

Will COVID Pandemic Induced Resurge in Immunity Booster Consumption Drive an Unethical Business Practice?

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Opinion

Currently, we are experiencing the biggest catastrophe of this century in the form of a new health crisis, COVID-19 pandemic. Inexorable escalation in incidence is adding criticality in bed occupancy and availability of skilled manpower [1-4]. Silent attack, zero therapeutic option and inestimable waves have compelled to implement 'social distancing' to break the contagious infection chain of Covid-19 [3]. Our normal life was in deep crisis with respect to accesses and affordability. It has shaken our belief, tested our patience and has challenged our fundamental existence. 2020 and 2021 has evidenced the helplessness of this progressive civilization. Under such circumstances, subjective behavioral changes offer promising avenues to increase morbidity and reduce mortality [5-10].

Health product purchase is a function of normative influence, health awareness, perceived behavioral control, and perceived value of health information [2]. Further, health awareness may motivate individual to improve or maintain their lifestyle by engaging in healthy consumption [1]. Immunity boosters, health products that contain one or more nutritional substances or drugs, have shown an exaggerated trend of sales growth in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Branded packaged immunity boosters were fetching mounting interest of average individuals due to preventive health [9]. Even, Google trend analysis observed massive search regarding all forms of "Immune boosting" that has turned into a trending topic of social media during the pandemic. Moreover, hashtag (#) immune booster became the buzz word of social media between April and May 2020. COVID-19 outbreak has a strong bearing on adoption of traditional health care practices. The panic concerning the pandemic seems to be creating social misguidance in future [6]. Covid-19 brought 'infodemic' of misinformation [10].

False post of Twitter, YouTube and Facebook increased by 59%, 27% and 24% respectively and 29% of such messages were misleading at the onset of the diseases [7]. Infodemic and social media guided medical pluralism has mediated as catalyst in the mushroom growth of immune booster brands. Moreover, the pandemic has synergised the consumption of alternative and indigenous medicine owing to its immunity-boosting measures [8]. Public were engaged in consumption of both homemade and readymade immunity boosters. Herbal and natural immunity boosters, vitamin C, multivitamin tablet, wellness pure herbs became popular on the outbreak of current health crisis [1]. Since the outbreak, pharmaceutical corporates are promoting several vitamins and minerals as savior through social media hype to fulfill their commercial interests. Exaggerated consumption of turmeric powder (five

times), besides milk derivative food drinks and honey has also been observed. Even from a declining trend in 2019, Chyawanprash, the traditional immune builder of Indian origin has bounced back from a negative growth to a whopping 132% in 2020 [5]. The trend is more visible among geriatric population.

The surge in inorganic growth of sales in immune boosters is the outcome of the attitude to escape COVID-19 infection. The prime objective is survival rather than growth. Perceived value of individuals has shifted from growth mindset to the issues of self-existence or sustenance [4]. Pandemic pumped a socially inclusive behaviour during the crisis. Panic driven minds are in a state of fear mongering. Subjective senses are experiencing a goal conflict. Public fear psychosis is the backbone of this irrational growth of immune booster industry. COVID-19 pandemic may bring several changes in perceived value of utility. Under such backdrop, 'Health in all policy' is imminent. Medicine and treatment will subjectively get first preference. Health or healthy lifestyle will be considered as a new term of purchase. With predatory intention, synthetic immune boosting brands of pharma corporate will inorganically prosper following this emerging trend of misguiding. So, brand narration, advertising copy will show a new unethical pattern.

A soft crime is hibernating in silence. It is the time for action, not for words. Sustenance of such myth of super-activity of these immune boosters can be encased if not objected by scientific evidence-based validation. In addition to subjective vigilance, multimodal approach from all the stakeholders of medical fraternity can protect the world community from the evil effect of such unethical means and motivate conscious consumption. A digital repository of immune boosters can function as a guide for right action. When the commercial objective is busy in its absolute

fulfillment by inspiring subjective nonsenses, let both the clinical and paramedical community actively engage to do justice for the prospective victims.

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