

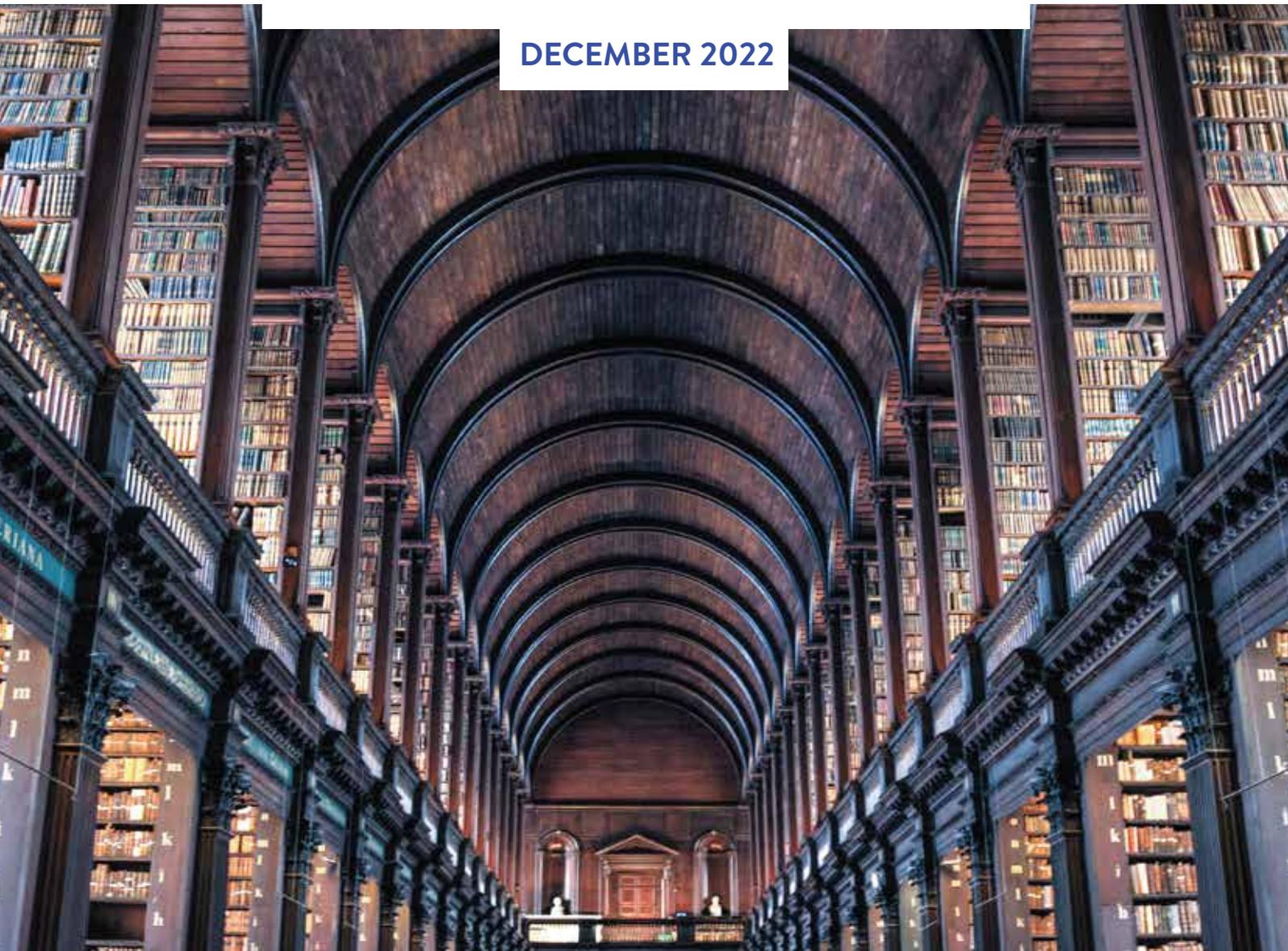


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Editor's comment  
Dr. Samson Oluseye Ojo

Dear colleagues,

The world saw a surge of research produced in fighting the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 and the associated public health responses during 2020 and 2021. It is with immense pleasure that I present this current issue of the Journal of Academic Reviews. This is because it comes at a time when the academic world has begun to get its bearing after prevailing over huge challenges and uncertainties enacted by the second pandemic associated with COVID-19. Humanity has come to embrace the change that comes with the aftermath of the pandemic, although it has posed significant challenges across many sectors. For instance, in the educational sector, learners and teachers need to learn and adapt to a virtual educational mode. Similarly, the retail industry saw a shift from in-store purchases to online and outdoor shopping, the same way a shift towards holiday accommodations in camping, trailer parks, and other short-stay accommodations was documented for hospitality resulting in a 78% decline in turnover for the passenger air transport sub-industry due to travel restrictions. With the end of 'Covid-19 pandemic in sight' as stated by the World Health Organisation, the societal impacts will continue to be felt for a decade or more. Therefore, it is pertinent to take cues from studies that can help shape our ways of life and deal with future pandemics.

Major and Colleagues in their article 'Impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy intentions. A systematic review' also uncovered how Covid-19 negatively affected the intention of couples to have children. The reasons given were the susceptibility of foetus to COVID-19, lack of access to fertility services, and inability to afford childcare because of fear of loss of jobs and future economic difficulties. They recommended that need for policy makers to consider targeted adjustments with the factors affecting the fertility intention of reproductive couples. Gowher, in his article entitled 'Covid 19 Pandemic and Education' reported a high level of inequity in the education system. in which learning has been mostly disrupted for the most deprived and marginalised groups, and the overall quality and quantity of students learning declined. One of the recommendations offered was to build resilient education systems to ensure they can overcome adversity and ensure no child or young person is denied the fundamental right to education. The third article by Okunade analyses the construct validity of observation and performance assessment for a teacher-training qualification. This is due to the mandatory requirement of observation of practice and performance assessment in achieving teacher's training qualification. This is particularly important as it might be the answer to concerns on how the quality of teaching delivery can be enhanced post-Covid-19. Similarly, Mehmood, in his article 'the changing consumer behaviour post-Covid-19', identified shifts in behaviour of consumers purchasing food, drugs, clothing, footwear, and electronic items as people now favour online shopping and reduce

physical contact. The last article by Marfo focuses on 'Gaining Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Through Corporate Strategy: A Case study on Adidas AG.' This article delves into the Sports industry and particularly investigates how Adidas, which has been significantly outperformed by Nike can gain a sustainable competitive advantage in the industry. Recommendations for corporate and business strategies were offered based on the data collected from consumers.

As we seek to launch our MRC Centre for Innovation in the new year, we strongly encourage manuscript submissions from researchers from other institutions and independent researchers alike. We welcome manuscripts on any topic relating to the themes listed on the last page. I would like to express an unalloyed appreciation to all the authors, the reviewers, and the Co-Editor-in-Chief, Sayeda Zain, for her never-ending support.

## Impact of COVID 19 on pregnancy intentions. A systematic review

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### ABSTRACT

Pregnancy intention is the expression of a desire to have children, considering numerous limitations such as the ideal number of children, gender, time, and interval of pregnancy. With the pandemic came many global issues, one of which is the fertility intentions and family-planning issues. Evidence shows that couples preparing for pregnancy were in a state of collective anxiety and panic. This study, therefore, sought to review the impact of Covid-19 on pregnancy intentions, identifying if they are positive or negative and providing explanations for such results. A total of 6651 articles were initially identified by a systematic search, and 11 articles met the eligibility criteria for inclusion. A quality appraisal was conducted to assess the risk of bias, confounding, internal and external validity, and reporting using the Strobe checklist. All the included studies reported changes in pregnancy intentions following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only eight studies reported reasons for respondents abandoning their pregnancy plans. Policy makers need to consider targeted adjustments to the factors affecting the pregnancy intention of reproductive couples.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; pregnancy, fertility, pandemic; parenthood; reproduction, intention.

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### INTRODUCTION

It has been three years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet its effects are still being felt. Belonging to the Coronaviridae family and order Nidovirales, Coronaviruses are single-stranded RNA viruses (Pal *et al.*, 2020). They are non-segmented, enveloped, and possess a lipid membrane which is a derivative of their host cell (Ludwig & Zarbock, 2020; Sharma *et al.*, 2021). They can typically cause a wide range of illnesses – from the common cold to respiratory and gastrointestinal infections (Pal *et al.*, 2020; Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020).

