



# Game Changers in India during the Covid-19 outbreak.

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**Abstract:** Covid 19 has been a disrupting phenomenon for the entire world whether it is in terms of life, business or mental well-being. However it has also acted as a great catalyst to boost creation and innovation in all fields. The paper talks about the ways in which industries have adopted to this virus either through innovation or a change of strategy. The paper also highlights the change in consumer behaviour and its impact on the society.

**Keywords:** India, Covid-19

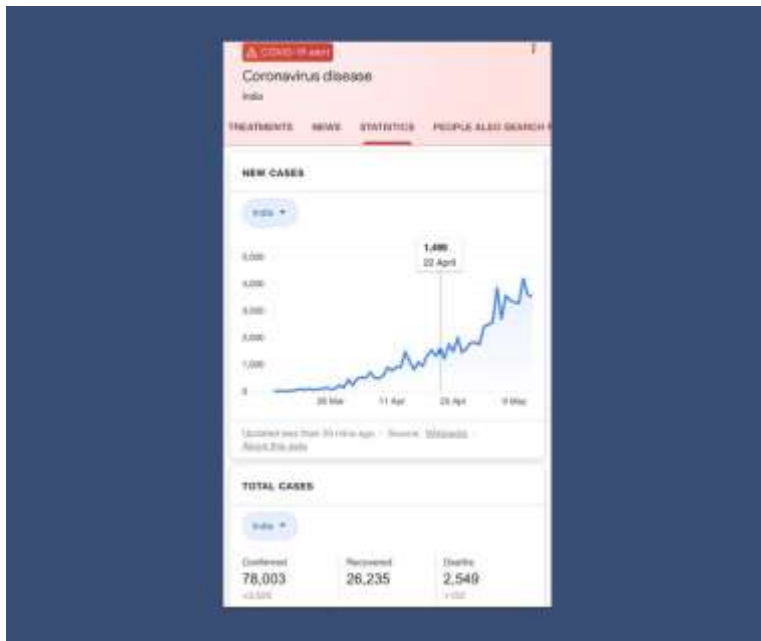
## 1) INTRODUCTION

COVID 19- A version of coronavirus that created a whirlwind in more than 200 nations across the globe. It has been the biggest disruptors of life and economy throwing the world into a frenzy. In India, around 70000 positive cases and 2200 deaths have been confirmed (as of 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020). This pandemic has changed the world's outlook towards existence and operation for good.

Covid-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has since spread globally, leading to an ongoing pandemic. It is claimed that the virus originated in the wet market in Wuhan that sells all kinds of animals for human consumption including rare species. This market usually lacks hygiene which is why it is easy for viruses present in one animal to transfer to another if they're kept side by side or one below the other. This is how multiple versions of coronavirus were passed on to humans (SARS and COVID-19). COVID-19 is a type of coronavirus that is usually found in flying mammals i.e. bats. Bats are sold in these wet markets in Wuhan. It is believed that the virus was transferred from a bat to a pangolin which was then consumed by a human resulting into this person now becoming the carrier of this deadly virus. Every time this person sneezed, touched an object or made contact with another human, minute particles of this virus got transmitted into that object/ person thus making other people sick. Some of the people who contacted this virus happened to travel overseas thus spreading the virus to other countries.

The impact of Covid 19 on India has been enormous since we're a country with a population of 1.3 billion. As this is a contagious virus, the government of India enforced a nation-wide lockdown on 24<sup>th</sup> of March as a preventive measure. Even though the decision taken by the government was prompt, proactive and wise, it could still not eradicate the virus immediately.

Graph 1.0: Worsening situation in India



Graph 1.0 shows the timeline of the virus in India. Number of cases and deaths have only been increasing day by day and no sure shot cure/ vaccine has been identified. The death toll has worsened due to poor health infrastructure and limited accessibility to hospitals for the poorest of the poor. The government facilities are already overburdened with patients and have been forever underfunded.

During the period of lockdown the government has stopped transport services, closed all factories and offices and restricted mobilization. The pandemic has created one of the largest recessions that the world has ever seen. There is a decrease in production and people are panic buying, product prices have increased, income have decreased and employees are being laid off, import and export has stopped, the unorganized sector has been affected the most, schools have shut down etc. The sudden wave of disruption has forced every industry to reinvent its presence to remain productive and connected.

