Is COVID-19 Generating Pandemic Animosity among Nations and Consumers? A Theoretical Overview

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Abstract: COVID-19 is a massive geopolitical disturbance that will reset the international system once the fuzz is lifted, accelerate de-globalization as well as de-regionalization and establish new political and trade alignments, and probably a new world order. This virus divided the world into three narratives, foremost is in favor of the US and against China, and second is in favor of China and against the US, and the third represents the neutral people who believe it is a natural virus. Multiple conspiracy theories have emerged about the origin and spread of the virus. Hence, it has generated pandemic animosity among the people of different nations. China and the US need to be more transparent on the origin and spread of the pandemic and step back from confrontation. This is a time to be united to fight with the virus. COVID-19 has also opened the gateway avenue for future researchers in multiple disciplines of academia.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, China, United States, Pandemic Animosity, Virus

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a massive geopolitical disturbance that will reset the international system once the fuzz is lifted, accelerate de-globalization as well as de-regionalization and establish new political and trade alignments and probably a new world order (Dareini, 2020). There is diverse anticipation that the new coronavirus will reframe world economic consumption and production chains. Due to the extreme outbreak, the global economy is predicted to recess this year (Ng, 2020). However, Chinese leaders believe in the growth and progress in controlling coronavirus is evidence of the commitment to position China as the frontline leader in the worldwide combat over the virus, and to march toward emerging a global power (Dareini, 2020). Coronavirus seems to have become a leading actor in international affairs. It will reshape global diplomatic alignments, said by Mohammad Tabatabaei (Dareini, 2020).

Is Novel Coronavirus a bioweapon? In recent months, narratives about the nature and origins of coronavirus have started shifting progressively from a natural occurrence to a human-made infectious disease (Dareini, 2020). On January 26th, 2020, Science Magazine stated the Wuhan seafood market is not a source of COVID-19, a deadly virus, but still, we did not find the exact clue of the origin of this pandemic. After this statement, some of the Chinese officials claimed that the COVID-19 virus could have originated somewhere outside of China. On February 27th, Zhong Nanshan COVID-19 pandemic medical advisor said: “Although the COVID-19 was first discovered in China, it does not mean it originated in China” (Dareini, 2020). After such statements, another cold war started between China and the United States; both countries are
criticizing each other for being responsible for this outbreak. Chinese officials claim Covid-19 might be the bioengineering of the United States. On the other hand, United States officials called Covid-19 as “Chinese virus,” “Wuhan virus,” “Chinese coronavirus,” and “Chinese disease,” even some of the US officials warned the Chinese government that “China will pay for this.”

Chinese are targeted in some of the countries as a “virus containing human.” Most victims are brutally attacked in the name of the Wuhan virus. Steadily increasing prejudice, racism, and xenophobia in the modes of fear, suspicions, and animosity towards Chinese people have been reported in many countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, and North America (en.m.wikipedia.org, 2020). Chinese people in the United Kingdom grumble those who are victims of higher rates of racist verbal abuse, with cases of violent attacks noted. Since the pandemic COVID-19 outbreak, in Germany, the Chinese Embassy has been informed of a rapid rise in assaults and racist abuse cases against Chinese citizens (Jakovljevic, Bjedov, Jaksic, & Jakovljevic, 2020).

Some of the South Koreans are vigorously blaming the local people residing in China as well as Korean policies and practices toward COVID-19 emergence. Such individuals are using social media to use rude and insulting words to express their negative feelings (Kim, 2020). Chinese restaurants in America, the UK, France, Australia, and many other countries are losing business due to this outbreak. France is facing an anti-Asian racism “epidemic” # “Chinese Don’t Come To Japan” is one of the high rated trending on Twitter (Ng, 2020). What started as a small cluster of unidentified cause pneumonia in Wuhan, China, has indeed have become one of the world’s most deadliest pandemic disease outbreaks the world has ever seen since the Spanish flu in 1918 (Ng, 2020). The COVID-19 has brought the most severe challenge to the global economy and stability since the Second World War. Moreover, it has triggered an escalating hating pandemic and generalized dehumanization in several countries, particularly against the Chinese and East Asian immigrant communities (Ng, 2020).