In the past 20 years, a few members of this group have been implicated in some respiratory illnesses. In 2003, the world experienced the effects of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV), followed by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), which is majorly in Middle Eastern countries. The emergence of SARS-CoV caused distraught among many, with the virus spreading to 30 countries of the world, resulting in 8098 morbidities and about 770 fatality cases (Hui

& Zumla, 2019). This same viral infection was reported to have caused a fatality rate of 25% among 12 pregnant women (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020). Fortunately, it may have been abated as no new cases have been identified since 2004 (Ludwig & Zarbock, 2020). In September 2012, the MERS coronavirus was isolated in Saudi Arabia and has continued to cause outbreaks in that region till the present (Al-Omari *et al.*, 2019). Al-Omari *et al.* (2019) reported 2220 laboratory-confirmed cases and a total of 790 deaths between 2012 and 2019, while WHO (2022) estimated a 35% fatality rate based on the number of reported cases globally. Hence, when idiopathic pneumonia was confirmed by a member of the coronavirus family, and it began to spread, people may have had an idea of the issue at hand. In December 2019, reports from China revealed cases of pneumonia of unknown origin which was later confirmed to be a novel coronavirus (Ludwig & Zarbock, 2020). This virus was later named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2), and the disease caused was tagged COVID-19. Given its genetic relatedness with the  $\beta$ -CoV found in bats, it is assumed to have originated from bats (Hui & Zamla, 2019; Ludwig & Zarbock, 2020). Covid-19 is a virulent and highly transmissible viral infection, and its effect in this relatively short period has surpassed that of the previous two combined (Shereen *et al.*, 2020; Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020). Transmission is through the mucus membranes, especially when persons are in close contact, moreover, it could be air-borne (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020). Between December 2019 and October 2022, the WHO has estimated a total of 626 337 158 confirmed cases (WHO, 2022).

With the pandemic came many global issues, one of which involved the healthcare system. Osanan *et al.* (2020) referenced how the rapid spread impeded the healthcare systems of many countries as the management and health workers were overwhelmed by the high rate of morbidity and mortality. They added that many public policies became more focused on patients with Covid-19 and ways to avoid transmission, almost neglecting other diseases. Unfortunately, this was likely to compromise the treatment of others who needed different medical attention, for example, individuals who intend to get pregnant or who were pregnant. Luppi *et al.* (2020) stressed that periods of medical crises were never preferred periods for couples to have babies. Osanan *et al.* (2020) retorted that pregnancy at such periods could be difficult anyway, highlighting issues like financial and transportation problems, lack of medical supplies and facilities, and the fear of catching the disease. In addition, phobia from the intensity of previous viral infections, like the H1N1 influenza virus 2 pandemics of 2009, Ebola virus, and the Zika virus, on foetus (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020; United Nations, 2021) may scare many to put off pregnancy plans. On a list of the many issues that the pandemic may have caused, a particular Canadian study revealed that participants – who were pregnant women and individuals in their postpartum – reported that they experienced psychosocial distress in the period of their pregnancies and post-partum, relating it to the lack of social support that was a result of the pandemic (Kolker *et al.*,

2021). Luppi *et al.* (2020) went further to state how the pandemic has influenced fertility plans in many countries and explained that while some postponed their plans to have children, others abandoned it. They also noted the difference in the rates of abandonment or postponement among some select countries positing that this difference was probably because of the differing economy, demography, and policies. This article aims to review studies on the impact of Covid-19 on pregnancy intentions, identifying if they are positive or negative and providing explanations for such results. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic review on this subject.

## **METHODS**

### *Overview*

Our systematic review was conducted following the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). A literature search was conducted in December 2021 and January 2022 by three independent authors with online databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar. Search terms/keywords and medical subject headings (MeSH) were combined with Boolean operators for the search [(Impact OR Effect) AND (Coronavirus OR COVID-19 OR SARS-COV 2) AND (Pregnancy intentions pregnancy plans OR Fertility intentions)]. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Articles were included if they reported primary data, were published in English and focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pregnancy intentions. No restriction was applied for study settings and dates of publication. However, articles were excluded if they were not published in English, did not report primary data, and were not concerned with the impact of COVID on pregnancy intentions. In addition, we excluded correspondences, letters, notes, communications, reviews, conference reports, and editorials.

A total of 6651 articles were in the first search. Identified articles were screened for eligibility following a two-step process. First, the titles and abstracts of studies were screened, leaving a total of 33 studies. Second, full texts of these studies were obtained and screened, and a final list was prepared for 10 studies that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This process was undertaken by two independent reviewers to reduce selection bias. In cases of discrepancies, it was discussed within the research team, and the consensus was reached. For additional articles, we searched through the reference lists of relevant studies. The PRISMA flow chart was used to illustrate how studies were selected for this review (Figure 1).

### *Data Extraction, Quality Assessment and Analysis*

Data from included studies were independently extracted by two authors into a template designed by the research team. Items extracted included: Authors' names, publication year, study's country of

origin, methods, sample size, and main findings. Two reviewers extracted the data. They were combined and assessed for accuracy. The methodological quality of the included studies was independently assessed by two reviewers using the STROBE checklist. This checklist consists of 22 items, with the highest score of 30. Studies were considered high quality with a total score of 23 points and above, those with a score lower than 16 points were considered low quality, and those with a score ranging from 16 to 23 were considered medium quality studies. Due to the heterogeneity and a limited number of included studies, a meta-analysis was not conducted. Thus, a narrative synthesis was used to present the results of this systematic review.

