

Introduction

Throughout history, humanity has faced many pandemics, such as the plague epidemic called the Black Death, which swept through Asia and Europe in the second half of the 14th century, or the Spanish flu caused by the H1N1 subtype virus, which decimated the population in 1918-1919. A hundred years later, humanity is struggling with another great pandemic, Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19), caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (SARS-COV-2). The effects of this pandemic can be seen in all countries and continents. Population losses are counted in millions of people, and losses in economies in trillions of euros.

Infectious diseases of an epidemic or pandemic nature have killed more people than numerous wars. They induced political, economic, and social changes. At some point, they strengthened faith, contributing to reinforcing spirituality. They also became an inspiration for painters, sculptors, and musicians. Their rapid progress accelerated scientific research, which, in turn, contributed to the development of biological and medical sciences. Although medicines and vaccines have been developed for more and more diseases, pandemics that have accompanied humanity for centuries continue to break out, shaping the reality for the generations living at that time (Krajewska 2020, p. 30).

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the functioning of modern societies and economies, causing a global crisis on an unprecedented scale.

The effects of the pandemic have been felt since the first months of its breakout in Wuhan, China. By causing changes in almost all areas of human life, the COVID-19 pandemic can be described as a catalyst for changes on a scale never seen before.

Although on May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, recovering from the crisis spurred by the pandemic is still an unprecedented challenge for the entire world (Mróz 2021, p.9). The ongoing war in Ukraine has not led to stabilization. Questions arise about the economy's future and how modern economic theories can cope with the current situation. The world continues to face a multidimensional crisis: health, humanitarian, economic, financial, and climate, which poses a challenge to governments, international organizations, businesses, as well as to consumers and their households. The UN estimates that the consequences of the pandemic and the resulting global recession will be catastrophic for many countries on all continents. However, do the changes triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic only have a negative impact? Or maybe there are also positive effects of the situation? Will the pandemic experience become a catalyst for innovative changes, redirecting society and the economy into safe grounds and sustainable development? To answer these questions, we have planned a three-stage research project entitled "*COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for change,*" which was implemented in 2022-2024. The project goals were:

- Identification of changes in the behavior of consumers and enterprises operating in a pandemic situation.
- Indication of the areas of the economy (industries) that have suffered the most due to the pandemic and those for which the crisis has become a driving force for development.
- Determining the relationship between the pandemic and the innovative activities of market entities, i.e., enterprises, consumers, and their households.

Proceeding to pursue the project's goals, we formulated five research hypotheses, which we verified empirically:

- H1: Besides the many adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing crisis has also had a visible positive impact on enterprises. The

pandemic has stimulated innovative solutions that enhance the level and quality of consumers' well-being, spurring beneficial changes in their behavior.

- H2: The most significant changes during the pandemic can be observed in the functioning of market entities that require direct contact with customers and those that require people's mobility.
- H3: The industries for which the pandemic became a driving force are primarily those that could effectively use modern forms of customer communication and electronic sales channels and conduct their business in a remote work mode.
- H4: The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the importance of digital technologies in the functioning of enterprises and households and accelerated the development of infrastructure, tools, and skills necessary to conduct remote activities.
- H5: The innovative activities of enterprises stimulated strategies for coping with the pandemic crisis.

The project was implemented in three stages. We critically reviewed the literature and other secondary sources on the COVID-19 pandemic in the first one. The study focused on how the pandemic has affected the behavior of market entities and how these entities have been categorized based on international findings in this area. The completed tasks enabled us to operationalize the studied concepts and categories, identify existing knowledge gaps in the topic, formulate research questions, and determine the scope of primary research (quantitative and qualitative).

In the second stage, we identified changes in the behavior of market entities during the pandemic. We have prepared quantitative statistical analyses to determine the actual changes in the behavior of consumers and their households and enterprises spurred by the pandemic. The tasks performed also made it possible to identify the areas of the economy (industries) that suffered most due to the pandemic and those for which the crisis became a driving force for development and determine the relationship between the pandemic and the innovative activities of market entities.