## 2) REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A) Innovation in a time of crisis

Crisis generate great opportunities if harnessed correctly. The needs and wants of the people change during a crisis leading into a shift in the market.' Necessity is the mother of innovation' and hence a crisis can be a great source of innovation for all of mankind. Crisis present us with unique conditions that allow innovators to think and move more freely to create rapid, impactful change. There are three key shifts that occur during a crisis that foster the conditions for new thinking and doing.

- Unification for a purpose- Crisis can manufacture the organizational courage that is needed to take measures in support of a purpose that would be unthinkable in times of calm. During crisis, failure is not an option. The workers usually have a lot of built up energy during these times. If channelled correctly towards a single purpose, it can help the organization to innovate something beyond what exists in the status quo.
- Unfreezing of the organization- As organizations bloom, they solidify their structures to create predictability, efficiency, and stability. Crisis changes all of that. Supply chain management, production patterns, inventory/ stock levels etc. have to be changed with a change in the market conditions. This may include more production and bypassing certain positions in the hierarchy for faster outcomes thus changing the nature of the functions of an organization.
- Fast-paced action- The pace of ideation, decision making and implementation increases drastically in the times of a pandemic. No one knows what the solution to the problems might be or whether a certain innovation will be a hit or a failure. Hence organisations need to allow free thinking and fast experimentation. If they succeed then they'll be the market leaders in innovation and if they fail then they will have time to try other things.

These shifts can make or break an organization. It is in these times that the leadership skills of people in power are tested. These shifts can help the organization to use the resources wisely and not just survive but potentially change the market scenario in their favour.

Crisis provides a trigger to think differently. When people are put in an uncomfortable and undesirable environment that's usually beyond their comfort zone they strive to change for better. They get motivated to change their means and ways by adapting to the given condition thus leading to innovation.

#### B) Lessons from Chinese companies' response to Covid-19

- Be transparent- Most of the leaders were more direct, frank and personal with their communication. This meant that some employees may disagree but in order to overcome the dissatisfaction, they gave everyone a larger goal that brought them all together- 'we are all in this battle together, fighting the same enemy'.
- Structural changes- Most Chinese companies usually followed a top-down approach. This resulted in numerous approvals at many levels. During the Covid crisis, many employees saw the role of middle level managers diminishing thus accelerating the pace of decision making.
- Evaluation of employee performance- The pandemic gave the top-level management a unique opportunity to evaluate the mid-level managers and view their ability to adapt to changing times. The crisis forced leaders to delegate work to their team so that they could focus on the larger picture. The ones who couldn't adapt to this change, failed.

### 3) METHODOLOGY

#### I. Secondary data collection-

- Referred to:
  - Various news articles
  - Studies published by relevant associations, government sources and international organizations
  - Websites and reports of the relevant organizations
- Motive:

To know the market trends. While the scope of primary research is limited because of the contacts one may have, secondary research provides a large database and easy access.

To know the recent developments in technology, social sphere etc.

#### II. Primary research

- Took personal interviews of people who were facing the brunt of the virus and were relevant to that particular topic.
- Motive:

Deeper insights. It is difficult to interpret the intensity or specific of certain things by just reading newspapers. Personal interviews give an in-depth knowledge of the topic being researched.

#### 4) WORK FROM HOME

As the name suggests, work from home stands for transferring the work that employees do in an organization to a digital platform from a physical one which allows them to work from wherever they want including their own homes. Thanks to the ever-evolving technologies like skype, zoom, google duo etc. it's no longer necessary to be physically present in an office to be a productive member of the team. The near universal ownership of cell phones and availability of personal computers have improved the overall connectivity and efficiency thus bringing the world closer. WFH has turned out to be a silver lining to the whole calamity. It has now become the new normal. It helps to facilitate social distancing and self-quarantining. By opting for work from home, employees not only protect themselves from the pandemic but also save on travelling time. By transforming from analogue to digital, one is no longer held back due the existence geographical boundaries thus expanding global reach. A proper digitalisation plan can help to reinvent processes, improve quality and maintain overall consistency in an organization. It enables decision makers to have access to all the information anytime, anywhere, using any device that they want. It also helps to reduce costs thus giving organizations a better chance at survival in the times of recession. As the need for economic productivity continues, a home-based workforce may be our best chance at growth.