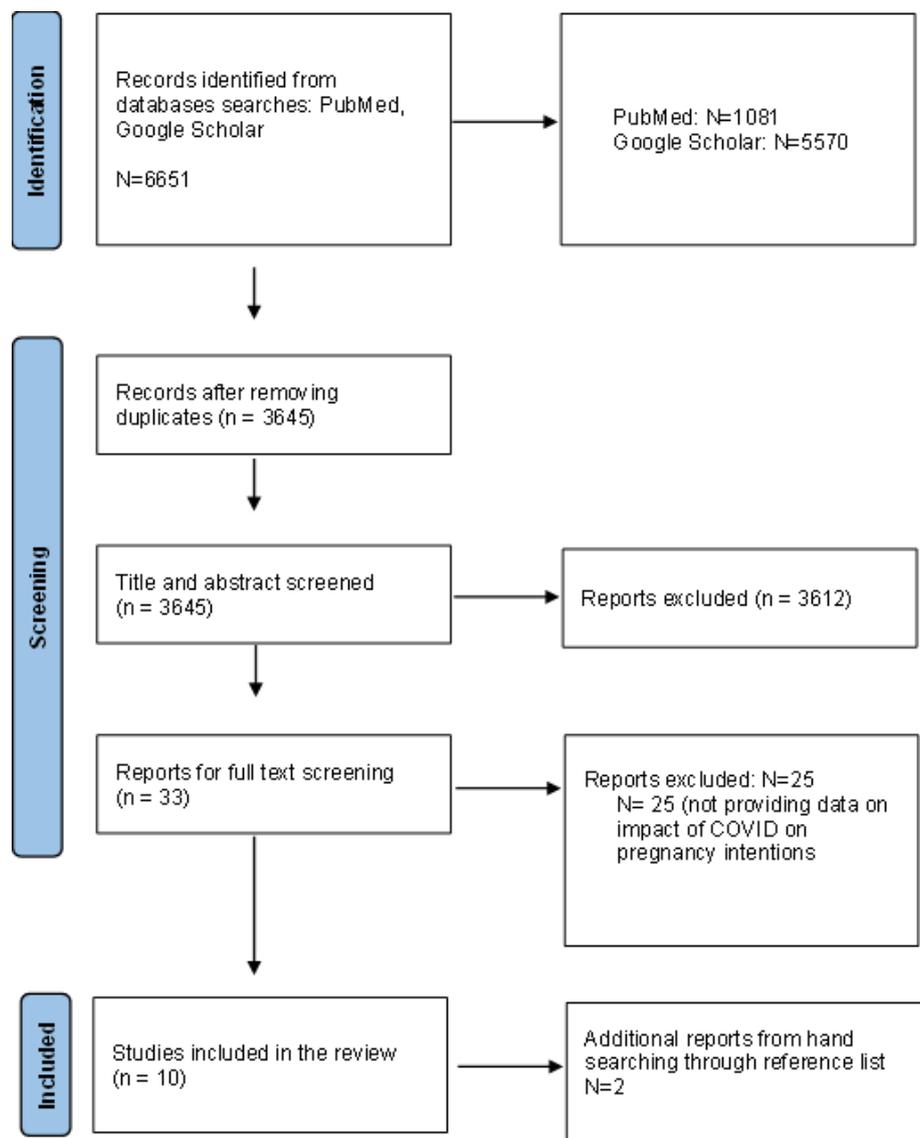


Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow chart of study selection

## RESULTS

The literature searches were performed in December 2021 and January 2022. A total of 3645 articles were screened for titles and abstracts. Of these, 33 were eligible for full-text screening, and eight articles that met the inclusion/exclusion criteria were included. We continued searching PubMed until submission, which provided two additional articles, giving a total of 10 articles that were included in this systematic review. The study selection process is summarised in Figure 1. The included studies reported on a total of 31877 participants aged 15 and 49 years. One study restricted their participants to only couples with fertility intentions [Zhu *et al.*, 2020], and one recruited only men and women in stable heterosexual relationships [Micelli, 2020]. Three studies recruited only women [Coombe *et al.*, 2020; Kahn *et al.*, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2021], one restricted their participants to only pregnant women [Balachandren, 2021], while four studies recruited residents (both men and women) [Coombe *et al.*, 2020; Emery and Koops, 2021; Luppi *et al.*, 2020; Sienicka *et al.*, 2021; ]. Among the 10 included studies, two originated from the USA [Lin *et al.*, 2021; Kahn *et al.*, 2021], one from the UK [Balachandren *et al.*, 2021], one from Italy [Micelli, 2020], one from China [Zhu *et al.*, 2020], one from Australia [Coombe *et al.*, 2020], one from Republic of Moldova [Emery and Koops, 2021] and one from five countries – Italy, France, Germany Spain, and the United Kingdom [Luppi *et al.*, 2020].

### *Impact of COVID on Pregnancy Intentions*

All the included studies reported changes in pregnancy intentions following the COVID-19 pandemic. A study conducted in China among couples planning to get pregnant indicated that pregnancy intentions were cancelled in 33.8% of their respondents due to the COVID pandemic [Zhu *et al.*, 2020]. In the Republic of Moldova, there was a 34% drop in pregnancy intentions among participants who were actively planning to have children prior to COVID-19 [Emery and Koops, 2021]. In Italy, 18% of the respondents planned to get pregnant before the pandemic; however, more than a third cancelled their plans during the pandemic. In contrast, about 11.5% of those who did not plan to have children before COVID-19 revealed their intentions for parenthood during the pandemic [Micelli, 2020]. Women in Australia expressed how the pandemic has led them to reconsider and question their intentions to have children. Some of the women reported avoiding or delaying pregnancy due to the pandemic, while others saw the pandemic as a reason to solidify their decision not to get pregnant at all. Others reported putting their pregnancy plans on hold [Coombe *et al.*, 2020]. In Kahn *et al.* [2021] study, about 49% of women in New York City, USA, who were actively planning to get pregnant, stopped their plans due to the pandemic. Also, 37% of those who were thinking of having children abandoned their plans [Kahn *et al.*, 2021]. A study in the USA reported a 25% decline in the desire to be pregnant among women aged 18 to 49 [Lin *et al.*, 2021]. A UK study is utilising data from an ongoing longitudinal cohort

study compared pregnancies pre and post-lockdown [Balachandren *et al.*, 2021]. The study reported that after the lockdown, women had 28% less likelihood of having a planned pregnancy. Moreover, there were higher numbers of unplanned pregnancies post-lockdown [Balachandren *et al.*, 2021]. In Poland, individuals who had plans to have children prior to COVID-19 postponed their plans (74%), while others decided to have a smaller number of children (26%) due to the pandemic [Sienicka *et al.*, 2021]. Flynn *et al.* [2021] reported that more than half of the respondents who had pregnancy plans were affected by the pandemic, with 72% of them postponing their plans.

### ***COVID-19 Related Factors Influencing Pregnancy Intentions***

In examining the factors influencing pregnancy intentions, only eight studies reported reasons for respondents abandoning their pregnancy plans. In Italy, 58% of respondents who abandoned their pregnancy plans were concerned about future economic difficulties [Micelli *et al.*, 2020]. Similarly, in the USA, women changed their pregnancy desires due to concerns about the difficulty of affording a child [Lin *et al.*, 2021]. Moreover, women who reported an inability to afford transportation, housing, and food were two times more likely to abandon their pregnancy plans [Lin *et al.*, 2021]. In Poland, 52% of respondents who lost their income during the pandemic and those (40%) with concerns of losing their income in the future changed their initial pregnancy plans [Sienicka *et al.*, 2021]. In contrast, among China couples, pregnancy intentions were not significantly affected by a decrease in income (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

Zhu *et al.* [2020] found that participants who had concerns about personal and foetal health were more likely to abandon their pregnancy plans. Similarly, women in Australia who abandoned their pregnancy plans cited concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on newborns and pregnant women [Coombe *et al.*, 2020]. Sienicka *et al.*, [2021] found that pregnancy plans were postponed among Polish people due to worry about the health of their prospective offspring. Moreover, others postponed due to fear of giving birth at hospitals (81%) and fear that there could be limited access to prenatal service delivery (87%) [Sienicka *et al.*, 2021]. In Australia, women believed that the pandemic and its restrictions have led to the inability for them to meet a partner and a delay in getting married, which has further delayed their plans of getting pregnant. For others, cancellation of In vitro fertilization and other fertility services, as well as career interruptions, influenced their decision to abandon their plans [Coombe *et al.*, 2020]. In Flynn *et al.*'s [2021] study, respondents indicated that lack of fertility treatment services and services to remove implants or coil (contraceptive devices) were reasons to change their pregnancy plans. Other respondents in the study were concerned about the baby and the mother's health.

First Author's name and year	Country of Origin	Sample	Study Design	Instruments	Results	STROBE Total Score
Zhu, 2020	China	Couples with fertility intention to get pregnant (N=447)	Cross-sectional survey	Self-rating anxiety scale	<p>66.2% participants reported no changes to the original fertility intentions, while 33.8% participants cancelled their plans due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Most women in the affected group worry about being infected with COVID-19 during antenatal visits and in a public place.</p> <p>56.3% of women in the affected group were anxious about self-health, others worry about foetus being susceptible to COVID-19 (25.1%).</p> <p>Participants who were less likely to change their pregnancy plans were those who believed that hospital and government control policies could protect them (<math>P &lt; 10^{-3}</math>).</p>	23 (Medium quality)
Emery, 2021	Republic of Moldova	Residents aged 15-79 (n=10,044)	Cross-national longitudinal survey		<p>For those actively trying to conceive, the odds ratio of trying to conceive were 46%<sup>9</sup> lower post lockdown than prior (a 34.5% drop).</p> <p>No changes for those with medium term fertility intentions, however, usage of contraceptives rose from 37% pre lockdown to 39%. For different methods of contraceptives, IUD use in rural areas fell 36% from 14% to 9%. Male condom uses in rural areas rose 21% from 19% to 23%. No difference for other contraceptives.</p>	21 (Medium quality)

Lin, 2021	USA	Women aged 18 to 49 (n=554)		Desire to Avoid Pregnancy Scale (DAP)	41% wanted to be pregnant more, 1 in 4 (25%) had a decreased desire to be pregnant, and 34% did not change their pregnancy desires.  37% were scared to be pregnant due to the pandemic. 1 in 7 (13%) believed it would be more difficult to afford a child. For others, desire for pregnancy was affected by inability to afford food, housing, and transportation during the pandemic.	20 (Medium quality)
Balachandren, 2021	UK	Residents who were pregnant between 24 May and 31 December 2020 (n=9784)	Prospective Longitudinal cohort study	London Measure of Unplanned Pregnancy (LMUP)	lower proportions of planned pregnancies (n=4388, 77.4% vs n=3396, 82.5%) in the post-lockdown group (p<0.001).  Women were significantly less likely to have a planned pregnancy (aOR 0.88, 95%CI 0.79 to 0.98, p=0.025)	29 (High quality)
Kahn, 2021	USA	Women (n=1560)	Cross-sectional	Perceived Stress Scale	49.2% of women who were actively trying to become pregnant stopped trying, 37.2% of women who were planning to become pregnant were no longer planning. Although not statistically significant, women who stopped contemplating or attempting to be pregnant following the outbreak, tend to be less financially secure than those still considering pregnancy.	25 (High quality)
Micelli, 2020	Italy	Men and women in heterosexual stable relationships, aged between 18 and 46 years (n=1482)	Correlational study		37.3% of those planning to have a child abandoned their intentions. Reasons were Worries related to future economic difficulties (58%) and consequences on pregnancy (58%).	19 (Low quality)
Coombe, 2020	Australia	Residents aged 18+ (n=518)			COVID-19 affected pregnancy plans, with participants delaying childbearing, or deciding to remain childfree.	23 (Medium quality)

