders presented mostly negative feelings such as: “Fear” (32), “Stress” (17), and “Anger” (15). However, both genders presented instances of “Joy” (13). In the case of men, some expressed “Satisfaction” (13).

Regarding “Values”: both genders expressed the “Sadness” (28) and “Concern” (17) that they have experienced and, on the other hand, “Happiness” (30). Men expressed the importance of “Protection” and “Safety” (17).

Figure 1. Hierarchy map, men



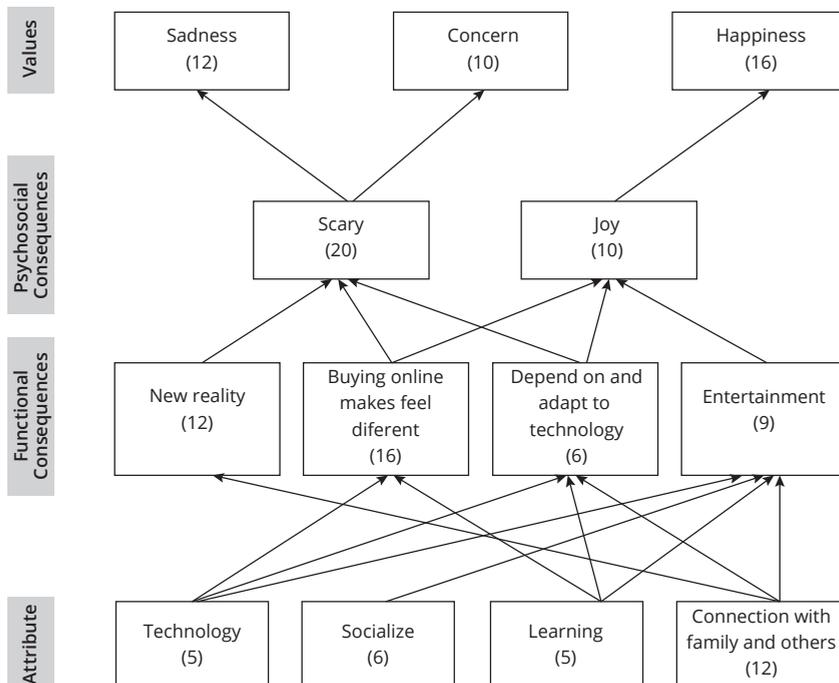
Source: own elaboration.

“The pandemic has taken away going to the movies. Watching a movie on Netflix is nowhere near that, and what I feel is frustration, since I can’t do anything about it” (Male, 19 years old).

“Consumption in times of pandemic is like an unknown person, unknown because, although one can expect good things, it is difficult to be sure that it will turn out well” (Male, 19 years old).

“I feel relieved when I get home after a very heavy day. Getting home is knowing that I will be able to rest. In the same way, I feel that same relief when I buy from home and I feel safe” (Male, 19 years old).

Figure 2. Hierarchy map women



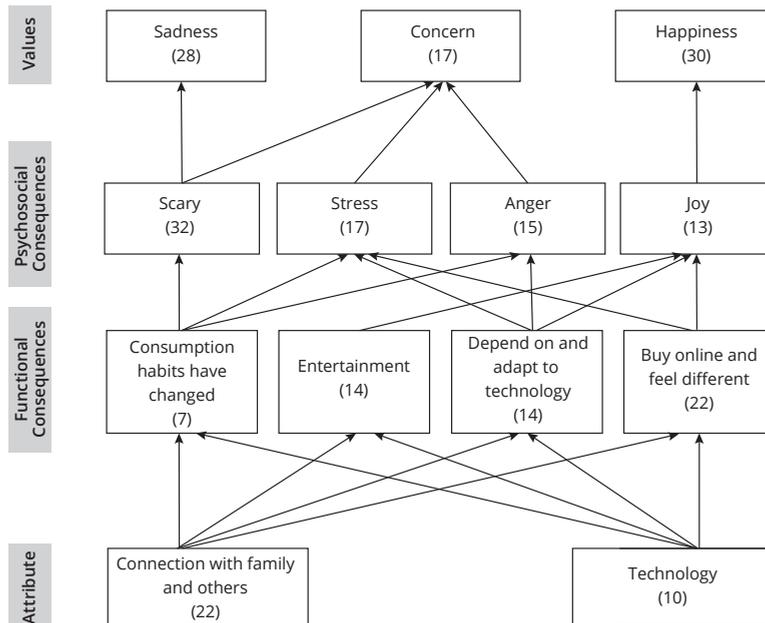
Source: own elaboration.

