

Understanding the Effect of Culture on E-Book Popularity during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus Pandemic has changed the way that people live, interact and communicate with others. Some modifications are transitory, while others seem to be permanent. Seeking for social and human development, many individuals find in educational courses a way to get a better quality of life. During the lockdown periods, reducing human contact, information technology plays an important role to enable the access of books by individuals. Cultural factors at a country level also can expand or decrease the interest in information technologies to access electronic books (e-books). Therefore, considering the lockdown limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper tests the effect of culture on e-book popularity among different countries. First, we observed a significant increase in the popularity of e-books during the lockdown period, which reinforces the potential that information technology has to generate different values for individuals and firms during lockdown restrictions. Large countries, and countries with better levels of information technology tend to search more for e-books during the lockdown. Moreover, masculinity and power distance are two dimensions of culture that seem to be related to the changes in the interest of e-books during pandemics. These results highlight new questions that can be explored in further research.

Keywords: E-Books; Cross-Country Analysis; Technology Adoption.

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 represents a “global society shock”, generating unprecedented impacts on the world, affecting capital supply, labor market, supply chain management, home life, peoples’ health, among others (Coombs, 2020; Papadopoulos, Baltas & Balta, 2020; Venkatesh, 2020). It may represent a unique situation across generations (Venkatesh, 2020). Lockdowns over the world and temporarily closure of businesses have required many actions by governments and individuals (Papadopoulos, Baltas & Balta, 2020), and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a special role in this regard.

ICTs contribute to facilitate the life of people and firms. In normal conditions, individuals have the option to choose an appropriate moment to adopt and start using ICT resources. Many factors can affect the initial adoption and the use of information technology, and they include market pressure, competition, behavioral / individual characteristics, and technology itself (Albertin & Albertin, 2012). In a mandatory context (Venkatesh et al., 2003), ICTs adoption can be affected and modified, which is the case forced by lockdown restrictions to prevent Coronavirus contagion. Therefore, Coronavirus pandemic represents an external event in the market that exerts a pressure in the environment and also affects ICTs use/adoption. A strong movement to digitalization started together with the isolation measures.

COVID-19 has generated a decrease in social activities, to reduce human contact, and an increase in other activities, such as eating at home (Coombs, 2020; Papadopoulos, Baltas & Balta, 2020) and working at home (home office). To deal with COVID-19 restrictions, many small firms use digital technologies that have potential to help the process of value creation (Papadopoulos, Baltas & Balta, 2020). On one hand, the impacts of COVID-19 increased the interest in information technology resources. For example, video conference offers to individuals the opportunity to keep in contact during these times (Coombs, 2020). In this way, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the digital world, generating opportunities to expand technology-based solutions (Sein, 2020; He, Zhang,