					<p>Participants reported delaying or avoiding pregnancy due to COVID-19. For others, the pandemic solidified their decision not to have children at all.</p> <p>They cited concerns about pregnancy care during the pandemic, not putting undue strain on the healthcare system, and concerns about the impact of the virus on pregnant women and newborns. Some reported delay in plans for pregnancy due to their changing life circumstances.</p> <p>Those actively trying pre COVID reported putting these plans on hold, due to the cancellation of IVF and other reproductive services, or because they had made the decision to stop actively trying during the pandemic.</p>	
Luppi, 2020	Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom	Young adults aged 18 to 34 years (n=6,000)		CAWI	Fertility plans were affected due to the pandemic in all five countries. In Germany and France, the majority postponed their fertility plans, while others abandoned their plans. In Italy and Spain, the majority abandoned their plans.	18 (Medium quality)
Sienicka, 2021	Poland	Residents aged 18 to 49 (n=984)	Cross-sectional		22% of those planning to have children changed their plans. 86% of this, changed their plans due to fear that access to pregnancy related services could be limited. Others were afraid of giving birth at hospitals during the pandemic (81%), concerned about the potential baby's health (76.9%), and due to fear of losing their income (40.3%).	15 (Low quality)
Flynn, 2021	UK and Non-UK	Women aged (n=504)	Cross sectional	Tommy's online tool	More than half of those planning to be pregnant were affected by COVID 19. 71.9% of these postponed	22 (Medium quality)

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pregnancy plans, 1.1% stopped planning, 27%  
continued with their plans.

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## **DISCUSSION**

Beyond the impact of COVID-19 on morbidity and mortality, individuals will experience short and long-term consequences to their pregnancy preferences and intentions, as well as their reproductive health [Kahn *et al.*, 2021; Mukherjee, 2021]. To our knowledge, this is the first systematic review synthesising evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy intentions. The overall findings from this review indicate that COVID-19 has a considerable negative impact on the pregnancy intentions of individuals and couples, and this has been felt globally. Indeed, the included studies from different cultures and countries had demonstrated that people who were actively planning or contemplating getting pregnant before COVID-19 made changes to their plans during the pandemic; pregnancy plans were deliberately abandoned or postponed. Our findings are consistent with the global data suggesting a decline in birth rates which has been accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic [Bricker, 2021]. The finding is also consistent with previous reports, suggesting that during public health crises, such as the Ebola and Zika pandemics, pregnancy intentions declined [United Nations, 2021].

Participants in the included studies highlighted COVID-19-related reasons for changing their pregnancy plans. Women were anxious about getting infected with COVID-19 in public places during pregnancy and at antenatal visits [Zhu *et al.*, 2020]. They also expressed fear of getting pregnant during the pandemic [Lin *et al.*, 2021] due to worry about the susceptibility of their foetus to COVID-19 [24] and the inability to afford a child because of the inability to afford transportation, housing, or food during the pandemic [Lin *et al.*, 2021]. Concerns about losing their jobs due to the pandemic and future economic difficulties also influenced changes to their pregnancy intentions. It has been argued that environmental influences and maternal health behaviours before conception can impact pregnancy outcomes [Flynn *et al.*, 2021; Public Health England, 2018] and the child's and mother's long-term health [Public Health England, 2018]. Negative influences such as anxiety and economic difficulties during the stage of preparing and planning for pregnancy can have detrimental consequences for both maternal and child health at the population level [Public Health England, 2018]. Thus, necessitating the need to promote preconception care even during pandemics to enhance pregnancy outcomes.

Based on this review, pregnancy plans were also abandoned due to fear of giving birth at hospitals during the pandemic [Sienicka, 2021] and fear that there could be limited access to pregnancy-related services [Sienicka, 2021]. This calls for a pragmatic approach when dealing with future pandemics to ensure that couples and individuals can access pregnancy-related services in an environment that is safe. In some of the included studies, there were cancellations of in vitro fertilisation and services to remove contraceptive

devices, which further delayed their pregnancy plans. Emerging research suggests that cancellation of fertility services due to COVID-19 has a psychological impact on those planning to have children, such as depressive thoughts, feeling anxious, and severe sleep and mood disturbances [Kaur *et al.*, 2020; Tippett, 2021]. This raises the question as to whether subsequent COVID-19 waves or future pandemics should result in cancellation of fertility services. Cancellation of fertility services should be approached with caution to prevent detrimental effects that could lead to mental health problems and permanent childlessness for those in older age groups.

This review highlights a gap in research on the lack of access and utilisation of fertility services and anxiety among those planning to have children. The review necessitates the need to understand the impact of COVID-19 and its restrictions on individuals or couples planning to get pregnant. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy intentions can inform policy makers to be better prepared when enacting policies and guidelines to promote timely access to fertility services despite the lockdown. Although the restrictions and cancellation of fertility services were enacted with good intentions, however, for a period, it has eliminated the possibility of having children for individuals and couples who cannot conceive naturally. It has also delayed parenthood for those who cannot access services to remove contraceptive devices even though they can conceive naturally. The denial of reproductive rights should be addressed with caution, and measures should be promptly available for implementation to prevent this from happening should future pandemics threaten the desire for parenthood of many again. This review should be considered in light of some limitations. Given the rapid timeframe that the review was conducted, we included readily available peer-reviewed studies reporting on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy intentions at the time of the review. However, COVID-19 research is constantly evolving, with new evidence emerging every week.

Moreover, no restrictions on the location were applied, and control measures may differ in countries. Thus, the generalisability of the findings may be inadequate. In addition, the studies included were medium to low quality, possibly since studies were observational.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review was undertaken to determine whether Covid-19 had any effect on pregnancy intentions. All the included studies reported changes in pregnancy intentions following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that COVID-19 had a considerable negative impact on the pregnancy intentions of individuals and couples. Some of the reasons given by respondents for abandoning their

pregnancy plans include feeling anxious about getting infected with COVID-19, susceptibility of their fetus to COVID-19, lack of access to fertility services, and inability to afford childcare due to concerns about losing their jobs due to the pandemic and future economic difficulties. Policy makers should consider targeted adjustments to the factors affecting the fertility intention of reproductive couples.

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## Covid 19 Pandemic and Education

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### ABSTRACT

In the last 2-3 years, the world has witnessed a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic - Covid 19. This has impacted lives and businesses across the world in a significant way. Business processes were forced to change and adapt to the new realities of Covid 19, especially working from home amid lockdowns. The main aim of this article is to assess some of the challenges and weaknesses that Covid 19 pandemic highlighted in the education system, the adaptations that were implemented by the education system, and the recommendations that should be considered going forward to ensure that education's losses are recovered, and the education system is made more resilient to face similar shocking events in the future. Secondary/desktop research - internet/online resources were mainly used to collect the secondary data for the article. One of the main findings is that Covid 19 pandemic has exposed inequity in the education system whereby learning has been mostly disrupted for the most deprived and disadvantaged students and least disrupted for socioeconomically advantaged students. The other finding is that the quality and quantity of students learning was reduced, both in-school and remotely, as there were many challenges that needed to be faced. Recommendations such as supporting the teaching profession, addressing learning losses and preventing dropouts, especially of marginalized groups; offering programmes that teach employability skills; expanding the definition of the right to education to include connectivity; eliminating obstacles to connectivity; strengthening data and monitoring of learning; strengthen the articulation and flexibility across levels and types of education and training, are offered.

