A STUDY OF COVID-19 COGNITION ON LIKELIHOOD TO SHARE AGAIN: A PRO-ENVIRONMENT BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 induced crisis has been identified as the most disruptive event in recent times. Its manifold consequences have affected various disciplines, like marketing, organizational behaviour, management practices and including but not limited to consumer behaviour. There are studies on the magnifying effect, poor hygiene, lifestyle diseases like diabetes, obesity, air-pollution have on corona virus. Yet, the literature is lacking on understanding whether the consumer cognition of Covid-19 will lead them to adopt a pro-environment behaviour. In the present study the authors seek to research this understudied area. Based on Affective Events Theory (AET). Accordingly, post literature review, an online survey was conducted with the respondents being eligible only if they had engaged in sharing practices during the covid period. A total of 347 responses were deemed fit for analysis. Structural Equation Modelling is used to demonstrate the fitness of the proposed model. The analysis reveal that covid-19 cognition can be a factor to indulge in environment friendly sharing practices. This research, thus, bridges the gap between cognition of covid-19 related pandemic and the intention of the consumers to indulge in pro-environment behaviour.

Keywords: Covid-19, sustainable consumption, Affective Events Theory, Pro-Environment Behavior, Sharing practices.

INTRODUCTION

The continuing research into the reasons behind the worldwide spread of covid-19 has identified the environmental concerns like climate change, air pollution, unhygienic sanitation conditions as significant factors in contributing towards the high mortality rates (Shakil *et al*., 2020). The regions with long term exposure to suspended particulate materials like $PM_{2.5}$, PM_{10} have shown higher level of infections and related morbidities. While the said phenomenon is still under-study, a realization has dawned on the people that unsustainable consumption demands have negatively impacted the environment. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the pro-environment behaviour (PEB) operationalized as likelihood to share again through the prism of Affective Events Theory (AET) in New Normal world. The study aims to understand the consumer's response towards the nascent sharing economy practices like Uber, Ola, Airbnb, Couchsurfing, co-working platforms sharing their resources and infrastructure.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The current pandemic is perceived to have far-reaching consequences (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), leading to long-term structural changes (Sigala, 2020). The consumer behaviour across nations and segments are expected to change, in the form of patterns in consumption, working conditions, modes of mobility, entertainment along with the means of socialization (Romagosa, 2020). The present pandemic ought to impact the consumer lifestyles by bringing changes in spending habits, culture of consumption, an individual's values, and their traditionally held beliefs (Wen et al., 2021). This perceived change in the consumer behaviour requires an investigation of consumer cognition of covid-19 and its impact towards the sharing practices. The sharing practices have been identified as sustainable consumption i.e., pro-environment in number of studies (Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Ertz & Leblanc-Proulx, 2018). Michelini *et al*., (2018) determined that consumers, present and potential, are increasingly concerned with the effects of their actions on the environment, eco- sustainability, thus, they are more likely to be supportive of sharing practices.

The extant literature on PEB is largely based on the much-researched theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Yuriev et al., 2020). The TPB primarily emphasises on the impact of the individual's intrinsic psychological motivation on their behaviour. The TPB being based on the "*Rational Man*" hypothesis, ignores the irrational affective reactions factors (Ajzen, 1991) which are an important antecedent towards determining an individual's work attitudes and behaviour (Todorova et al., 2014). To determine the impact of affective reactions due to certain events Affective Events Theory (AET) provides an effective framework (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Weiss and Beal, 2015). Hence, it has been selected as the theoretical base of the present study.

AET postulates that an individual's event cognition leads to affective reactions (positive and/or negative) which determine their subsequent attitude and behaviour. Event Cognition has been described as an individuals' cognitive understanding of their relationship with the external environment (Weiss and Beal, 2015). Event cognition was further divided into i) Event relevance and ii) Event coping by Lazarus (1991). While the former emphasises on understanding the relationship between the events and human well-being, the later, i.e., Event coping, lays emphasis on personal resources and the tools and alternatives for coping with the event.

The relationship between event cognition and the behaviour is mediated by an individual's affective reactions. How the individual perceives the external environment, the effect it has on their attitude, choices and emotions has been described as Affective Reaction (Watson et al.1988). Bissing-Olson et al., (2016) distinguishes between positive environmental affective reaction (PEAR) and negative environmental affective reaction (NEAR). Positive affective reactions indicate the extent to which an individual feels enthusiastic, joyful, and alert, in participating in environment protection actions. Similarly, negative affective reactions are an individual's perception of their unpleasant experiences due to pollution, environment degradation and deterioration of quality of life due to these factors.

The previous studies on the AET researched the impact of internal events thereby ignoring the external events (Butts et al., 2015) which are a contributory to an individual's attitude, behaviour formation and subsequent decision-making. In present context, the COVID-19 pandemic, identified by WHO (2020) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), has a disruptive influence on the affective reactions and subsequent behaviours. Covid-19 may stimulate an individual's PEAR in the form of enthusiasm, encouragement, and interest to protect the natural environment; simultaneously, an individual may experience negative

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environmental affective reactions like anger, worry, and guilt due to their own and others destructive behaviour towards environment, which exacerbated the pandemic situation Figure 1.

