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WINNING THE COVID WAR AS RESPONSIVE MALAYSIAN CITIZEN: SOCIAL CONFORMITY, SOCIAL COMPLIANCE AND SOCIAL OBEDIENCE

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Abstract

Covid-19 (also known as Corona virus) was detected initially at Wuhan, China, has spread to over 200 countries across the globe. This deadly virus is a threat to mankind as it has killed more than 300,000 and infected more than 5 million people globally. Declared as pandemic by World Health Organisation (WHO), momentum is accelerating to speed the development of coronavirus vaccines. Research indicated that this virus is airborne; a person on close contact may get infected from the droplets produced from the infected person during sneezing or coughing. As the virus is given medical attention to cure the infection, equal attention is given to the social aspect to break the chain of Covid. Prevention measures become crucial where many countries have taken unprecedented measures to stop the spreading of virus by implementing lockdown and social distancing. Lockdown and social distancing are out of norm social conducts, thus adopting them instantaneously and adhering to them at all times are indeed incredible. This study explores social conformity, social compliance and social obedience of responsive citizen in Malaysian context to win the war against Covid.

Keywords

Social Conformity, Social Compliance, Social Obedience, Social Distancing, Covid-19

1. Introduction

“Stay at home”, “Social distancing”, “Hygiene” and “Online” have been the mantras during Covid situation. Covid was a global phenomenon and winning the war against this dreadful disease was an uphill battle. Corona virus was initially identified at Wuhan, China end of 2019 with the symptoms of flu, cough, sore throat and difficulty in breathing. While the world watched China in handling the disease, the virus started to spread to all continents. The impact was enormous where total infections and deaths outside China outnumbered cases in China. World Health Organization (WHO) has declared Corona Virus as a pandemic in March 2020 and named the disease as Corona Virus Disease 2019 or COVID-19. More than 5 million people globally infected with this deadly virus and more than 300,000 people globally have died due to this virus (as of this article written, 23 May 2020). Medical experts and scientists have been diligently working to produce vaccine for this disease however, yet to have any outcome (De Vos, 2020; Elkbuli, McKenny & Sen-Crowe, 2020; Worldometer, 2020).

Malaysia was no exception to this virus, more than 7000 infections and more than 100 deaths recorded (as of this article written, 23 May 2020). The steep growth in the infections in March and April shook the entire nation and increased the fear on this virus. This deadly virus was detrimental to socio-economy of all nations, impacting financial, manufacturing, aviation, tourism and many other industries and resulted in unemployment, changes in academic calendar and other issues. Aligned to the declaration of corona virus as pandemic by WHO, Malaysian government announced Movement Control Order (MCO) mandating lockdown of all sectors except essential services. It was an approach to reduce mobility of people to stop the spreading of virus. Everyone was asked to stay at home which initiated work from home and school from home, utilizing the online platform. Social distancing of 1 meter in public, wearing of face mask and frequently sanitizing hands were emphasized to be adopted as new lifestyle (Malaysia Ministry of Health, 2020, n.d.). Please refer to figure 1 for guide from Malaysia Ministry of Health in preventing transmission of corona virus.



Figure 1: Preventing Spreading of Virus (Malaysia Ministry of Health, n.d.)

2. Social Behavior

While medical has its own role to play, corona virus emerged as a societal problem involving global community. Spreading of virus due to close contact is inevitable, thus social distancing became a mandated requirement. As the virus was airborne, wearing of mask, hand sanitization and frequent washing of hands also became subset of the requirement.

Social distancing is where usual distance is expanded to a recommended distance. In the context of corona virus, as recommended by the medical experts, 1meter distance was recommended between individuals which is believed to reduce the spreading of the virus. Work from home, distance learning and temporarily halt of public engagements, leisure activities and travelling were among the community level measures imposed to reduce close contact and break the virus chain. Aviation came to almost a complete stop. In Malaysia, non-essential sectors were shutdown resulting mobility of community to a standstill. Social distancing is highly potential to reduce new infections, thus allowing adequate attention to save patients in critical condition. Social distancing has been established as a realistic solution in which entire community is able to participate while reducing the spread of the virus, indirectly winning the case against corona virus. (De Vos, 2020; Elkbuli et al., 2020; Wu et al. as cited in Elkbuli et al., 2020).