In terms of creating a social impact, work from home might come handy. Before the pandemic a lot of people faced problems in managing their work life balance. Most of them weren't able to give enough time to their children, parents, spouse, friends, work and then remove some time for themselves. This affected their productivity at work, their relations with their family and their mental health in the long term. WFH gives them some leave way of time and allows them to restructure their schedule in order to have a better balance in life.

Women are another stakeholder that have been benefitted from this. In a country like India, women have been more vulnerable than men due to the long history of patriarchy and gender discrimination. They are usually the ones who have the sole responsibility of doing the household chores leaving them with very little time and energy to anything else. Women are always burdened with the idea of their responsibility being towards the maintenance of their home more than anything else. Due to all these reasons, women have been the most vulnerable stakeholders. WFH enables these women to seek employment and work at their own comfort. It allows women to opt for part time jobs, target oriented jobs, jobs with either flexible or fixed timings etc. This empowers women by encouraging them to work, be independent and earn for themselves.

While the flexibility that work from home presents is excellent, it has its own set of challenges. Many-a-times communication with peers and clients can be misconstrued too. Sometimes co-workers may be unresponsive to certain channels of communication or may just take a very long time to revert back. This keeps delaying decision making. On the other hand, emails and texts cannot necessarily give one a sense of clients' approval and appreciation or any reflection on the job performance. This affects employee performance since they do not get accurate feedback.

#### 5) VIDEO CONFERENCING APPS

Video call is trending amid the covid-19 outbreak. Overnight offices have become deserted places. Home is the new workplace and remote working is the new norm. Similarly, bedrooms have become the new classrooms and distance learning is the new style. To facilitate these changes, online apps have turned out to be a saviour. They allow people to conduct meetings, conferences, lectures, training programmes etc. online. This helps people to be productive even in the middle of a pandemic.

Online video calling apps include skype, zoom, google duo, face time, whatsapp etc. These apps are accessible from cell phones and laptops both. Most of these apps are available for windows, android and IOS. Along with video calling they also have an option to chat and share their screens. These apps are freely accessible to users who work in small groups. For larger groups, a fee has to be paid.

The outlook for the video conferencing app industry started long before the current pandemic. While temporary growth in stock price may be grabbing the headlines recently, an upward growth pattern was already in place. The global video conferencing market size was valued at 3.85 billion U.S. Dollars in 2019 and is predicted to touch a CAGR of 9.9% from 2020 to 2027.

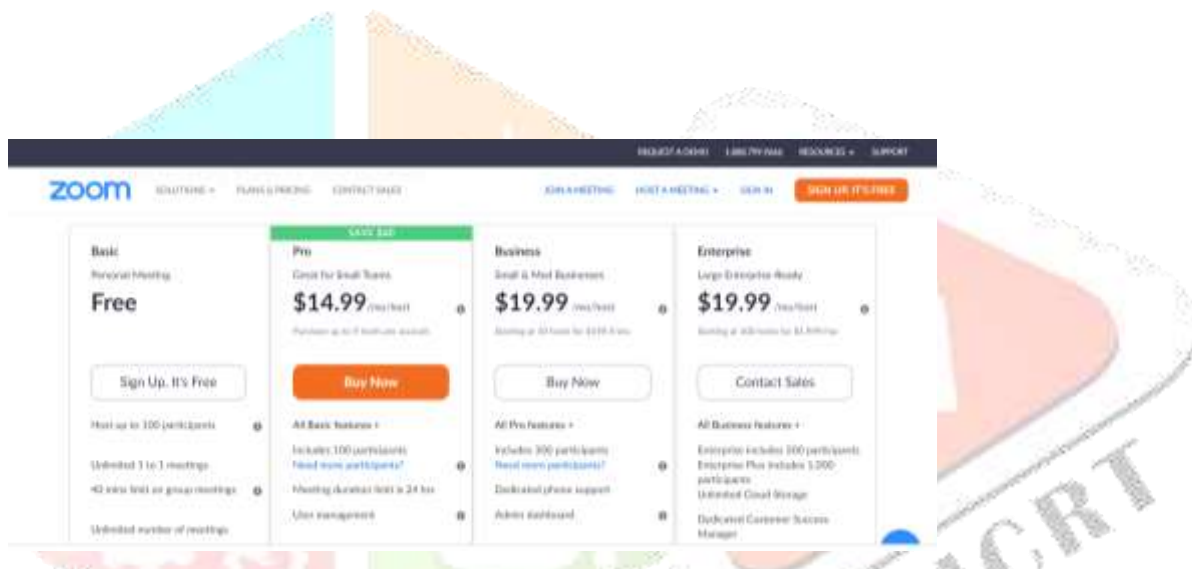
The imposed travel ban has forced enterprises in foreign markets to adopt video conferencing software for maintaining business continuity. Several companies are implementing innovative employee training & recruitment processes through video calls. In addition, government authorities are using video conferencing services for connecting with healthcare professionals and administrative bodies of other countries. Due to a loss of human contact, people at large are contacting each other through these apps to keep in touch, talk and play games while they see and talk to each other.

