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PEOPLE NOW WEAR MASKS: IS IT THE OUTCOME OF INDIVIDUAL'S PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE BEING SAFE?

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Abstract

Human psychology influences individual's decision where numerous factors can be used exploiting the decision in the 21st business-mentality world. But this approach was missing addressing the severity of the COVID-19 crisis while it was spreading globally country-wise. Most countries like Bangladesh were not prepared meeting the challenges. Addressing the issue, they started with traditional-approaches namely lockdown and no-mask no-service etc. However, a large population nationwide had ignored the restrictions. However, no effort was given for convincing people, making them for understanding and then makes appeal for peoples' actions etc. rather using traditional approaches. Today there is no lockdown and no restriction in place. But small percentage of the population wears masks. This *dichotomy* in result raises question: Is it the outcome of individual's psychological influence being safe? This study scrutinizes the answer using the Consumer Choice & Behavioral Theory lens. Thus, it concludes that some factors such as perceived risk, being see of consequences, messages through media and feelings of responsibility & safety out of self-consciousness etc. play significant roles in today's *scenario*. Since most people are risk-averse, utility analysis of the factor(s) of psychology influence such as individual's understanding about severity, knowledge etc. are dominating today's *scenario* where expected utility leads mask-wearing today. Thus, the policy-proposal ratifies that utilization the techniques of convincing people rather imposing command & control could

have undercut the number of deaths. Welfare analysis of the policy-proposal can lead to future study on today's *scenario*.

Keywords: COVID-19 crisis, traditional approach, convincing approach, today people live with business-mentality, peoples' understandings are powerful, effective management

JEL Classification: I10, I11, I12, I15, I18, I19

Introduction

After severely spreading for a while globally country-wise where most countries like Bangladesh were not prepared meeting the challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is over now. Thus, no country has now traditional approach such as lockdown and shutdown crowded spot(s) provision in place (The Daily Star, 2022; Rahman, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). There is no requirement for wearing mask and maintain distance country-wise such as Bangladesh.

Today world is no free from consequences of COVID-19, but it feels like to be in normal stages just like any other health disease issues. So, there is no lockdown law in practice. Today here it is seen that some people wear masks and keep distances in their movement even through there is no lockdown law in place. No law enforcement entity is on the streets and holding weapons targeting for violators of lockdown laws. These are the realities of today's human society in Bangladesh. In this progression, no developed countries are exception (Nicholas , 2022; WHO, 2023). There are many probable reasons for the decline of masking. This might include there is no lockdown laws in place, no pandemic fatigue – a justified belief that the worst of pandemic consequences is behind us and the removal of mask mandates provisions.

However, there are many people, obviously a small percentage of total population country-wise wear mask. This dichotomy raises question: whether the lockdown law had resulted *wearing-mask & keeping-physical-distance* during the severity of COVID-19 Crisis country-wise such as Bangladesh? More specifically, today there is no severity of pandemic consequences, but some people still wear mask, which raises question: Is it the outcome of individual's psychological influence being safe?

This study uses the Consumer Choice & Behavioral Theory lens for scrutinizing the answer to the question posed.

This journey begins with elaboration on what had done country-wise such as Bangladesh addressing the severity of COVID-19 consequences. Then it looks at

“what could have done” for addressing the severity, which could have undercut the number of deaths or could have saved more lives. Finally, “what could have done” as a policy-proposal is being cross-examined in this study.

What had done country-wise such as Bangladesh?

Government initially began its efforts with travel-restrictions, social-distancing-measures, shutting-down academic-arena and finally imposing lockdown-laws in Dhaka city and slowly beyond. Besides this, government-initiated testing & treatment of COVID-19 patients in government and in some private hospitals and clinics across the country. Since then, the number of infected individuals were gradually increasing. However, this journey began with wrong signal to public. The DGHS under MoH was responsible giving approval to service providers conducting COVID-19 tests. The JKG Healthcare was one of the approved service-providers. It was engaged producing fake test-reports and issued forged “Covid-19-certificate” (Rahman, 2021a; 2021b, 2021c). It got further ugly. The JKG was secretly led by physician Sabrina Arif Chowdhury who was officially employed as Government Surgeon under the DGHS. This Sabrina-ism of the DGHS has polluted the *entire* healthcare-service sectors (Rahman, 2021b). In this process, few like Sabrina, became the money-suckers at the frontline. In the process, the DGHS was becoming money-making machine and MoH was watching the Sabrina-ism. So, the COVID-19 became a blessing for the parties involved with the costs of the public during the pandemic crisis.