Therefore, we examine possible changes in individuals' pro-environmental behaviour in light of covid-19 pandemic, using Affective Events Theory. Recent research (Malik et al., 2018) has empirically demonstrated that individuals can modify or adjust their values and/or behavioural tendencies to manage their concerns or anxiety arising out of either natural or human-made disasters. These behavioural modifications can be in different forms including the recognition of need for a healthy lifestyle. Thus, the individuals may opt for adopting sharing practices. Likelihood to share again which is considered as PEB. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H_{1a} *COVID-19 Event relevance cognition will have a significant effect on positive environmental affective reactions*

H_{1b} *COVID-19 Event coping cognition will have a significant positive effect on positive environmental affective reactions*

H_{2a} *COVID-19 Event relevance cognition will have a significant positive effect on the negative environmental affective reactions*

H_{2b} *COVID-19 Event coping cognition will have a significant positive effect on the negative environmental affective reactions*

H_3 *Positive environmental affective reactions will lead to likelihood to sharing again (PEB)*

H_4 *Negative environmental affective reactions will lead to likelihood to share again (PEB)*

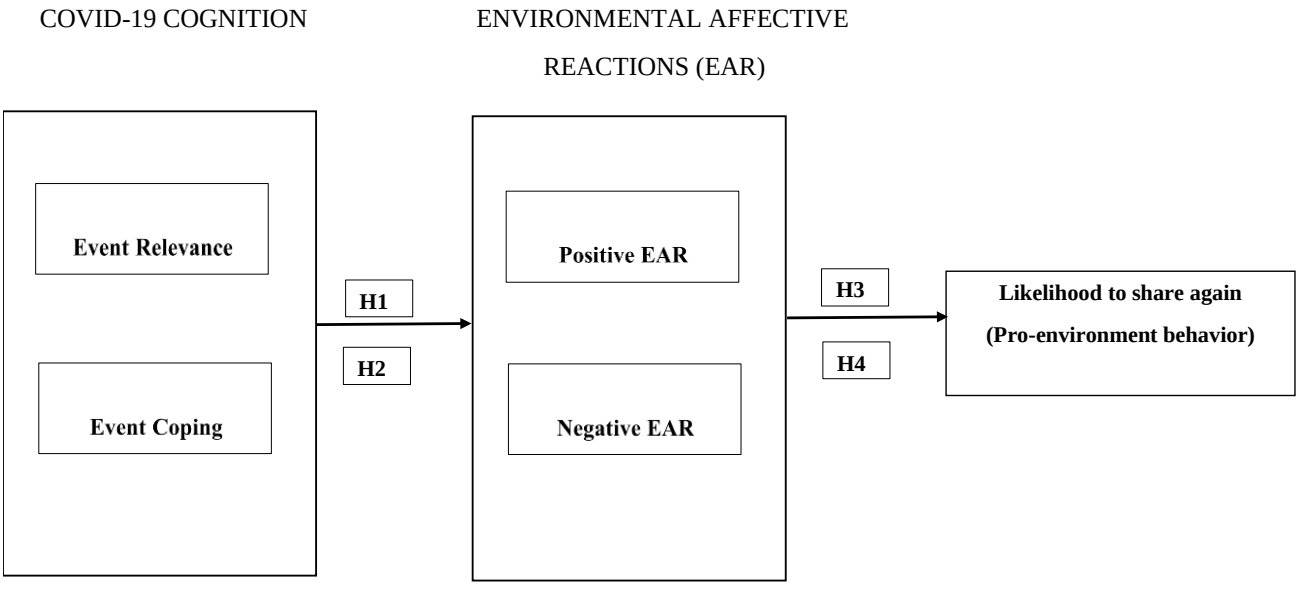

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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RESEARCH DESIGN

The Quantitative research methodology was applied. An online questionnaire was mailed to approx.800 prospective participants in India. Out of these 347 responded who had experienced the sharing practices during peak covid -19 phase April 2020 to May 2021. The sharing practices were defined as Uber, Ola cab services and Oyo Rooms. SEM was used to analyze the results.

The constructs of the study are based on pre-studied scales. The authors altered the items in accordance with the COVID-19 emergency. All variables were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Scale Items: Covid -19 cognition

The scale of COVID-19 emergency cognition includes two dimensions: Event relevance and Event coping. The items for both have been adapted with suitable modifications from Lazarus (1991) and Folkman *et al*., (1986). The same were modified based on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Environmental Affective Reactions (EAR)

The scale for EAR was developed by Watson *et al*., (1988) and Lazarus (2006, 1991), and the authors of the study modified the same to understand sharing practices consumers' environmental affective reactions toward COVID-19.