However, all these apps come with their own set of difficulties. There are a lot of software and hardware problems. Some people don't know how to operate these apps and solve the technical errors due to which a lot of time is wasted in solving the problem. The obvious threat of cybercrime still exists despite the security.

### Case study zoom

Zoom was founded by Eric Yuan who used to be the vice president for cisco Webex. When more competitors started emerging in the market, Eric felt the need to upgrade the product however his superiors gave him a deaf ear. Frustrated by this, he left Cisco in 2011 and took 40 engineers with him. Eventually they built zoom and launched its software in 2013 and an IPO in 2019.

### Zoom's pricing model



Zoom has priced its services lower than its competitors. Currently it is trying to focus on acquisition along with revenue. Lowering the barrier of entry, increases the number of customers.

### What makes zoom the leading video conferencing app in today's times?

- Unlike the rest of the players in the market, zoom is very consumer driven. They constantly update themselves so that it's easy for the consumers to use their product. They take feedback from consumers and actually act on it.
- It is a scalable business model and that's the reason why investors are drawn towards it. It became scalable because it figured out how to get more efficient at key processes like selling, marketing, service, and product development as it got bigger. This shows up in its numbers - for instance, in the year ending January 2017, operating expense to sales was 79% - the same as in January 2019. Meanwhile, Zoom's margin of profit (gross) increased from 79% to 82%.

Zoom has had its own set of problems of security and privacy. Zoom bombings in which hackers invade chat rooms to engage in racist language and aggressive threats, still exist. These bombers are able to enter into meetings and violate the privacy of the users due to the lack of security protection.

Hackers have also been able to invade meetings, exposing corporates to the risk of their trade secrets being leaked.

### Innovation challenge for development of video conferencing solutions

Zoom has had pressing security concerns recently. The government has cautioned the Indian users because it is being used by some of the best companies within the country. Zoom was earlier disallowed by Google, Tesla and the Taiwan government.

To tackle these concerns, the government of India has launched a challenge for all the tech developers of India to make a video conferencing app. The registration for the same started on mygov.in website on 13<sup>th</sup> April and ended on 30<sup>th</sup> April. The app must include but may not be limited to the following- the app should work in low and high network scenarios, should have low power usage, should work on all devices, should have a chat and multi people conference option, should have proper security etc. The results will be announced in July and the winner gets to take home a sum of Rs.1 Crore.

## 6) EDUCATION

Sometime in the second week of March, state governments across the country began shutting down schools and colleges on a temporary basis to prevent the spread of covid 19. This was a crucial time for the education sector since board exams, entrance exams, other competitive exams etc. are usually held in this period. Since the lockdown continues, all these exams have been postponed.

The structure of schooling and learning for the remaining students has changed too. They have adopted to online teaching methods on various video conferencing platforms. However, it is seen that e-learning could effectively only be adopted by private colleges since they have the resources to pay for meeting that are conducted on various video conferencing platforms and they also have other resources like internet connection and a laptop/ cell phone through which they can operate. Low-income private colleges and government colleges have unfortunately been non-operational for the time being. The government has also been unable to provide meals to children who had been enrolled in these schools like it promised to do when it launched the mid-day meal scheme.

The pandemic has significantly disrupted the secondary and tertiary education sector as well. Most of the students who were planning to go abroad have stalled due to the risk of life and availability of flights. Thus, there is a decline in the demand for overseas higher education which might affect the skill set and economic, social and cultural development of the country.

The larger concern, however, on everybody's mind is the out-turn of the disease on the employment rate. Recent graduates in India are dreading withdrawal of job offers from corporates because of the present-day situation. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's estimates that the unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April.