Along with social distancing, personal hygiene was also cascaded as recommended measures and in certain places it was made compulsory. Reading temperature, hand sanitization, frequent washing of hands, wearing of mask and food deliveries practicing contactless deliveries were among the safety measures implemented for further protection and reduce the chances virus spreading. Those returned from overseas and those found to be in close contact with existing positive covid cases were quarantined to avoid them from being source of spread and treated promptly.

As responsive citizens, applying rational mentality to adopt the measures into lifestyle and complying with the process are extremely crucial to win the war against this deadly virus. This rational adoption can be viewed in 3 aspects, conformity, compliance and obedience. When an individual placed in a group, the person will exhibit conformity by observing group actions and adjusting their behavior and beliefs accordingly to fit to the group norm. Compliance is seen from the dimension of change being intentionally initiated in response to request from external source. An individual will initiate act of obedience responding commands from an authority

figure (Fabrigar & Norris, 2012). This study identifies the social behavioral reality in the acceptance of the social distancing and safety measures in the context of conformity, compliance and obedience to break the virus chain.

3. Objective of the Study

3.1 Research Hypothesis

Societal behavior is the core element that determines success in stopping the spreading of the virus. There are 3 hypothesis formulated in this research:

- a. H1 : Society can accept the new lifestyle norms at home and in public to go along with the community, demonstrating social conformity
- b. H2: Society can act in accordance to the cascaded safety measures for Covid situation, demonstrating social compliance.
- c. H3: Society can accept standard operating procedure (SOP) by the government and responds to law enforcement orders, demonstrating social obedience.

3.2 Research Objective

This research will meet objectives stated below:

- a. To examine society's acceptance of new lifestyle norms at home and in public to go along with the community, demonstrating social conformity
- b. To examine society's conduct in accordance to the cascaded safety measures for Covid situation, demonstrating social compliance.
- c. To examine society's acceptance of SOP by the government and responding to law enforcement orders, demonstrating social obedience.

3.3 Research Questions

This research will respond to questions below:

- a. Can society accept the new lifestyle norms at home and in public to go along with the community, demonstrating social conformity?
- b. Can society act in accordance to the cascaded safety measures for Covid situation, demonstrating social compliance?
- c. Can society accept SOP by the government and responds to law enforcement orders, demonstrating social obedience?

4. Methodology

This study was conducted as an exploratory study in the social aspect of the pandemic and complemented with qualitative methodology. While the threats and the spreading of the virus have become a common, the social related measures are new adoptions by the community, thus the public became the target audience in this research. Onsite observation was selected as the technique to discover the reality of adherence to social distancing, upholding of hygiene and pre-requisites mandated at public places. This technique also provided opportunity to understand the inclination of public in practicing the measures required in the SOP.

On 30 April 2020 onsite observation and review on the adherence to the mandated actions and reactions were conducted at the wet markets, supermarkets and grocery shops and interview was conducted with students on their perception on Covid. Pre-requisite before entering markets and grocery shops, directives inside the premise with marks, restrictions in entering business premises, notices from the traders to the consumers and involvement of law enforcement front liners upholding the SOP were among the observations done.

With regards to students, interview technique was applied primarily to probe their understanding on corona virus, the new lifestyle of staying at home, learning from home and practicing the safety measures. As the students were from different age category, the interview was conducted in conversational mode to enable them to explain their perception on Covid.

5. Analysis

Based on the interview with the students, they have done their own study to know about the deadly virus, how it is transmitted, and diseases related to this virus. They unanimously agreed that corona virus is a dangerous virus and staying at home as the most appropriate action to keep everyone safe from the virus. Students look forward for school holidays to take a break from studies. However, lockdown is something new for them. They miss their school, miss playing with friends and miss all external activities. Confined within the brick and mortar, students feel bored of repeating the same activities. They also felt online learning as overloading. However, they are willing to let go their routine and favorite activities, stay home and continue the online learning due to the awareness on this virus. They have stressed the importance of complying with the safety measures, washing and sanitizing hands, wearing face masks and social distancing. They have implanted obedience in their minds to adhere to such measures to

stop the spreading of virus. Student demonstrating hand sanitization has been provided in figure 2.