“In my case, joy is what predominates when viewing a page on the Internet where I can purchase. It is the joy of buying a product that makes you excited to wait for it to arrive at your door. I enjoy the experience that is to click and have it days later at the door of my home. Also, this image reminds me of a feeling: the happiness of being with your favorite people” (Female, 19 years old).

“This image reminds me of how my consumption habits have truly changed due to the pandemic. Before, when I had the opportunity to go places to get my products, I knew what to expect. Instead, using technology, it is a question mark what will be inside the box. The feeling of surprise is present at all times” (Female, 19 years old).

“This image expresses very well how, having changed my daily life, and with it my consumption habits as well, due to COVID, now buying online causes fear in me. I am on the lookout like when a bee approaches you, you are looking for comments on whether the product is good, if the page is formal and if it will arrive in good condition. From time to time this feeling of fear occurs when you do not know the true intentions of the companies” (Female, 19 years old).

Figure 3. Hierarchy map, men and women



Source: own elaboration.

Within the ZMET methodology, the authors proposed the use of a set of “Seven Giant Metaphors,” consisting of metaphors about: balance, transformation, journey, container, connection, resource, and control (Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). During the production of the present research, three of the Seven Giant Metaphors were identified, namely:

- i) The Transformation metaphors came to the fore by having to adapt to new ways of consumption through digital media and information technologies such as online shopping and home-delivery services, alongside the new formats of entertainment and healthcare services due to the health crisis.
- ii) The Control metaphors were also frequently elicited, since, according to the in-depth interviews, many people have been feeling out-of-control, anxious, insecure, frightened, fearful, concerned, and vulnerable in the face of the adversity and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.
- iii) Connection metaphors were brought to light as a result of a consistent need to feel connected with their families, their friends, and loved ones through their personal, social, and professional environments and also through digital social networks.

5. Conclusions, limitations, and future research

According to the study results, the changes in consumption habits in times of COVID-19 have caused both positive and negative feelings and emotions, with some differences between women and men. Permanent and complex changes in consumer behavior are beginning to make themselves felt and will continue evolving in the years to come. The new generation will significantly change global consumer attitudes, buying patterns, and psychographic behavior, developing a new social norm.

Future buying behaviors will be affected by the emotions experienced during the pandemic. Those young people who had to change their social behavior after confinement are the ones who set the tone for the new social normality. Although it has increased significantly as a result of the pandemic, the switch to online commerce will only endure if the younger generations want to retain this way of life.

Decisions about remaining physically distanced from each other, which translates into a relative permanence of home-based work, digital entertainment, virtual

sociability, and virtual reality, will be judged through the eyes of perceived risk. The perceived risk around e-commerce transactions has also been changed as a result of pandemic emotions, from an economic-centric factor to a health and safety-centric one. That is, people seek to prioritize the convenience demanded by the health emergency over the security risks usually considered in online commerce.

The future direction of our communities and economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic will be based on the speed of the readjustment to traditional activities or their gradual adaptation (Sheth, 2020). To develop appropriate actions for the new consumer, business and marketing activities will have to consider the new normal with changes in consumption shifts, emotions, and lifestyle. Considering negative emotions such as anger, frustration, stress, fear, sadness, anxiety, and worry as triggers of changes in consumer habits; and positive emotions such as security, happiness, protection, satisfaction, tranquility, comfort, and harmony on issues that concern them such as technology, online shopping, entertainment, learning, hygiene, and new technological platforms; while prioritizing in consumers' lifestyles the capacity of adaptation, protection, information, exercise, healthy life, and family connection.

The main limitation of the research lies in the scope and profile of the sample. As a future line of research, it will be proposed to conduct quantitative research that will allow a more representative assessment of the post-COVID emotions that affect consumption, and to create a model that can explain the best marketing practices aimed at encouraging consumers' purchase intention. In addition, we would like to study more deeply the effect of fear as a moderator of the relation between consumer behavior and purchase intention in the context of online shopping.



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