On the bright side, students are now encouraged to expand their existing knowledge base by utilising the free time and enrolling for online courses that may be relevant to their field of specialisation. This includes courses on platforms like udemy, edx, coursera etc.

### Diksha

Diksha is an e-learning portal launched by MHRD for smooth and hassle free interaction between students and teachers. The portal helps teachers and students alike. For teachers, it gives them various training programmes, helps them to improve their skills, shows their career progression etc. Students are now able to revise the lessons that were taught in class, solve practice sums and get immediate feedback and find additional reference matter on this portal.

Diksha is one of the best things that the government could think of in a situation of chaos to facilitate learning. This platform solves all the problems (of expense, accessibility and security) that arise in other modes of online learning. The government however lacks in the implementation part of this initiative due to which it still hasn't become a massive success. This platform, if implemented correctly, could change India's outlook towards education.

Fig 2- Complaints regarding the implementation of the app.



## 7) SOCIO-CULTURAL GAME CHANGERS

### A) Rise in martial terminology

In the context of covid 19, martial terminology is an umbrella for words like corona warriors, fighting an invisible enemy, frontline warriors etc. These terms have been widely used since the pandemic has started and are usually used to represent essential workers like doctors, nurses, garbage collectors, people sewing masks etc. It usually symbolises those people who put their life in danger to serve the society at large during a pandemic and without whom we cannot function normally on a daily basis. The usage of such terms has become more common than ever now-a-days. Every newspaper article or even a whatsapp forward uses these terms. The amount of discourse has increased to the extent that people have now understood the value of essential workers. They have started respecting the person to collect the garbage, the nurses who were otherwise taken for granted, the house help etc. These people otherwise do not get respected in the society due to their race, caste, class or socio-economic background. Martial terminologies have become a unifying identity that transcend other identities like race, caste etc. One now gives these people the same amount of validation that they would've given a soldier for protecting their lives. This collectivised identity has helped these essential workers to stop being discriminated in the society. It has also helped them to garner the resources that they may need to carry out their duties e.g. - various business have contributed money so that doctors can buy the necessary equipment. It has also helped them to build up political capital which they can use in the future to lobby the government to pass better laws for them or they can now at least hold the government accountable for not looking after their basic needs like safety, minimum wage etc. This social and political capital is something that lacked before the pandemic or the rise of martial terminology.

### B) Recognition and redistribution of unpaid labour

Unpaid labour is the labour that is not recognised in the market and doesn't received any remuneration. It usually includes household work like cleaning, cooking, doing laundry etc. that is done by family members or mainly women in the Indian context. Unpaid labour is one of the main reasons for gender disparity in India. It has historically been very difficult to change the perception of men towards unpaid care because they have never done this kind of work in their entire lives. However, covid 19 does present a unique opportunity in this aspect. Due to the lockdown, everybody has been confined to their homes and most of them do not have maids at their house due to the crisis. This has resulted into the excess work being redistributed amongst family members. While women still do the maximum amount of work, men and children have atleast volunteered to help in areas like doing laundry, fetching groceries, sweeping etc. Even though this doesn't solve the problem of women being burdened all the time totally,

it atleast paves way for breaking social norms. When children see their father working is when they'll grow up to help in the house themselves.

## 8) CHANGE IN CONSUMPTION OF CHINESE & INDIAN PRODUCTS

The current unprecedented war-like situation has bought the world to its knees irrespective of their power and status. Due to the financial loss and loss of lives that every country is facing, every country has developed a resentment towards China (even if they may not outright blame China). While most of the countries are trying to survive and sustain, China's power starving communist strategists are seeing this as an opportunity to grab the first spot in international trade surpassing the USA. However trust and fear are two major factors that will play a role here and possibly be the reason why China won't be able to succeed with such communist policies.

Trust- Countries like Spain, Britain, Australia, Turkey and Netherland have raised a huge alarm for receiving substandard and faulty medical kits and supplies from China amid COVID-19 crisis, which is a huge question mark on the quality of the products coming from China. This will injure the "Made in China" brand image even further.

Fear- Traders, Businessmen and intermediaries in India and the world started realising how volatile it could be in dealing with China. They also are a part of the suffering and would at least think twice in the future before blindly going to China for everything and anything.