**Keywords:** *Covid 19 pandemic, education system, challenges, institutions, governments, teaching methods, funding diversion, work from home, lockdowns, and weaknesses.*

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### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19's destructive repercussions have affected practically every facet of life, including education. The pandemic has changed the lives of millions of people around the world, including students, and educational institutions, who were forced to close in an effort to stop COVID-19 from spreading. At the

peak of the pandemic, 185 million students were affected by the closure of schools in 45 countries in Europe and Central Asia (Donnelly, Gresham, and Patrinos, 2021). Apart from the virus's adverse health effects on individuals who are directly impacted, the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications for students, compromising not just their studies but also their physical and mental well-being (Arden and Chilcot, 2020). As a consequence of the closure of institutions, classes were held remotely, lowering the quality of education. Subsequently, the effect on the credibility of education has been witnessed all over the world. Students become less excited about the integrity of their work especially due to the lack of student-teacher interaction.

In England, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on learning as well. The quality and quantity of students learning were reduced, both in-school and remotely, as many challenges needed to be faced. For most students, learning has been disrupted, and for a small proportion; learning has been severely disrupted, while for some others, there have been some learning gains. Teachers have reported that the most learning losses are in literacy and maths. In addition, practical aspects and qualifications have also been particularly disrupted (Howard, Khan and Lockyer, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic seemed to know no bounds, infecting people of various races, ages, education levels, economic levels, gender, and castes. The consequences, on the other hand, have been terrible, with the most vulnerable people suffering the most in all areas, particularly education (Kuhfeld *et al.*, 2020). Students from privileged backgrounds may have found alternate learning possibilities outside of closed educational institutions, while those from less privileged backgrounds were left out when these institutions closed (OECD, 2020). This is also confirmed by teachers in England that the impacts of the pandemic on learning have been uneven. Learning has been mostly disrupted for the most deprived and disadvantaged students, and least disrupted for socioeconomically advantaged students, although there will of course, be exceptions to this. For example, losses are found to be significantly greater among students whose parents have less education; a finding gave added strength by a study showing that children from socioeconomically advantaged families have received more support from their parents in their studies during the school closure period (Donnelly, Gresham and Patrinos, 2021). This has shown, as a result of the crises, many of our education system's flaws and inequities have been exposed, ranging from the supportive structures needed to focus on learning to the misalignment of resources and imperatives (Ågerfalk, Conboy and Myers, 2020). The COVID-19 financial crisis is often regarded as the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression. The pandemic has had a tremendous and subtle impact on people's

lives. COVID-19 serves as a stark reminder of long-standing imbalances in our societies and the importance of properly investigating practices to safeguard and lift society's most vulnerable individuals (Schleicher, 2020).

The pandemic's economic and health effects vary substantially based on socio-economic conditions, and these elements are important mediators in comprehending the pandemic's major effects. Similarly, students live in an unpredictable world with an increasing frequency of financial shocks, such as a lack of funding to finish their studies or the transition from traditional teaching to online learning, all of which can affect their academic performance, educational plans, and future job expectations (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020). The problems may not be remedied in time for the approaching crisis, putting education financing under threat in the years ahead. While the long-term effect of the issue is unknown, the pandemic may influence public education funding as funds are redirected away from education and into the health sector and economy. Despite the short-term funding packages of a few countries, long-term public education spending is compromised as public revenues are redirected to health and social services (Berchin and de Andrade Guerra, 2020). Private finance might become limited when the economy is at its weakest and unemployment is at its peak. On a larger scale, the lockdown increased disparities between the privileged and the underprivileged.

Education systems continuously look at the expertise, data, and interpretation of foreign policies as they build policy responses (Etemad, 2020). The world is experiencing a tremendous educational crisis, one of history's most significant challenges to global education. The entire educational system's objective is to help students overcome previous learning crises and respond to the pandemic they are experiencing. Students worldwide were already experiencing a learning crisis, as many of them were enrolled in educational institutions but lacked essential life skills. The present pandemic can potentially worsen the widespread destruction if it is not treated appropriately. A dearth of learning opportunities, a rise in dropout rates, and other factors are deeply worrying in this time of crisis and might have an immediate impact on students (Herbert, 2020). In addition, practically every country has unequal educational systems, with poor children bearing the brunt of the consequences. It pours down on the underprivileged when it rains. The current task is to limit as much as possible the pandemic's adverse effects on learning and teaching and to use this experience to revert to a speedier learning development route. When attempting to deal with this crisis, educational systems will need to consider how to recover faster, with a renewed sense of openness to all

factors and a greater awareness and sense of urgency about the need to close the opportunity gap and ensure that all students have access to high-quality education opportunities (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021).

Teachers have a vital responsibility ahead of them; if they fail to do it, it will have a long-term impact on students. As a result, in the future, ensuring the educational system's long-term stability should be a major concern, with an emphasis on preparing students for quality inclusive education and the central notion of rebuilding better education. Teachers have helped to build the resilience of more adaptive education systems, which are completely devoted to students across a wide range of learning modalities and technology and are better prepared to deal with future crises (Jandrić *et al.*, 2020). Teachers hope to assist students in maintaining and promoting high-quality education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic's outbreak and recovery stages, with a special focus on the most vulnerable students (Gamage *et al.*, 2020). Teachers have an overarching context for directing their decision-making, planning, and policy development processes with a collection of thematic concerns. Teachers would emphasise large inequalities in access to excellent education, equitable schooling, and significant learning differences across student groups during and after the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of these issues (Lakhan, Agrawal and Sharma, 2020).

According to Lellis-Santos and Abdulkader, (2020), in order to remove all barriers and increase the system's resilience and academics' ability to provide students with a high-quality education in times of crisis, teachers have taken appropriate steps to ensure that students can participate in high-quality, inclusive education while also being adequately cared for and supported. In a variety of significant interrelated sectors, educators have analysed, planned, reviewed, and maintained strategies. They have changed their teaching methods to match the current circumstance, and they have adapted to it because change is inevitable (O'Brien *et al.*, 2020). Teachers have defined a learning strategy that mixes remote and classroom teaching and developed an appraisal system to help evaluate which solutions, resources, and platforms are most relevant, bringing students to the level of learning competency and catching up on missed learning. They are also reviewing and reforming the current educational system in light of the crisis' long-term effects. They have built a new architecture to help students prepare, organise, and manage themselves, as well as build the abilities they will need to respond effectively. They have focused on the idea of rigour and endeavoured to help the students. Because this scenario may necessitate more aid than rigour, rigour may suffer, but this is fair, given the circumstances. Teachers have established a space where students' opinions

and perspectives may reveal the route we are trying to carve out for everyone's benefit during times of uncertainty (Pal and Vanijja, 2020).

Educational leaders need to further reimagine education and teaching and seize the opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of solutions previously considered difficult or impossible to implement. The focus should be given on supporting the teaching profession, addressing learning losses and preventing dropouts, especially of marginalized groups; offer programmes that teach employability skills; expanding the definition of the right to education to include connectivity; eliminating obstacles to connectivity; strengthening data and monitoring of learning; strengthen the articulation and flexibility across levels and types of education and training (United Nations, 2020)

Furthermore, there is a need to build resilient education systems for sustainable and equitable development. Strengthening the resilience of education systems will enable countries to respond to the challenges of maintaining safety in schools and universities and position them to better cope with future crises. In this regard, governments could consider focusing on equity and inclusion; reinforce risk management capacities; at all levels of the system; ensure robust coordination and leadership; and improve consultation and communication mechanisms (United Nations, 2020). Governments by implementing learning recovery programs must ensure that students who have fallen behind receive the support that they need to catch up to expected learning targets. Although, the United Kingdom government took measures such as announcing a £1 billion pupil catch-up fund that included a portion set aside for tutoring and the National Tutoring Programme with a £76 million budget. Clearly, significant budget allocations; however, further actions will be needed to return to previous levels of learning.

It is imperative for nations that we not only recover from the pandemic but also use this experience to become better prepared for future crises. In order to support such an aim, nations are required to build their capacity to offer blended models of education. Institutions should be better equipped and prepared to switch between face-to-face learning and distance learning as demanded by the situation. Such flexibility in the education system will safeguard the education of students not only during future pandemics but also for other shocks such as natural disasters or adverse weather events. In addition, flexible curricula must be designed to be taught online or in person, and teachers must be trained to manage a wide variety of IT devices and software (Donnelly, Gresham, and Patrinos, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

In this article, some of the challenges and weaknesses that Covid 19 pandemic highlighted in the education system are assessed, and the adaptations that were implemented by the education system were reported. Recommendations that should be considered going forward to ensure that education losses are recovered and the education system is made more resilient to face similar shocking events in the future are offered as well.