Figure 2: *Student Demonstrating Hand Sanitization*

Government has also established restrictions and guidelines or SOP to be adhered in public places. Observation was done at a wet market in the town of Changlun, Kedah, a place daily visited by many people. Movement of people and interaction with the traders are unavoidable. Everyone is required to adhere to the SOP and Malaysian army has been tasked to manage adherence. Entrance and exit are separated. As shown in figure 3, everyone is required to wear mask, to be in queue with 1-meter distance, got through temperature reading, sanitize their hands and finally enter the market. People are to follow the marked points, as shown in figure 4, at the stalls and walkways to enable the distancing of 1 meter. Police was placed inside the market to monitor the public movement and adherence of the SOP.



Figure 3: *SOP managed by Army*



Figure 4: *Marked Points inside the Market*

As shown in figure 5 and 6, in a visit to a supermarket, similar SOP was noticed, i.e. wearing of mask, taking temperature, sanitizing hands and additionally, token is given to each customer entering the supermarket. Floors are marked to enable distancing of 1 meter. Traders displayed notice mentioning entry will not be allowed for customers without mask. There were certain outlets in the supermarket allowed limited customers such as 5 at a time. Certain traders arranged for external counters to take orders, pick the items and hand it over to customers upon payment done.

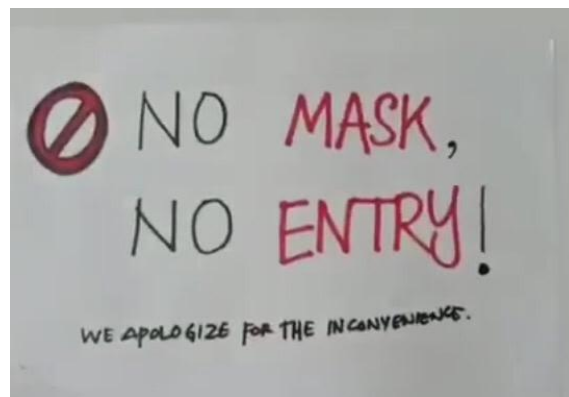


Figure 5: *Prohibiting Entry without Mask*



Figure 6: *Temperature Taken before Entering Trading Area*

Based on the visits and observation at wet market, supermarket and grocery shops, public was seen to be adhering the SOP, following guidelines, wearing mask, sanitizing the hands and keep the social distancing. Due to the awareness on the deadly virus, to avoid infection and in the community spirit to stop the spreading, everyone complied to the SOP and pre-caution measures. Such obedience was seen collectively and everyone was playing their roles accordingly.

To ensure people are mobilizing for the right reason, roadblocks were set up at certain cross points to validate reason to leave home. As of this video is done, only 1 person allowed leave home, travel within 10 KM radius, permitted hours 8am to 8pm, provide a valid reason such as purchase goods or medical or authorization letter from the employer and compulsory to have mask. Police was tasked to handle the roadblocks accompanied by army. While many adhered, there were summons issued by the police to those did not comply to the rules.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The onsite observations and testimony of students have clearly answered the question, what do we do as responsive citizen to win the Covid war. As responsive citizens upholding 3 behavioral aspects, social conformity, social compliance and social obedience proven to be the success factors in combating the spreading of coronavirus and winning the war collectively as one Malaysian community. Taking initiative to understand the Covid situation and adopting the new lifestyle norms were seen happening at community level. Everyone complied to the pre-caution measures at the public places and possessed documents required by the police for mobilizing. Citizens demonstrated obedience by adhering to travel reasons, travel distance and the allowed travel timeframe. Sustaining conformity, compliance and obedience have evinced positive results in the reduction of total cases and deaths due to corona virus.

Winning the covid war as responsive citizen can be further expanded to investigate financial crime such as fraud, scam, money mule and other cybercrimes as criminals and fraudsters might take advantage by offering work from home packages to earn income in this uncertain situation. Stay home, stay safe.

7. Acknowledgment

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