

Chapter 15

Peruvian Consumer Responses to the Use of Technologies in the Context of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has led many states, in an attempt to control the spread of the virus, to decree social immobilization, which meant the introduction of restrictions on the free movement of people and the opening of shops. This led them to seek new marketing channels for purchases. Among these, ICTs have been important. This is the focus of the analysis in this document. Through surveys and interviews, information was obtained, divided into four age groups, which showed that an important part of the population has had to resort to ICTs to acquire goods and/or pay for services. This change in the way of acquiring had different particularities according to the age group analyzed, with a greater change in the oldest group (56 to 74 years old). It can be concluded that the massification of these tools has generated a change in the ways of acquiring products, and this is likely to transcend the pandemic and these channels will be maintained and strengthened in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, the assimilation of technology in productive processes and supply chains is still limited, and there is also a digital divide, presenting this as an obstacle for important sectors of the population, affecting rural areas to a greater extent because they have greater limitations in access to and use of digital technologies; situations that have had a strong impact on the relationships between individuals, creating new means through which they interact with their environment in different ways. Some of these spaces are the ways in which people consume and/or acquire the goods necessary to satisfy their physical and/or spiritual needs. Therefore, “digital infrastructure is a fundamental component in maintaining economic resilience” (CAF Development Bank of Latin America, 2020, p.17).

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has shown that the Peruvian state and its population were not prepared to face crisis situations at this level, showing a strong vulnerability in many sectors. The importance of this chapter lies in the fact that it provides an understanding of the dynamics that exist in developing economies, where a large number of the population still does not have access to or feels culturally distant from the use of digital tools for consumption and/or the sale of products. All this information will serve the sectors involved in the planning and elaboration of public policies that will help strengthen the implementation of activities and provide better conditions for value generation.

This analysis is based on the city of Arequipa, which “is the second pole of industrial development in the country, highly diversified with a base made up of leading companies producing consumer goods, inputs and capital goods of national and regional scope” (Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 2016, p.13). Regarding the economic aspect, in this same department 95.8% of the companies are “Micro” (INEI, 2014), most of which have been affected by the isolation measures imposed by the government to face COVID-19.

In this context, companies have not been able to carry out their productive activities normally, which has led to a significant drop in their income. This socio-economic situation will have a direct impact on the increase of precarious employment, informality and poverty levels. As a result, many people who were entering and establishing themselves in the emerging middle class could return to poverty. This would add more people to the informal sector of the economy, which already accounted for more than 70 per cent before the pandemic. The largest informal sector is the commercial sector, which is seen as a refuge for workers in other sectors. All this shows that these people and businesses will have to reinvent themselves commercially to survive, just as consumers have to connect to new channels to acquire the goods they need.

It is possible that the effects of COVID 19 have drastically changed the purchasing habits and mechanisms of Arequipa’s consumers, which is why this document aims to micro-analyse consumers’ responses to the use of information and communication technologies. In this sense, we assume that this has required, on the part of consumers and producers, the use of a set of information on the proximity, quality and availability of products, and of the universe of possible consumers on the producers’ side as well. We also consider the tendency to replace unsophisticated information equipment with devices that allow access to networks and web pages, together with access to an internet connection that facilitates the connectivity of the agents involved.

The research carried out is non-experimental, exploratory and descriptive, with the use of qualitative and quantitative tools, through the application of convenience sampling, aimed at people living in the city of Arequipa, Peru, of different age groups classified as follows: between 10 - 24 years old, 25 - 40 years old, 41 - 55 years old, 56 - 74 years old.

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