Processes of globalization are already too complicated and challenging to fully understand by any single individual. How can you know that the world’s truth and avoid succumbing to misinformation and misunderstanding (ญาติ, 2018). Conspiratorial theory is an explanation of an incident featuring malevolent, powerful, and sometimes hidden actors pulling all the strings and trying to manipulate incidents and public sentiment to their own advantage (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). Such situation is needed to be appropriately addressed with facts and figures to explain this deadly outbreak and to find out the actual cause of the outbreak to identify the actors behind such situation if any and in order to normalize the heat of animosity among nations and consumers for a better world and productive economic gains.

2. Literature Review
In Wuhan, China, a novel primary atypical (viral) pneumonia, which was alarmingly contagious, broke out in December 2019. It has since been described as a zoonotic coronavirus, which is similar to coronavirus SARS and coronavirus MERS and has been called COVID-19 (Liu, Gayle, Wilder-Smith, & Rocklöv, 2020). It might be one another scientific challenges and ongoing deadly pandemics of the world like HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acute immunodeficiency syndrome), what was initially referred to as a “gay virus” has transformed into one of the biggest ongoing pandemics and scientific challenges for medical and modern medicine (Halepas & Ferneini, 2020). Since then, the epidemic has spread to all mainland provinces China as well as to around 215 countries, and regions across the globe in all continents have cases, as on June 3rd, 2020, with 6320698 confirmed cases worldwide out of which 2934905 recovered and 377941 died (mp.weixin.qq.com, 2020).
Right after the Science Magazine statement about the origin of COVID-19, Lijian Zhao, spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, indicated on March 12th, 2020, that coronavirus might have been bioengineered by the United States. Zhao tweeted that it might be the US army that brought the epidemic to Wuhan. He also said and indicated to the US: “Be transparent! And Make your data public! The United States owes us a clarification” (Dareini, 2020). The US President referred to the coronavirus as the “Chinese virus” on March 19th, 2020. Global threats require unified efforts, which is why terms like the “Chinese virus” are so detrimental. Anti-Chinese hostility was a recurring problem, be it with plague in San Francisco in 1900, SARS in 2003, or Covid-19 today (Halepas & Ferneini, 2020).

President Trump was criticized for having unfairly stigmatized an entire nation by his use of the term “Chinese virus” and for encouraging hostility towards Asian-Americans. He later explained that he was not at all racist and that the coronavirus came from China, and that the Chinese government had some responsibility for the COVID-19 outbreak by hiding and minimizing the outbreak (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). The US officials have tried to introduce novel coronavirus pandemic as a “Chinese disease.” Pompeo called it the “Wuhan virus,” whereas Kevin McCarthy, a Republican member of House of Representatives, named this virus as “Chinese coronavirus” (Dareini, 2020). On the other hand, Tom Cotton, a Republican Senator, has suggested that the virus is Chinese scientists’ work at a secret biological warfare laboratory in Wuhan. He later warned the Chinese government: “China will pay for this” (Dareini, 2020).

Besides, conspiracy theories of COVID-19 appear to be predicated on epistemic, social, existential, and political motives. The power of creative fiction depends on it, and different political authorities interpret events differently (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). For instance, Russian and Iranian news sources are depicting us as a narrative that this novel coronavirus is an extension of President Trump’s trade war with China. The CIA has developed the virus according to one of the versions to destabilize China further and replace leadership with pro-western (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). This narrative is in line with typical Russian narration in an attempt to depict the US as the ‘bad guy’ worldwide (Glenza, 2020).

Similarly, US officials and news sources are trying to push their narrative to portray China as a ‘bad guy’ that China developed this virus to affect the US interests in the world and trying to set a new world order. Others say the virus is a result of the international elite whose goal is to bring about a financial crisis leading to a currencies crash (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). Governments around the world react to the virus by printing or borrowing money to counter COVID-19 and to stimulate their economy. This could lead to hyperinflation, which will make local currency valueless and pave the way for the implementation of a foreign banking-controlled digital currency that would be controlled by these banking elites of the world (Harari, 2020). Anti-vaxxers claim that the entire pandemic of the virus is a farce whose objective is to implement compulsory vaccination for controlling the population of the world (Jakovljevic et al., 2020).