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# Analysis of construct validity of observation and performance assessment for a teacher-training qualification

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## ABSTRACT

Observation of practice and performance assessment is mandatory to achieve an initial teacher's training qualification. Trainee teachers must demonstrate their skills and knowledge of teaching, learning, and assessment in their assessment of teaching practice. These competencies are assessed by qualified assessors and are used to determine trainee teachers' readiness for classroom teaching, learning and assessment practice. However, several assessment validity issues arise during this data collection process and evidence interpretation. The report analysed potential threats to the construct validity of observation and performance assessment for a teacher-training qualification. Crooks (1996) eight-linked chain model was reconstructed and applied to evaluate validity issues identified in the observation and assessment of performance. Solutions for improving practice are suggested.

**Keywords:** Observation, performance, assessment, teacher-training, qualification, construct, validity

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## INTRODUCTION

Observation and performance assessment is a mandatory part of education and training to assess trainee teachers and trainers during their initial teacher training programme (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004; Molina *et al.*, 2020). In the pre-service preparation and continuing professional development of teachers, a classroom observation is longstanding (O'Leary & Brooks, 2014) to enhance teaching qualities (Fullerton, 2002), improve standards, performance, and accountability in teaching and learning (Matthews & Noyes, 2016). It is central in the context of specialised knowledge production and education policies (Alliaud & Feeney, 2015). Trainee teachers and trainers must teach and demonstrate knowledge, skills, and understanding of their chosen subject specialist area, professional standards, and teaching competencies in the education sector (DfES, 2004; Van Der Schaaf *et al.*, 2019).

The use of classroom observation during a live session as a summative assessment enables qualified teachers and assessors to collect evidence and grade trainees' teaching performance and mastery of competencies (Mashburn *et al.*, 2018). Although, this approach to assessing trainee teachers and trainers is a critical component of the practicum (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008). However, in my experience as an assessor, validation of competencies is an issue identified in the summative assessment method 'observation and performance assessment'. The validation of competencies requires not only the competence should be operationally defined (Van der Schaaf & Stokking, 2011), but the evidence from observation and performance assessment should reflect the judgment of competencies accurately (Thilakaratne & Kvan, 2006). Hence, trainee teachers would have to demonstrate above-average competencies to achieve a high rating during classroom observation (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 2001a; Pearson, 2017). Consequently, the evidence collected may not be sufficient to support the construct during the observation and performance assessment (O'Leary, 2003).

This analysis aims to identify potential threats to construct validity in observation and performance assessment for a teacher-training qualification. It includes a discussion of frameworks (Crooks *et al.* 1996; Kane 1992; Messick 1989) to understand validity issues in assessment. It further establishes the application of Crooks *et al.* (1996) eight-linked chain model to evaluate validity issues identified in the observation and assessment of performance. However, not all aspects of the model are applied in the report. Findings from the research will provide a substantiated argument to review the assessment method in question and serve as an avenue to strengthen the validity of the teaching qualification, improve professional practice, and enhance the quality standard arrangement of the organisation.

## **OVERVIEW OF OBSERVATION AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT IN INITIAL TEACHER-TRAINING QUALIFICATION**

Performance assessment involves how theoretical knowledge is evident in solving real-life problems and decision-making (Cummings *et al.*, 2008). The intention of using performance assessments is to allow test takers to demonstrate the ability to recall facts or demonstrate skills (Swaffield, 2008). Likewise, performance assessment is used based on the rationale that students are well-equipped to work in an increasingly complex and rapidly growing society (Chen, 2006; Jones, 2002). Hence, performance assessment is thought to provide better consistency in evaluating students' overall performance within a specific programme (Chen, 2006). Employers want individuals with critical thinking skills and high-level

metacognitive, cognitive, and social competencies relevant to effective communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving (Cummings *et al.*, 2008; Jones, 2002). Hence, performance assessment activities have been seen as a requirement for meeting standards among professional organisations and legislative bodies (Hunt *et al.*, 2000; Pecheone *et al.*, 2005).

Observation of teaching and learning (OTL) emerged from the government initiative to improve the professional skills and knowledge base of teachers (including trainees) (O'Leary & Brooks, 2014). Consequently, OTL has become the Further Education (FE) colleges' cornerstone for quality assurance (Armitage *et al.*, 2003; Ball, 2003). Furthermore, DfES (2004) report emphasised the importance of teaching practice, thereby requesting observation of teaching and learning as part of achieving a teaching qualification. The government enactment of the DfEE (2001a) further made it a legal requirement for teaching staff to gain an appropriate qualification (O'Leary, 2003). Therefore, to achieve a Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training, a mandatory 100 hours of teaching practice in the post-16 education sector, eight observation and performance assessments of approximately one hour each is required by trainee teachers (Pearson, 2017) while demonstrating characteristics that meet the Ofsted grade 2 practice standard (appendix 1) (Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), 2007; Ofsted, 2008b). The assessor observes the score and provides written feedback on the pro forma graded form (appendix 2) (Pearson, 2017). A passing grade can only be achieved for each observation when sections 1 and 2 are ticked on the pro forma. There is also a re-assessment of observation which does not achieve a passing grade with the assessor's feedback indicating areas requiring improvement.

## **VALIDITY AND VALIDATION IN ASSESSMENT**

From a psychometric point of view, an assessment is good if it is objective, reliable, and valid (Clausen-May, 2001; Knorr & Klusmann, 2015). Given the significant use of assessment procedures within educational systems, validity is considered an essential factor in measuring student achievement (Crooks *et al.*, 1996; DeLuca, 2011). The concept of validity includes how a test can predict future performance while considering external criteria (criterion), content area (content), or theoretical construct (construct) (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017).

Newton & Shaw (2014) referred to validity as the hallmark of assessment quality, while Newton and Baird (2016) identified it as a crucial term in educational and psychological measurement. Unless a test captures

its point of interest, the reliability of the test is of little value (Forster, 2017). Hence, validity stands as a superior criterion for evaluating assessment quality (Black & Wiliam, 2014) and the most significant criterion in test evaluation (Koretz, 2008). Borsboom *et al.* (2004) mentioned that the extent to which a test measures what it supposes to measure can determine its validity. Black *et al.* (2012) suggested that assessing what one is interested in is the key to validity.

Newton (2012) also explained that the purpose for which a test is constructed or used determines validity. Newton (2017) further evaluated validity as a property of test interpretations. Messick (1989), however, highlighted that validity is more than measurement principles but includes social values which have a meaning and force beyond measurement when making decisions and evaluative judgment. Hence, Messick viewed validity as a property of inferences about interpretations or actions (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017).

Newton & Shaw (2014) evaluated validity as a technical term in educational and psychometric measurement relating to validation. Hence, validity and validation are 'two sides of the same coin'(pg 2). Subsequently, the validation process focuses on investigating validity since validity is not a property of a test but of itself (Newton & Shaw, 2014). Therefore, there is no such thing as a valid test (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) because a validity claim does not focus on the assessment (Borsboom & Mellenbergh, 2004) but on the meaning of test scores (Messick, 1989) or interpretation of scores and implications arising from actions entailed in the meaning (Cronbach, 1988). Simultaneously, these scores are beyond the functions of items or stimulus conditions, but they also consider the assessment context and the individual responding to it (Borsboom & Mellenbergh, 2004). Messick (1989) further evaluated that the point at which score meaning and action implications hold among persons or groups within several settings or context is a persistent and perennial empirical question. From this perspective, validity is an evolving property, while validation is an activity, thus a continuing process (Borsboom & Mellenbergh, 2004; Cook & Hatala, 2016).

Considering the above on practice, validity threats do not arise from the observation and performance assessment but from the use and meaning given to the Pro-forma grades provided by the assessor and the consequences (positive and negative) on the student and other involved stakeholders. In such an instance, relying on an assessor's rationale judgment to support or nullify trainee teacher competency leads to different validity issues. More so, malpractices such as coaching, and contract writers can influence reliability issues and diminish the validity of supporting evidence (lesson plan and teaching slides) provided by the trainee teacher.

Black & Wiliam (2014) evaluated that although validity is primarily essential. However, its practical application to educational assessment can be complicated. Knorr & Klusmann (2015) further agreed that defining a point to claim the interpretation of a test is valid is difficult in theory. Likewise, finding a good measure of validation in practice can be a struggle. On this basis, several validity frameworks (Crooks *et al.* 1996; Kane, 1992; Messick 1989) offer unique but overlapping views and processes to understand the conception of validity within the context of educational measurement and assessment use (St-Onge *et al.* 2017).