In the third stage, we enriched the findings of primary quantitative research with the results of qualitative research, namely the opinions of ex-

perts from both the world of science and practice, obtained during individual in-depth interviews. The conducted research and the analyses based on it allowed us to determine the perspective of market entities' functioning after the pandemic's end and summarize research from previous stages.

The result of the research endeavor is the monograph now being presented to readers, which consists of this introduction, four chapters, and a summary. The first chapter shows the COVID-19 pandemic as a determinant of consumer behavior. The conducted bibliometric analysis, based on numerous secondary sources, enabled us to present the impact of the pandemic on the everyday functioning of consumers and their households. The first chapter is exploratory in nature and sets the directions and domains of discourse undertaken in the subsequent chapters of the work.

In the second chapter, we outline the methodological aspects of the research undertaken on consumer behavior in a pandemic. These studies are explanatory in nature. First, we explain empirical research methodology in a situation of limited contact with the research subjects. Then, in the following subsections, we characterize the quantitative and qualitative research undertaken and delineate the research samples.

In the third chapter, we discuss the results of quantitative research. First, we describe the extent of meeting consumer needs during the pandemic, with particular emphasis on diagnosed deficits and areas where the degree of meeting needs increased. In the next section, we address the negative and positive influence of the pandemic on consumers. The sense of threat caused by the pandemic situation and the adaptive actions taken by consumers are presented in the third subchapter. The chapter ends by analyzing consumer behaviors developed during the pandemic and introducing a consumer typology based on these behaviors.

Chapter four presents our predictions about consumer behavior in post-pandemic times. We attempt to answer the question of whether the end of the pandemic is a new beginning or a return to the past. In the following pages of the chapter, we present the statement of gains and losses incurred during the pandemic, covering not only consumers but also enterprises operating in the consumer goods and services market. The source material for the considerations undertaken in this chapter draws on the

statements of a group of experts in science and practice obtained during individual in-depth interviews.

The monograph ends with a comprehensive summary. We present the most prominent research results and conclusions regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer purchasing and consumption behavior. We outline the limitations related to conducting research during the pandemic. Finally, we indicate further possible research directions.

The monograph primarily targets managers of enterprises operating in the consumer goods and services market. The book may also inspire scientists to research consumer behavior in the post-pandemic reality. Students of economics and management should also find interesting content there.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS A DETERMINANT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

1.1. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for the functioning of consumers and their households

The World Health Organization announced the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (www1), initiating numerous activities related to limiting its spread. This had consequences for the functioning of the socio-economic sphere and, consequently, for consumer behavior and households.

Due to the number and changes in confirmed cases across different countries, the progress of the pandemic varied and largely depended on the number of tests conducted, the scope and duration of restrictions introduced and their effectiveness, the isolation of infected people, quarantine of those who were in contact with the infected, and the geographical location of individual countries (Dąbrowska, Janoś-Kresło, 2022, p.59). The consequences of the pandemic for individual countries depended on the pace at which the virus spread.

The WHO Director-General announced on May 5, 2023, that COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue that no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) (www2). Nearly seven million people have died due to the coronavirus worldwide. There have been over 775 million confirmed cases of infection (www 3)¹.

¹ As of May 26, 2024.

The pandemic's health, social, and economic effects have been an enormous challenge for economies almost all over the world in the macro-, meso- and microeconomic dimensions and still are. The pandemic has significantly impacted many areas of the economy, society, and personal lives for more than three years. The pandemic caused economic losses in many industries, and the scale of the recession is sometimes compared to that recorded during the Great Depression of 1929 – reflected in the decline in global GDP. In particular, these losses concerned industries such as catering, hotels, tourism, culture, and beauty – all those in which direct contact between staff and customers seemed indispensable. The healthcare system has faced previously unimaginable challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as a crisis of extraordinary scale, has rapidly and drastically changed people's lives worldwide regarding health, everyday life, education, and work. Restrictions and limitations related to the pandemic have led to job losses, increased unemployment, a decline in income for many consumers, and reductions in spending (Laguna et al., 2020; Maison et al., 2022, p.6).