The spokesman of the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs Zhao Lijian claimed that during the Military World Games in Wuhan, China, in October 2019, the Pentagon sent over 280 participants along with staff members consists of 17 teams, where the US military brought this novel coronavirus COVID-19 to China (Jakovljevic et al., 2020; Mahar I, 2020). It is also interesting that Dean Koontz, one of the American fictions writer in 1981, described in one of his book “The Eyes of Darkness” about the coronavirus Wuhan-400 as the most deadliest biological weapon which spread worldwide (Jakovljevic et al., 2020; Mahar I, 2020). Furthermore, the Hollywood movie “CONTAGION” released in 2012 displayed the 100% similar outbreak and situation during
the outbreak as we are now facing during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Is it coincident? It has created a lot of doubts in the minds of individuals.

A former Israeli army military commander Dany Shoham said the Wuhan Virology Institute is being used for Beijing’s covert bio-weapon program (Jakovljevic et al., 2020; Mahar I, 2020). CBC News has reported that two Chinese spies stole the coronavirus from the Infectious Disease Facility Laboratory of Canada (Jakovljevic et al., 2020; Mahar I, 2020). Mis/information disseminated on Facebook that the Wuxi Pharma Lab located in Wuhan owned by George Soros, where COVID-19 had been developed and break out conveniently (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). Some others claim that the diagnostic testing for this coronavirus came too early, and it seems it has been produced in advance. As discussed, and warned by Bill Gates and former US president Obama in their speeches, however, when they were asked for justification for their statements, they did not give satisfactory answers.

This heat due to COVID-19 pandemic is converting into a pandemic animosity among nations and consumers. Unfortunately, this pandemic animosity has directions towards China, Chinese people, Chinese business, and Chinese products, as we have discussed the anger for Chines people around the world as Chinese companies are losing their market share during this pandemic. The hard stance is more prominent in the efforts of Trump administration to restrain Chinese telecoms giants, ZTE Corporation and Huawei Technologies (Oxford Analytica, 2020c). They are also involved in legislation to set tighter rules to limit the Chinese exports, especially the medical exports in the current scenario (Oxford Analytica, 2020f). Thus, this COVID-19 pandemic has been becoming an external threat for Chinese as well as Chinese business and exports worldwide (Oxford Analytica, 2020d), as a rise in racist abuse against Chinese, boycott to buy Chinese products and visiting Chinese restaurants in the USA, UK, France, Australia, India, and in many more countries across the world.

As Klein (2002) argues that aggressive consumers usually do not denigrate or distort the image of the products of a target country, they simply start refusing to purchase products of offending country. These findings underline that the consumers distinct their feelings of anger towards an offending country from their evaluation of products from that country. Moreover, various recent studies have investigated that the consumer animosity impacts negatively on evaluations of products made in offending/ hostile country as well as on their buying intentions (De Nisco, Mainolfi, Marino, & Napolitano, 2016).

It is important to remember that we live in a propaganda world. All media sources working around us have their agendas, and the truth usually takes second place in political matters to the acquisition of political power (Jakovljevic et al., 2020). Therefore, all news sources are somehow biased and must be critically consumed. Furthermore, it is vital to keep in mind that some highly irresponsible politicians have deliberately undermined confidence in science, in the media, and public authorities (Harari, 2020). Especially, social media, which is based on highly unreliable sources, is being used for propaganda and hate speech as a 900% rise in hate speech has been recorded only on Twitter (thenextweb.com, 2020). Besides, some hashtags being used by a lot of Twitter users against China and Chinese people such as #Chinavirus, #Kungflu, and #chinaliedpeopledied.

As an aspect of an increasingly acrimonious China-US relationship, the two governments have started a “tit-for-tat” escalation of restrictions against each other’s media groups. China’s idea of paying reparations for the COVID-19 pandemic could gain mainstream traction, and it will further sour the China-US relationship (Oxford Analytica, 2020e). Facts provide us clarity in uncertainty, facts give us comfort during anxiety, facts make people correct during the time of misinformation,
facts unite us when we are divided, facts matter most during the time of crisis, so facts and truth matter most for the betterment of the world. CNN, March 28th, 2020 (Jakovljevic et al., 2020).