## **VALIDITY AND VALIDITY FRAMEWORK**

In an attempt to integrate theory and observation, Cronbach and Meehl's (1955) notion of construct postulates individual's attitudes assumed to reflect in test performance. Although not offered as a validity framework, construct validity was viewed as an all-pervasive concern (Cronbach and Meehl's, 1955). In their view, the construct which needs to be measured can be represented in a nomological network that includes a theoretical (what was measured) and empirical framework (how it will be measured).

Based on Cronbach's (1988) construct validity notion, a unified view of validity proposed by Messick conceptualise criteria, content, and construct into a constructed framework. The essence of this is to integrate the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of score-based inferences (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017) for empirical testing of rational hypotheses on score meaning and use (Messick, 1989). In a nutshell, validity is primarily about the construct and the meaning of scores. Further to the development of construct validity, Messick (2000) identified content, substantive processes, score structure, generalizability, external relationships, and testing consequences as the six aspects of construct validity. Conversely, construct under-representation (CU) and construct irrelevance variance (CIV) threaten validity (Messick 1989, 1994).

Construct under-representation reflects assessment deficiency (Baartman *et al.*, 2007), whereby the assessment is too narrow by failing to include essential components or facets of the construct (Shaw & Crisp, 2011) thus, jeopardizing assessment authenticity (Black & Wiliam, 2014). On the other hand, construct-irrelevance variance occurs when the assessment is too broad, resulting in excess score variance, which is not relevant to the interpreted construct, thereby jeopardizing directness (Braun, 2019). Hence, validation issues can arise when the extent to which an assessment can underrepresent the construct while

simultaneously contaminating assessment scores with construct-irrelevance variance (Haladyna & Downing, 2004).

Building on the work of Messick (1989), Kane (e.g., 1992, 2006, 2013), in an attempt to simplify validity theory, provides an argument-based and contemporary approach to validation by proposing a coherent chain of four inferences: scoring, generalisation, extrapolation, and implications to support the intended interpretations of assessment evidence. According to Kane (2013), collecting evidence across the four inferences is crucial for identifying factors inherent to the assessment processes, thus, threatening assessment decisions and conclusions. In this perspective, evaluating assessment activities and verifying if assessors generate appropriate and consistent scores after performance observation on how adequate the observed sample represents the broader range of possible performance is essential (Clauser *et al.*, 2012). The assessor's decisions (pass or fail) are central to assessment validity interpretations (Kane, 2013) as it is beyond their own professional practice or pedagogical ideas. It involves psychological impact (motivation or anxiety) on the student, ethics, fairness, and social values such as the trustworthiness of the assessment method and the qualification by the society (Schuwirth & Vleuten, 2011). Hence, assessors must identify, clarify, and test inferences used to verify if the evidence supports or disprove decisions made on assessment narratives or scores (Cook & Hatala, 2016).

Crooks *et al.* (1996) suggestion combines a defined set of validation criteria and a structure for an argument-based approach to validity. Accordingly, an assessment involves eight stages (administration, scoring, aggregation, generalisation, evaluation, decision, and impact) viewed as a chain (figure 1). Thus, a weakness in any of the chains weakens the whole chain. In a nutshell, it is crucial to consider the threat to validity in each chain (Black *et al.*, 2010).

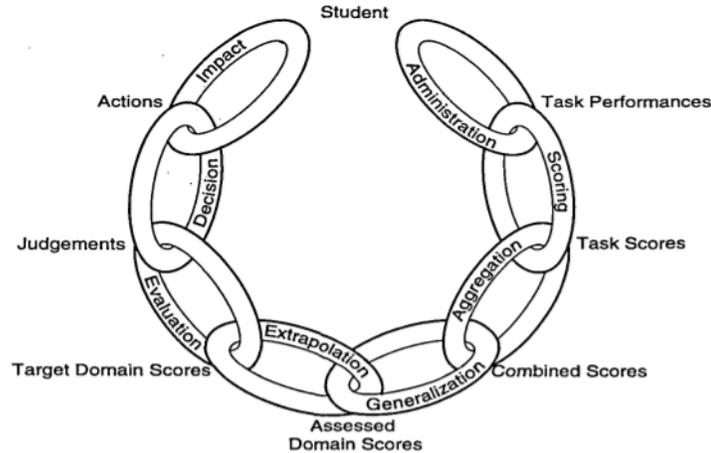


Figure 1. A model of educational assessment for use in the validation and planning of assessments (Crooks *et al.*, 1996).

According to Cook & Hatala (2016), using a validity framework is crucial for constructing a validity argument. Likewise, the consideration of existing evidence. Hess & Kvern (2021) mentioned that it is paramount to consider assessment purpose and construct (performance domain) before applying a validity framework. Hence, having reviewed (Crooks *et al.* 1996; Kane 2013; Messick 1989) and from professional practice experiences, Kane's (1996) validity argument structure was based on psychometric concepts. Its focus is more on assessment evidence and the universe score, which may be apparent to test evaluators. Hence, not accessible to practitioners who lack psychometric understanding (Knorr and Klusmann, 2015). Similarly, Messick (1994) five sources of evidence framework provides an incomplete guide in selecting or prioritising evidence.

Furthermore, construct-underrepresentation in observation and performance methods of assessment is not evident. However, construct-irrelevance can be identified in the assessment process. Nevertheless, this factor is not sufficient for a validity argument with stakeholders. Hence, I have concluded to apply Crooks *et al.* (1996) eight-link chain model to evaluate validity issues in the assessment method (observation and performance assessment) used in my department (teacher-training qualification) not because it is a better validity framework, but it helps organise my thinking regarding validation questions and also serves as a substantiated approach to present identified validity issues that are more worrying which requires scrutiny to the senior management of my organisation and other stakeholders involved in assessment and quality assurance processes and practices.

## APPLICATION OF EIGHT-LINKED CHAIN MODEL TO OBSERVATION AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

According to Crooks *et al.* (1996), different assessment cases can influence various validity threats within each link. For example, validity threats in formative assessment can be significantly crucial to some aspects of the chain with less importance to other aspects. Aggregation, generalisation, and extrapolation were considered highly important when identifying validity threats in a summative assessment. However, from my professional experience of using observation and performance assessment, overlooked aspects that threaten validity in the quality assurance processes are evident in administration, scoring, evaluation, decision, and impact. Also, individual threats identified by Crooks *et al.* (1996) are interwoven or causal factors of another threat to validity in the assessment. Hence, I rearranged the chain model (figure 2) to provide a more practical approach to highlight associated threats (figure 3) to the validity of interpretations and use of inferences and scores that I identified in the observation and performance assessment in teachers' training qualifications.

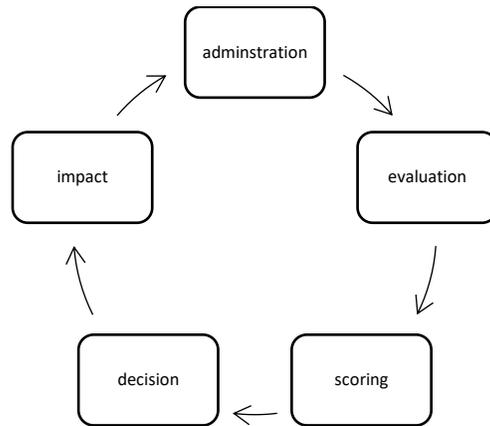


Figure 2. Educational and assessment model for validation and assessment planning adapted from Crooks *et al.* (1996)