This Sabrina-ism *dilemma* would not take place if the government had started its journey with modern-approaches (Rahman, 2021b). It includes convincing people, making them understand etc. using the 21st Century multi-media technology for inspiring people for moral responsibility rather sticking with policy of command & control. Rather engaging in criminal activities, the Sabrina gong would have engaged with moral responsibilities. Sabrina gong would have extended official-duties to its fullest where government’s modern-approaches including showing COVID-19 consequences using multi-media would have inspired them. It would significantly serve for awareness about COVID-19 consequences, which would influence people psychologically for using mask for self-protection rather forcing to wear mask and what not.

Despites these multi-phases behaviors, it is recognized that government’s policy “no mask, no service”, which was established sometime near the end of the critical situation, was for inspiring the people for sharpening peoples’ moral-responsibilities addressing the pandemic-crisis for the survival. This is because a society is a system that organizes interactions between individual and diverse groups in a viewpoint for its survival through legal and moral standards. On legal issue, punishment can be imposed based on Court decision. On morality issues,

leadership can impose sanctions on individual misbehaves. Thus, in this case “no service” can be seen as a sanction or punishment on individual who does not follow social rule such as wearing mask.

However, no government-effort was seen in practice that ensures modern-approach. Despite having access to multi-media communication facilitations in the 21st Century digital era, no effort was seen on convincing people, making people for their way understanding consequences and taking preventive-measures from own desire. Thus, people were not eased taking their own decision in aim to avoid perceived risk.

What could have done country-wise such as Bangladesh: Policy proposal in case of facing similar challenges in the future?

Government could have used approaches for convincing people, making them for understanding and then make appeal for peoples’ actions etc. rather using traditional approach. This is because the 21st Century human-society is a society of business-mentality where individual’s psychological influences can play significant roles in their choices (Howard, 1991). In this case, individual’s thoughts, feelings, and other cognitive characteristics can influence his/her behavior, attitude, and functions of his/her mind. These factors can effect on human thinking and afterward they also affect his decision-making in daily life. Thus, from the first stages of COVID-19 pandemic crisis, government country-wise could have preferred convincing approach over command-control approach. This is because solving this kind of problem requires a sense of responsibility, I mean individual responsibility. It requires coordinated-efforts and pragmatic-collaborations with stakeholders, which could have been an effective management for effective-outcome. But it was missing in government’s efforts.

This policy proposal “what could have done” is being cross-examined as follows.

It is well recognized that people do make decisions based on own benefits where people’s psychology influences for doing it meeting the needs or demands on daily basis. Many of our actions are influenced in ways we do not even realize. These influences can be a wide array of things including the words, persuasion, witnessing something, creation of self-consciousness and body language of others, which cause our psychological influences for doing it. Even a mild persuasion for doing good things can have a substantial impact on us, which means that individual or organization or government entity too can use persuasion to influence the behaviors of others.

It is assumed that promoting any positive messages effectively can enhance people’s understanding about their own benefits, which can influence people psychologically for doing things such as wearing mask and what not in case of

pandemic or any other situation for individual or society's better-ness. Since this understanding comes through self-psychological influence based on promotional efforts of others, it is powerful and stick with individual in human society. In this sense, today's wearing mask even there is no lockdown provision in place, people wear mask for its own safety where the individual psychology has played significantly in decision making process wearing mask.

Model

Since we live in the 21st Century Digital *Era*, persuasive techniques or efforts can be promoted in multi-faucets for influencing individual's psychology so that s/he does it for its own benefits. In other words, this mathematical model (Rahman, 2020) can be written as follows.

Psychological influence = $f(\text{Persuasion techniques for } \textit{mask wearing})$

$PI = f(X_1, X_2, X_3 \dots X_n)$ where

PI = Psychological influence

X_1 = Use loaded words & images of consequences (say dead-body's pics of COVID-19)

X_2 = Get your foot in the door – reach out everyone in multi-faucets – TV / Radio / drama / movie etc.