3. Discussion
Unfortunately, COVID-19 has been generating animosity among people across the world, and this pandemic situation has been creating a feeling of hate and anger because people are losing their lives, jobs, businesses, they are suffering from depression and anxiety. Lockdown has created substantial economic losses in countries, which leads to a mass shortfall in revenues, and on the other hand rapid rise in budget spending for handling and managing the pandemic disaster situation is also creating problems for many countries. COVID-19 pandemic badly affected almost all sectors of the economy worldwide, it has created the significant threats for economy, growth, capital flows, the balance of payments, agriculture, industry, health, pharmaceutical, international relations, foreign policy, aid, foreign trade, foreign investment, regulation, immigration, airlines, transport, telecommunications, defense, technology, internet, corporate, election and many more, it can also provoke the activities of terrorism as the heat is increasing among nations, and China most probably is in a danger line because of pandemic origin. However, this situation has also created animosity feelings among people against the United States, too, especially in those countries that support Russian and Iranian narrative. Furthermore, COVID-19 has also created some opportunities, such as a rapid rise in online activities leading to an increase in demand for supporting businesses as well.

After winning the battle with the pandemic, China not only successfully restarted the economic operations but also started helping other nations in this panic situation through donating health care products and assisting countries by sending medical teams. China is at the forefront of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on its industrial base to boost production and exports initially to equipment-starved countries worldwide (Oxford Analytica, 2020b). However, this act of kindness has been misperceived by opponents as they perceived China is trying to take advantage of the pandemic by offer help to combat this virus (ceeol.com, 2020) and also trying to change the world order that can lead to more confrontation.

The more bilateral ties deteriorate, the fewer reasons for Beijing and Washington to retreat from confrontation during such a world crisis (Oxford Analytica, 2020b). This pandemic allows us to be united to fight with viruses for a better and safer world. Hence, it calls for China and the US to be more transparent about the source and spread of COVID-19. China and the US play a critical role in providing the rest of the world with data on COVID-19 related infections and fatalities. There are, however, widespread doubts about the reliability of the data that they supply (Oxford Analytica, 2020a). The leaders of China have the aim to stimulate local production, strengthen relationships with the EU (China’s most important trading partner) and reduce the risk of European firms withdrawing from the country as China knows the US and UK are losing their grip over EU (ceeol.com, 2020).

COVID-19 is altering our view of the world around us. It has questioned many of our ideologies: from socialism to neo-liberalism, from work over-relevance to work-life balance, and from globalization to nationalization. Nevertheless, we argue that the adverse effects of the pandemic on globalization are temporary and that in the long run, it will encourage more international cooperation among nations worldwide (R Yacoub & El-Zomor, 2020). Therefore, China should concentrate on the long run and employ more efforts to manage the confrontation situation with countries, especially with US, Europe, and India, these countries are the biggest markets of Chinese products. And also continue to help the rest of the world through possible means as well as by enhancing the production facilities to meet the potential demand of countries in this deadly
pandemic situation. Moreover, there is a need to face the anger and animosity with patience and skills to resolve the confrontations. However, with the passage of time in this deadly COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of economic war is getting more attention as well as the narrative of the human-made virus is also getting more support.

4. Directions for Future Research
COVID-19 has also opened the gateway avenue for future researchers in multiple disciplines of academia. However, the present study is focusing on the field of marketing and consumer behavior. Some of the exciting directions relevant to this pandemic situation are given; First, pandemic animosity has not gained any significant attention of scholars previously, though it has been used in tourism-related studies in the marketing field, this phenomenon deserves some qualitative and quantitative studies to investigate the impact. Second, a good country of origin image can play a critical role in controlling the animosity generated through the pandemic situation, too, so the present study suggests incorporating this phenomenon for future research. Third, in order to measure the more effectiveness of pandemic animosity construct, the cross-country comparison study can be helpful. Fourth, brand evaluation and innovativeness might be used to investigate the impact of pandemic animosity, especially on brands from emerging markets. Fifth, consumers’ positive attitude needs to be incorporated in studies for comparing both positive and negative consumer attitudinal aspects for investigation. Sixth, on the one hand, intra nation animosity deserves to be investigated to identify the negative impact and consequences. Seventh, on the other hand, strategic innovations in marketing and supply chain management activities during such global crises of the COVID-19 pandemic may also be studied. Last but not least, the role of media, including social media, must be investigated in the pandemic animosity framework.

References


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