

Croatian Purchase Experience During Covid-19: The Role of Company's Media Presence for Consumer Vulnerability, Resilience and Buying Behaviour

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Abstract. Covid-19 pandemic strongly impacted our ways of living and buying, thus posing many challenges for consumers and companies. When faced with economic and health crisis, consumers tend to change their behaviour, attitudes and purchasing habits (Wright and Blackburn 2020, Voinea and Filip 2011). Besides making them vulnerable, tough situations can stimulate consumers to be proactive, i.e. to learn to adjust to crisis situation or disaster finding the ways of building the resilience (Maurer 2016, Lorenz and Dittmer 2016). However, the marketplace has a crucial role in this. Namely, the companies are important in making sure that the products and services are available to consumers and that the satisfying purchasing experience, which lowers the consumer vulnerability and increases resilience, is provided (Nessel 2016). Researchers predict inevitable changes in buying behaviour patterns whereas the consumers will continue to buy online (Tam 2020).

This study explores the role of company's media presence for consumers' buying changing patterns given their vulnerability and resilience during Covid-19. The main research objectives are the influence of company's media presence on the consumer vulnerability and resilience, as well as the effects of vulnerability and resilience for the new online buying behaviour patterns (e.g. forced online buying and learning about new buying skills). Vulnerability and resilience are related but diverse concepts vital for understanding the change (Miller et al. 2010). The literature suggests that these concepts are rarely studied from the marketing and consumer experience perspectives (Rew and Minor 2018, Shi et al. 2017, Mayntz 2016, Maurer 2016, Ball and Lamberton 2015, Miller et al. 2010). Therefore, it is expected that this research will fill these gaps thus contributing to the vulnerability and resilience theories by examining the role of retailers' media presence and the relations of vulnerability and resilience to new consumer behaviour patterns (shift to online buying and perceiving it as a good opportunity for learning and acquiring new online buying skills).

The sample encompassed 405 Croatian consumers. Data was analysed using regression analyses. The research results show that the company's media presence is not relevant for the consumer vulnerability, but it positively impacts the consumer resilience. Furthermore, the results indicate that vulnerable consumers were "forced" by the pandemic to online buying and do think that such new way of buying represents a way of acquiring new buying skills. On the other side, consumer resilience negatively impacts the perception of pandemic as a driving force for online buying meaning that more resilient consumers were not forced by the pandemic to buy products online. In addition, consumer resilience does not significantly influence the perception of pandemic as a way of learning about new buying means. These results provide novel findings in terms of exploring the consumer behaviour in the pandemic context given vulnerability and resilience aspects. Moreover, the research results have implications for retailers in terms of developing efficient marketing and communication strategies.

Keywords: COVID-19, consumer vulnerability, consumer resilience, company's media presence, online buying behaviour

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