X_3 = Creation of self-consciousness - feelings of responsibility & safety associated with wearing masks etc.

X_4 = Utilize power of reciprocity (free mask distribution, no mask no service etc.)

X_5 = Create a need by having provision in place *e.g.*, lockdown, arrest / penalty Including monetary for violation etc.

X_n = many more factors that are not included above

Even though there are no provisional requirements or no lockdown in place country-wise such as Bangladesh, comparatively a smaller percentage of the population in human society wear mask. Here an individual wears mask based on his / her psychological influence saving self.

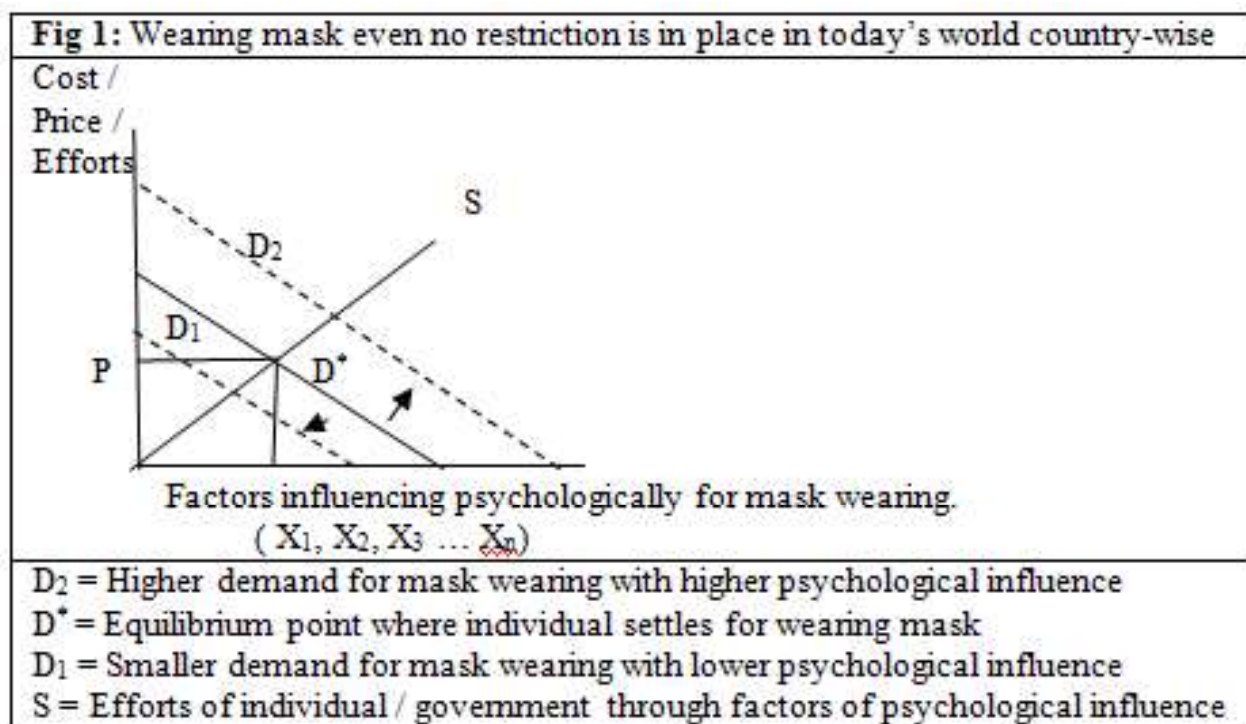
In this instance and in many other similar ones, knowing how to take advantage of human psychology to persuade others can be a valuable tool when necessity arises. So, in instances of *mask wearing or maintaining distance* and in many other similar ones, knowing how to take advantage of human psychology to persuade and then act accordingly can be vital when it is needed most. During COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it could have saved more lives country-wise such as Bangladesh.

In other words, in the 21st Century business-mentality world, lockdown law could have been the last options for convincing people psychologically for mask wearing and keep distance in their way daily lifestyles.