One of the basic countermeasures introduced in many countries to limit the spread of the virus was to radically limit people's mobility and introduce the principle of social distancing (Rejeb, Rejeb, Keogh, 2020, pp.475-485).

Depending on the pandemic situation, and in particular, on the number of cases, governments of individual countries introduced restrictions intended to limit the transmission of the virus. The scope and duration of the measures in force depended significantly on the epidemic situation and the adopted strategy to counteract the pandemic. In addition to the most constraining restrictions on the isolation of sick people and quarantine of contacts/people returning from abroad, pandemic restrictions applied to almost every consumer and their household, conditioning their behavior on the market. The introduced restrictions also applied to enterprises and institutions, limiting and sometimes even preventing their activities.

The consequences of the pandemic on the behavior of consumers and their households resulted primarily from the decisions of the authorities of individual countries to periodically restrict consumers' freedom to move, assemble, and use commercial and service establishments, in particular:

- limiting the number of people staying in one place in domestic/private and public spaces,
- the need to maintain social distance,
- prohibition/limitation of organizing and participating in family events, religious meetings, and mass events,
- restricting mobility (curfew), public transport use,
- closing state borders,
- quarantine for people who have had contact with an infected person,
- quarantine for people returning from countries with a high infection rate,
- the need to wear masks,
- recommendations for frequent hand washing,
- lack of possibility/limited possibility of using classroom educational services at preschool, school, and student levels;
- prohibition/limitation of the possibility of making location-based purchases (including shopping malls),
- closing down/limiting the activities of gyms and fitness clubs,
- closing down/limiting the operation of hotels and other accommodation facilities,
- closing down/limiting the activities of sanatoria,
- preventing/limiting the possibility of providing location-based catering services,
- preventing/limiting the possibility of providing beauty, hairdressing, and SPA services,
- preventing/limiting the possibility of providing rehabilitation and massage services,
- closing down/limiting the activities of enterprises producing consumer goods.

Pandemic restrictions have influenced consumer behavior in many markets, and above all, the scope and way of satisfying their needs related to:

- health care,
- health safety,
- food,
- leisure,

- education,
- cultural participation,
- opportunity to spend time with family and friends,
- self-fulfillment (career),
- housing conditions,
- physical/sports activity.

Consumer reactions to the pandemic can be considered typical responses to a crisis. On the one hand, they consisted of adapting to the existing situation by refraining from purchasing goods and services that are not necessary for survival (e.g., cultural services, education, entertainment, luxury goods), limiting the scale of consumption – using previously purchased goods and reducing the frequency of new purchases (except for stockpiling or speculative purchases), searching for cheaper substitutes to maintain the current standard of living and reducing losses. The pandemic crisis contributed to a change in the structure of consumption and expenditure (including the decreased share of spending on non-food purchases), a change in the way consumers satisfy their needs, and a change in the way of obtaining funds to meet their needs.

Facing the crisis spurred by the pandemic, consumers also became more rational in their purchasing decisions, and more signs of entrepreneurship could be seen in their behavior, including the importance of one's work in the household has increased, and consumption has taken on a natural form in addition to the market form. Concerns about the actual decline in the ability to meet needs, lower incomes, and rising living costs contributed to consumers' search for alternative sources of earnings. At the same time, changes were noted in consumers' attitudes toward their own health care through increased importance of rest and various activities undertaken to lead a healthy lifestyle (e.g., diet, physical activity).

Consumers' reactions to the pandemic depended on their economic situation and social status (Chlipała, Żbikowska, 2021). They changed with the pandemic development stage – the scale of infections and the actions taken by the governments of individual countries (Reformat, 2020, p.178; Mróz, 2021, p.44) (Table 1.1).