The suffering of this magnitude is hard to be forgotten. In the days to come, consumers would not want to pay such a heavy price in the bargain for easy/cheap options. Fear and loss of trust have resulted in a negative brand perception and that's exactly how Chinese products are getting affected right now.

How does this benefit India?- India has extended all the possible support and help to many countries including the USA, which gave a major boost to our international image. All this would certainly build the positive perception and improve the brand value of "Made in India". It's an opportunity for India to take the big leap in manufacturing sector and international trade.

Containing the virus will undoubtedly be the chief priority of nations across the world in the next few months, or perhaps, even years. This will have a powerful negative impact on the demand for Chinese labour force in the international markets, since the virus was first reported in Wuhan, China, and widespread perception of it as the originating country will severely limit the inflow of human capital from China. Additionally, the ensuing strained diplomatic ties of various nations with China would add to this effect. This phenomenon could potentially lead to a substitution of Chinese labour by the Indian labour supply due to- India's advantageous demography with one of the world's largest working age populations, it's natural comparative advantage in the IT and services sector, digital trade enhancement post the pandemic and finally, India's amicable diplomatic ties with the major investing countries worldwide.

Vocal for local- China succeeds in boosting its economy through trade not only because it is one of the largest exporters of goods in the world but also because it is one of the largest consumers too. Even though the Chinese will still consume 'made in China' products, India can motivate its citizens to consume 'Made in India' products thus becoming one of the largest consumer markets for Indian goods. This will also decrease India's dependency on imported Chinese goods thus creating a more self-reliant (atma nirbhar) market.



## 9) SHIFT IN MARKETING AND CONSUMER CONTENT CONSUMPTION

### MARKETING

Marketers usually try and appeal to a person's irrational desires by creating an emotional appeal through their ads. However many people will now question the rationale behind paying for brand reputation or for a non-essential product. This quarantine has rationalized the human mind to an extent that marketers will now find it difficult to get their customers to behave irrationally. The marketing strategies will need to be completely rehashed to adapt to the new mind-set. Mere reputation will not work. Brand communication strategies will now have to focus on purpose to ensure goodwill of its patrons. Brands that invested in building a reputation over the years will finally succeed in garnering the attention of potential investors and sustaining their place among their competitors. Marketers too would need to reset their strategy or be ready to brace the impact.

How are marketers currently marketing?

There has been an influx of branded coronavirus emails. These emails don't look like "marketing" at all in the first go. Few overtly advertise products. However, they're a part of larger email marketing and branding strategies as they provide practical information, the emails also brand their parent companies as reliable, sanitary and ethical to restore the faith of the consumers.

This wasn't always the case, but what consumers want, what regulators will allow, and what brands have the budget for — basically, the entire economy — has shifted since the pandemic began.

### CONTENT CONSUMPTION

There has been a shift in the consumption patterns, media usage, purchase behaviour and overall marketing and brand trends in India, in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak. It impacts businesses, consumer sentiment and behaviour and the response of brands.

Television ratings which has been on the decline over the past year has now experienced an exponential jump because of Coronavirus –related news. The trend is in conjunction with other Asian markets like China and Korea.

It is seen that the time spent by an average user is over 4 hours per day as compared to 1.5 hours which was the initial time for the usage of social media.

While Amazon Prime Video and Netflix—the two giants in the OTT market in India—have refused to reveal the kind of surge they have witnessed, the fact that several big ticket films are now lined up for OTT release instead of theatrical ones, is proof enough of the rise in their respective subscription bases. Even traditional movie-goers, who vouch for a film because of the star's name will now get onto the OTT bandwagon. While most films get a digital release, it usually happens after the theatrical run is over. With a lack of options, cinema-goers will also latch onto the OTT platforms.

## 10) CONCLUSION

The virus is a strong reminder of how little it takes to make everything uncertain. India changed overnight as the virus awakened. Having exposed society's dysfunction, the Covid 19 crisis invited us to rethink our future with respect to work, education, communication, cultural norms, ways of spreading awareness, marketing, travelling etc.

It has shown the capability of our leaders. It is an invitation to make radical changes in the economy, our social behaviour and the role of government in our lives.

In such a time of crisis, human intelligence, behaviour and motivation have proved that innovation can have no boundaries. People have made ways to sustain and progress even in such a situation by adopting to the circumstances.

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