Today's dynamic societies, less governable by old methods of command & obedience, may set and achieve both individual and broad social goals by enhancing decision-making capacities of individuals where authority's efforts can be vital on promoting individual's psychology for doing or not doing it. For example: environmentally responsible behaviors of human in society can ensure pollution free environment where individual's psychological influence can be significant for getting it done (Rahman, 2000; 2022). Such a change would mean a radical break with past as well as with most prevailing governance models.

Setup & notation:

Today no country has active lockdown provision in place. However, a small percentage of population still wear mask. These people are stimulated by their own psychological influences for the decision wearing mask where their knowledge particularly experiences, observations, etc, are the factors that play vital roles.



Demand for factor(s):

To further simplify the exposition, we assume that mask is not free of cost. So, in this case, meeting psychological demand, people spend money, which is price or cost of the factor of psychological influences, in this case knowledges particularly experiences, observations etc. So, these factors can be denoted as *demand for factors* for adequate psychological influences. During COVID 19 crisis, there were TV advertisement, announcement etc. for wearing mask where some cases masks were distributed free of cost. So, these all then served as factors for individual's psychological influence. So, these factors then were in demand.

Supply and equilibrium:

Based on the current situation, individual himself supplies the factors of psychological influence for wearing mask now a days. However, during the crisis, provision such as lockdown, TV advertisement, announcement etc. served as factors of psychological influence for wearing mask where agencies or entities such as government supplied the factor(s) of psychological influence for wearing mask.

To characterize equilibrium, we have made first assumption that there exists a price \bar{p} such that $D(\bar{p}) > 0$ and $MC(p) < p$ for every $p > \bar{p}$. In other words, it is assumed that factor(s) of psychological influence are beneficial and efficient to those with the highest willingness to pay for it, which makes the individual being safe.

Fig 1 shows that a small percentage of population country-wise such as Bangladesh settles at point D^* where demand for mask wearing (being safe) = efforts of the individual for individual's psychological influence. In other words, point D^* represent the equilibrium point where $DD = SS$. This is the *scenario* of today's world where there is no restriction or lockdown law in place for mask wearing but some people wear mask based on individual's own efforts on his or her psychological influence for decision of mask wearing.

Since the proposed model begins with psychological influence = $f(\text{Persuasion techniques for mask wearing})$, here individual's current knowledge about the severity of pandemic crisis as well as knowledge about safety measure, a small percentage of the population has decided to wear mask.

Utility assessment of factor(s) that resulted psychological influence wearing mask.

Today in human society some people wear mask outside home even though there is no restriction imposed by government country-wise. It is clear now that perceived-risk factor plays influential roles in setting up the stage for individual's decision to

be on safe side where individual's psychological influence convinced him or her meeting self-demand no matter what surrounding people think about it.

It is palatable assuming that most people in most of the time are risk-averse in general, *i.e.*, they prefer certainty to uncertainty when it comes own health issue where individual's understanding about severity, individual's knowledge etc. are important. Fig 2 illustrates the risk preferences of a risk-averse individual.

In today's world of uncertainty, an individual's actual utility that s/he receives from the factors (say X_1 = Use loaded words & images of consequences) that create psychological influence for mask wearing where $PI = f(\text{factors that promote level of influence})$ will never fall on the TU (X) but on the chord (the bold line) (Rahman, 2018) as shown in Fig 2.

X_g , in Fig. 2, represents a service outcome of the factors of PI in which individual may use a certain level of factor-service X while X_f represents a negative outcome in which individual may use less of factor-service X. If there is a level of uncertainty that an individual may not use X_g units of the factor-service X, the utility that this individual receives will lie somewhere on the chord (the bold line). The chord represents the expected utility (EU) of using factor-service X, which lies in the concavity of the curve because it is the average probability that the individual will use factor-service X or not. As a result, an individual will never receive TU (X_a) but rather EU (X_a).