Likelihood to Share Again (Pro-Environment Behaviour)

The authors adapted the scale from study by Lamberton and Rose (2012) for understanding the respondents' intention to share again Tables 1 & 2.

Table 1
SCALE ITEMS

S. No.	Variables	Items
01.	Event Relevance (ER)	COVID-19 emergency hindered my achievement of important goals in my life (ER1)
		COVID-19 emergency threatened my health or safety (ER2)
		COVID-19 emergency hindered my achievement of important goals in my work (ER3)
02.	Event Cognition (EC)	I can protect myself from the threat of COVID-19 emergency (EC1)
		I can overcome the inconvenience or difficulties in my life brought by COVID-19 emergency (EC 2)
		I can cope with the inconvenience in my work caused by COVID-19 emergency (EC3)
03.	Positive Environment Affective Recognition (PEAR)	I am inspired that COVID-19 emergency cognition has prompted the public to pay attention to the ecological environment (PEAR 1)
		I am happy about the measures taken to combat wildlife trade during COVID-19 emergency (PEAR 2)
		The cognition of COVID-19 emergency makes me proud of my past actions to protect the ecological environment (PEAR 3)
04.	Negative Environmental Affection Recognition (NEAR)	The cognition of COVID-19 emergency makes me feel angry about the destruction of the ecological environment by others (NEAR 1)
		The cognition of COVID-19 emergency makes me scared

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		about the consequences of environmental damages (NEAR 2)
		The cognition of COVID-19 emergency makes me feel worried about the current situation of the relationship between human beings and nature (NEAR 3)
		The cognition of COVID-19 emergency makes me feel guilty for neglecting wildlife protection in the past (NEAR 4)
05.	Likelihood to share again (LSA)	How likely would you be to choose sharing option like Ola/Uber next time you need to travel
		I would prefer sharing option to driving my own car
		I will most likely prefer using a sharing option instead of purchasing a car

Table 2
RESPONDENTS PROFILE

S. No.	Variable	Number	Percentage
01.	Gender: Male	203	58.5
	Female	144	41.5
02.	Age: 18-29	119	34.3
	29-39	138	39.8
	39-49	64	18.5
	49+	26	7.4
03.	Frequency of sharing transactions:		
	Less than 1 a week	126	36.3
	1-5 a week	163	46.9
	More than 5 a week	58	16.7
04.	Occupation: Student	109	31.4
	Employed	216	62.2
	Retired	22	6.3

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Table 3
RELIABILITY & VALIDITY ANALYSIS OF THE VARIABLE

S. No.	Variable	Item	Loadings	Cornbach α	CR	AVE
01.	Event relevance	ER1	0.684	0.856	0.971	0.666
		ER2	0.829			
		ER3	0.866			
02.	Event Coping	EC1	0.921	0.759	0.843	0.552
		EC2	0.842			
		EC3	0.588			
03.	Positive Environment Affective Reaction	PEAR1	0.642	0.912	0.916	0.775
		PEAR2	0.786			
		PEAR3	0.663			
04.	Negative Environment Affective Reaction	NEAR1	0.716	0.843	0.745	0.682
		NEAR2	0.835			
		NEAR3	0.856			
		NEAR4	0.534			
05.	Likelihood to Share Again	LSA1	0.769	0.935	0.874	0.532
		LSA2	0.682			
		LSA3	0.889			

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Table 4 HYPOTHESIS RESULTS		
Sr. No.	**Hypothesis**	**Result**
01.	H1a	Supported
02.	H1b	Supported
03.	H2a	Supported
04.	H2b	Supported
05.	H3	Supported
06.	H4	Supported

Theoretical Contribution

The study expands affective events theory's (AET) by including the cognition of external events or emergencies which have effect on internal work events. It is applied to establish the relationship between the current pandemic and PEB. Thus, a unique perspective for promoting pro-environmental behaviour has been identified in the study Tables 3 & 4.

Practical Contribution

The acceptance of the sharing practices is becoming increasingly crucial due to concepts like 'dark side', 'share-washing' (Aloni 2016) which refer to exploitative and disruptive economic nature of these practices. Covid-19 provides a unique instance where due to its contagious nature, fast spread, lack of information and vaccination during the initial stages, the governments and business organizations had to take drastic steps like full/partial lockdowns, social distancing, quarantines etc. These measures go against the very premise of the sharing practices.

Therefore, the potential consumers/sharers cognition and reaction to the pandemic needs to be studied. The study contributes to the PEB of the sharing practitioners during the pandemic times. Thus, will have practical managerial implications for the business organizations.

Limitations

The study being conducted during pandemic times was able to reach urban population only, hence, may have an urban metropolitan bias since the respondents are majorly from Delhi-NCR.

Secondly, as Prayag (2020, p. 179) explained, 'pandemics are not new'; The previous studies during SARS, Ebola outbreaks did highlight crisis and short-term impacts on different organizations and business models. Therefore, the findings of present study in the context of covid-19 may be ineffective during any subsequent crisis.

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