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Coronavirus Outbreak to Accelerate Household Wellness Trends

By Media Eghbal
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This article is part of a series on COVID-19 focusing on how the outbreak is affecting industries.

Even before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic hit the global economy, consumers around the world were bringing wellbeing in-house, turning to new technologies and trends in the health and wellness industry. Drivers of the household wellness trend included the Millennial desire for experience and self-improvement, rising technology, and broadband access, resulting in consumers choosing to cocoon at home, fewer children (a decline in children per household globally, from 1.4 in 2000 to 0.9 by 2040), allowing for greater discretionary spending, and a dramatic shift in attention to mental wellbeing. With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing many to remain at home for protracted periods, and “cocooning” being further strengthened by quarantines and lockdowns, at-home wellness trends are accelerating:

- Quarantined consumers are embracing digital wellness products and content.
- COVID-19 health concerns are impacting areas such as mental wellbeing, nutrition, and at-home healthcare for the elderly.
- Stuck at home during lockdowns, consumers want to feel more comfortable in their household, increasing demand for home and garden wellbeing products.
- With a global recession looming on the back of the COVID-19 impact, frugal-friendly cocooning trends will only strengthen.

Quarantined Consumers Embrace Digital Wellness Products and Content

Many of today's home wellbeing trends, from using digital appliances to researching wellness trends online and ordering goods via internet retailers, are a result of digitization.

Internet-enabled products and services worldwide are seeing massive spikes in demand as consumers seek to pass the time during virus-enforced lockdowns and social distancing measures, fuelling demand for at-home fitness products and services:

- US fitness specialist ClassPass, which has expanded its focus on home-based classes, has seen a jump in subscriptions throughout March and April 2020.
- Orders of Mirror, a USD1,495 fitness full-length connected device that comes alive with an LCD panel, stereo speakers, camera, and a microphone, have also spiked throughout the 2-month period.

The fitness market will not move to the household wholesale, but it will embed habits and open up the segment to adoption among new audiences, making it a more widely accepted and mainstream activity.

Mental Wellbeing Rising in Importance in Light of Pandemic Effects

Rising anxiety levels during the pandemic are turning more consumers towards goods that can help with mental wellbeing. This is creating demand for home-based over-the-counter (OTC) sleep aid devices, especially as many health-conscious consumers are avoiding sleep aids that include the

Associated Wellness Markets

Health and wellness food and beverages

Global retail value of USD743bn in 2019, with growth of 10.2% in real terms since 2014

OTC sleep aids

Global retail value of USD3.0bn in 2019, with growth of 27.8% in real terms since 2014

Air purifiers

Global retail value of USD4.9bn in 2019, with growth of 34.7% in real terms since 2014

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ingestion of chemicals. There are many kinds of devices that purport to improve consumers' ability to both fall asleep and remain asleep, as well as improving the quality of rest. These include specialized mattresses, such as US-based bed specialist Eight Sleep's Eight Smart Mattress, which includes a tracker that provides daily analysis of a sleeper's quality of sleep.

Examples of rising usage of mental wellbeing services during the virus outbreak include:

- US-based TalkSpace, an online therapy company, reported at the end of March 2020 that the volume of users on the platform was up by 25% since the middle of February.
- US mental health chatbots Wysa (based in the UK) and Woebot (based in the US) have also seen usage go up significantly throughout the February-March period.

Nutrition More Important in Improving Immune Systems During the Pandemic

Nutrition has become a major influencing factor across household kitchens as consumer concerns over obesity and health rise throughout the pandemic. In particular, demand for immunity boosting foods and vitamins to ward off pandemic symptoms is on the rise:

- At the end of March, UK-based health and beauty retailer Superdrug stated that stocks of immunity-boosting vitamins had run out due to massive consumer purchases
- In mid-April 2020, on Amazon.com, 17 of the top 20 vitamin category products sold were immune related.

With more consumers taking up at-home fitness and healthier lifestyles to boost immune systems, personal nutrition demands have also focused on pre- and post-workout fuel, niche personal preferences like vegetarianism or health-focused diets, and a desire to consume in-trend superfoods like turmeric, kefir, and kale.

At-risk Older Consumers Turn to Remote Healthcare

With older consumers particularly vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 and many are too afraid of infection to visit a hospital for treatment of other ailments, telehealth (remote healthcare at home) will be instrumental in reimagining healthcare. A variety of health-focused sites, apps, and wearables are enabling users to gain health and diet information from their sofa. These markets are lucrative due to the rapid growth of household heads aged over 60 years, set to account for around one-third of all household heads by 2040.

Examples of rising remote healthcare solutions include:

- Current Health, a US maker of an armband device that remotely monitors vital signs, said that the number of US health systems the company is working with jumped by 50% in the second half of March 2020.
- Many healthcare companies worldwide have updated their algorithms to create chatbots that help screen users for COVID-19 before they visit a hospital or clinic.

Pandemic Shifts Home Wellness from Early Adoption to Mass Market Potential

The idea of the home as a wellbeing hub will be strengthened significantly on the back of the pandemic. The short-term impact of quarantine measures will transfer into long-term adoption across numerous wellness markets. Some segments, such as digital fitness and remote health devices, will receive the necessary push to move them from an early-adoption phase to mass-market appeal.

With an expected global recession in 2020, products deemed as luxury, such as high-end supplements, expensive superfoods and home décor, will suffer as household purchasing power decreases. However, other services, such as affordable subscriptions in digital fitness and value-added healthcare devices, may see stable and even rising demand as consumers stay home and cut back on discretionary spending outside of the home. ■

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