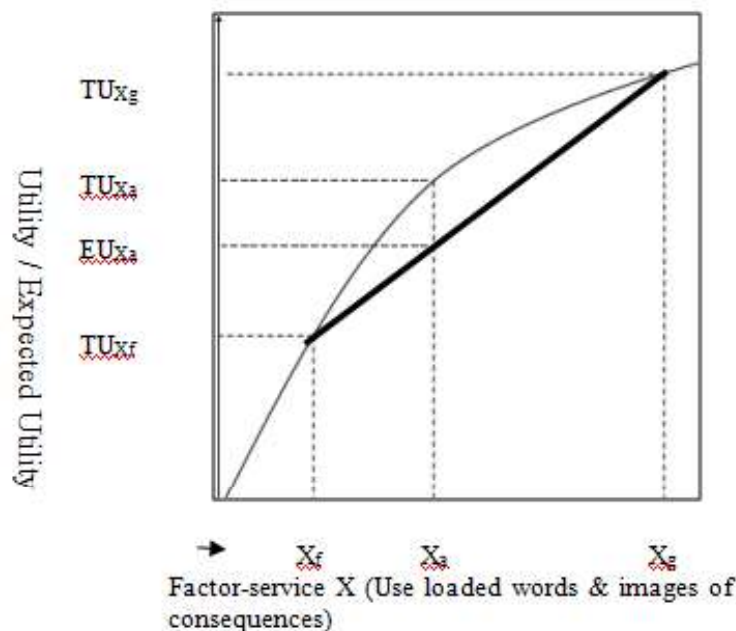


Fig. 2: Risk aversion *scenario* of Factor-service for creation psychological influence for mask

Analysis of the policy-proposal and today's outcome

In proposed-approach, individual's benefit using facemask and keeping-distance will be equal to expected-benefit. This outcome depends on individual's efforts and quality of the product individual uses. Any changes in individual's efforts may risk for getting infected. It may defeat the individual in fights with pandemic such as COVID-19. So, under modern-approach individuals can receive more expected-benefit than that under traditional-approach. This is because individuals will have more information & resources available to him from multi-sources. Under traditional-approach, individuals may have limited information on consequences & preventive-measure by struggling with lockdown-laws. Also, individual can have this information on mostly on own efforts, which cannot be challenging for rural people because of the digital era.

During the period of the COVID-19 crisis, both first wave and the second wave, in Bangladesh, rather putting efforts only within main cities, by engaging local administration, the government could have reached out rural areas based on it foresee. In return, it would have undermined the trends of catastrophes. During the second wave, strict lockdown-laws with provisions of arrest, penalties for violators nationwide were in place. With two reasons, it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of current strict policies in Bangladesh. They were 1) death and infected people numbers daily were remained unchanged with minor variation and 2) mostly populated rural-area situation was not fully known.

But people now are familiar with consequences and preventive-measures in choices to be on safe-side. This progression was not free-of-cost but with high-price-tag "so many precious lives." It could have been curtailed in numbers if modern strategies were in place.

Conclusion

It is well recognized that people do make decisions based on own benefits where people's psychology influences for doing it meeting the needs on daily basis. Individual's many actions are influenced in ways the individual does not realize. These influences can be a wide array of things, including the words and body language of others. In this process, factor(s) that prompts psychological influences can be utilized for individual's decision exploitation. However, this approach was missing addressing the COVID-19 crisis while it was spreading globally country-wise. Most countries like Bangladesh were not prepared meeting the challenges. Addressing the issue, they started with traditional-approaches namely lockdown, shutdown crowded-spot(s) and *no-mask no-service*. However, large percent of the population nationwide had violated laws. However, no effort was given for convincing people, making them for understanding and then make appeal for

peoples' actions etc. rather using the traditional approach. Today there is no lockdown and no restriction in place, but small percentage of the population wear masks. This *dichotomy* in result raises question: Is it the outcome of individual's psychological influence being safe? This study scrutinizes the probable answers(s) under the Consumer Choice & Behavioral lens. Thus, this study concludes that some factors such as perceived risk-factors, self-witnessing of images of consequences, messages through media and feelings of responsibility & safety out of self-consciousness etc. play significant roles in today's *scenario* wearing masks.

Since most people are risk-averse, utility analysis of the factor(s) such as individual's understanding about severity, individual's knowledge etc. are dominating today's *scenario* where expected utility leads the psychological influence on today's decision. Thus, the policy-proposal ratifies that utilization techniques of convincing people rather imposing command & control could have saved more lives. Welfare analysis of the policy-proposal can lead to future study on today's *scenario*.

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