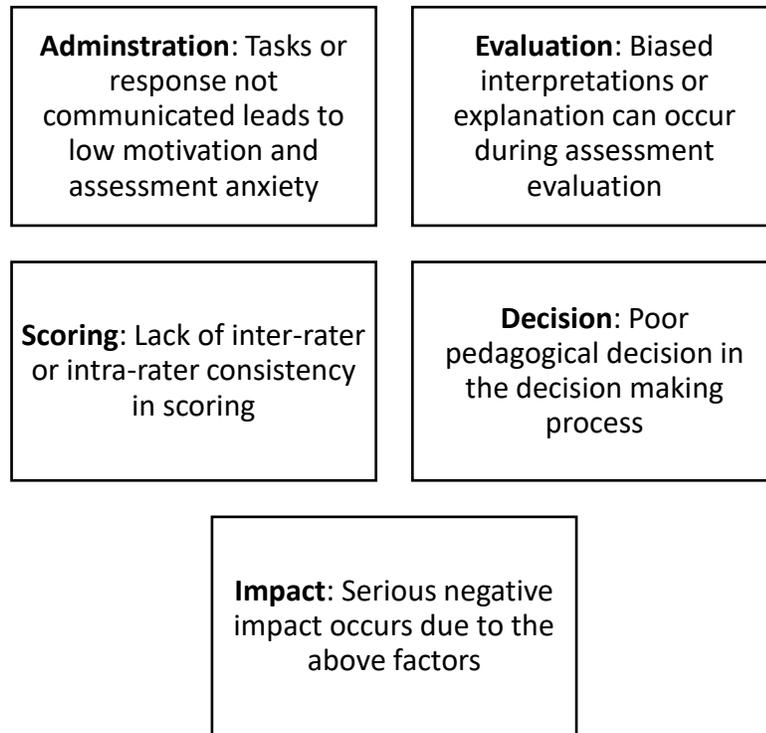


Figure 3. Associated validity threats identified in observation and performance assessment adapted from Crooks *et al.* (1996) chain model

## FIVE STAGES OF VALIDITY ISSUES IN OBSERVATION AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

### *Administration*

Crooks *et al.* (1996) highlighted low motivation, assessment anxiety, and non-communication of tasks and responses as individual threats to validity identified in the first chain (administration). However, from professional experience, poor or lack of communication of tasks and responses significantly influence assessment anxiety and low motivation among trainee-teachers during their teaching practice observation. This evidence suggests several factors can cause anxiety and low motivation during assessment (Eklöf, 2010; Wise *et al.*, 2006). Observations from professional experience identified poorly designed response arrangements or confusing instructions led to trainee teachers' misinterpretation of assessment tasks, resulting in low motivation by displaying a lack of maximum effort in the assessment task. Similarly, assessment anxiety among students with high motivation undermines trainee-teacher performance. Hence, both aspects give a misleading picture of students' actual ability, knowledge, and skills, thereby posing a threat to validity in interpreting and using test scores (Musekamp & Pearce, 2016).

### ***Evaluation***

A person interpreting an assessment score would have access to the assessment instructions (Crooks *et al.*, 1996). Similarly, additional information about the student and previous assessment performance known to the assessor can influence assessment decisions (Gravells, 2016). From a professional point of view, assessors communicate with other departments, such as welfare, to access information relevant to students learning and development. The intention is to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010, thus helping to value diversity and promoting fairness in teaching, learning, and assessment. However, additional knowledge of students' information may influence the assessor's interpretations of assessment information (Shaw *et al.*, 2021; Tweed *et al.*, 2013), thus, distorting assessment judgment and decision-making. Consequently, resulting in biased interpretation or explanation of student performance (Stroud *et al.*, 2011), a factor identified by Crooks *et al.* (1996) as a threat to validity associated with assessment evaluation.

### ***Scoring***

The observation Pro-forma providing separate scores on many different aspects contributes to evaluating assessment (Pearson, 2017) and could fail to capture the richness of trainee teacher's performance because the scoring may be considered too analytic (Crooks *et al.*, 1996). Hence, the scores provided may not be adequate in rewarding students who concisely adhered to assessment instruction but failed to show it during observation due to several uncontrollable factors, such as trainee teachers' emotions and classroom ambiance. Thus, the scores provided may not be a true reflection of competency, thereby deemed a threat to the validity of evidence in the observation and performance assessment.

### ***Decision***

The teaching practice observation involves the assessor's pedagogical decision (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Crooks *et al.*, 1996). As an assessor, using standardised proforma to record performance during teaching observation is mandatory. Similarly, providing overall feedback is essential to the assessment process (Copland, 2010; Tang & Chow, 2007). Feedback is not merely interpreting assessment information but involves pedagogical decisions (Bell *et al.*, 2019; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006), a factor determining the impact of assessment, thereby influencing assessment validity (Crooks *et al.*, 1996). From professional experience, fairness underpins the quality of assessment (Gravells, 2016; Wilson, 2008), and consequences such as reduced motivation, increased anxiety, and exclusion from further learning opportunities arise in an assessor's poor pedagogical decision resulting in a negative impact. Hence, unfair assessment decision reduces validity (Kane, 2010).

### ***Impact***

No matter how technical assessment sounds (Crooks et., 1996), a crucial aspect of the validation process is the intended and unintended positive or negative consequences that directly or indirectly impact students and other participants including the assessor, organisation, and the awarding body. From a professional point of view, a positive impact could indicate valuable benefits for students and stakeholders. Likewise, potential negative consequences lead to student withdrawal from the learning programme, poor achievement and retention rate, damaged relationship between the assessor and the student, and perceived unfairness. Hence, it is vital to consider the consequential basis of ethics and justice when collecting assessment evidence (Messick, 1989).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE VALIDITY**

Acknowledging the need for assessment trustworthiness as evidence of student achievement is central to assessment processes and practices (Joughin *et al.*, 2017). Newton & Shaw (2014) mentioned that validity is not a property of a test but inferences. Hence, the recommendations identified are not purposed to change the assessment but to minimise threats to the valid use of evidence in the assessment method.

Awarding organisations have direct control over assessment procedures (Joughin *et al.*, 2017). Likewise, improvements to assessment involve several organisation levels and interactions outside professional bodies (Boud *et al.*, 2016) which makes changes to assessment practices complex and extends beyond assessor's decisions (Bearman *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, communicating my own professional views could help enhance and facilitate the rearrangement of assessment processes and practices in my organisation. Therefore, recommendations include multiple observers to minimise the risk of bias. Video recording sessions could eliminate administration issues, such as student anxiety. Incorporating training and development courses for assessors can also enhance the understanding and impact of pedagogical decisions. However, these may not pose a definite solution until trial because every new implementation has its own challenges. For example, reliability issues such as systematic administration, and inter-rater and intra-rater consistency can occur.

Report writing, another assessment method used in my organisation to assess trainee teachers, would have provided an avenue to gather more evidence of students' knowledge, skills, and understanding. However, issues of assessment cheating and other forms of assessment malpractice significantly impact the validity and reliability of report writing. On this notion, I evaluated that implementing a systematic improvement and identifying factors such as institution resources, capacity, organisation policies, and the social-cultural

context of assessment planning is vital for minimising threats to the valid use of observation and performance assessment. Thus, helpful in strengthening the trustworthiness of the qualification and the organisation quality assurance policies and practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

Educational assessment operates in the context of unavoidable restrictions in the real world, bringing continuous changes in the assessment process. Different assessments have different purposes. Likewise, every approach to design assessment procedures has its strengths and weaknesses. Hence, constructing a validity argument relevant to assessment purposes is essential for developing a solid understanding of assessment and quality assurance principles and practices. Validation is beyond ticking boxes or giving a yes or no answer. It entails professional exercise, insights, judgment, and understanding. The implication of focusing on the validity of assessment procedures is that validity is not just about the measurement instrument or measurement interpretation only. It concerns every aspect to gather additional sources of evidence and analysis to maximise accuracy and useful measurement.

Several factors influence test designers to compromise on assessment activities. However, test developers must rationalise decisions and understand their likely impact on validity. Rigorous validation of observation and performance assessment used in a teacher training programme is essential for individuals or groups to trust the assessment results. Hence, collecting any evidence is not enough for the validity argument, but the relevance, quality, and breadth of evidence, score, relationship, consequences, and a critical appraisal of gaps are vital to identifying validity issues in assessment processes and practices.

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# **The Changing Consumer Behaviour Post-Covid19**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The coronavirus pandemic has altered the shopping habits of consumers as well as the disease itself. Still, there are influences on how people shop based on their legislative, political, and economic aspects. This study uses secondary data and an online survey to gather data via social networks. Because of the lockdowns across the country, it proved challenging to collect face-to-face data from the participants. The data come from 1,038 consumers from different ranges of age, from 18 to 60. Because the pandemic has affected the patterns of purchase and consumption, the purchasing habits of those who participated in the lockdown are more authentic and provide us with the opportunity to generate new ideas. The research analysis demonstrated the observed shifts in the behaviour of consumers when purchasing food, drugs, clothing, footwear, and electronic items.

**Keywords:** Covid19, Consumer Behaviour, Post-Covid-19, pandemic

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Year 2020 will be remembered among the retail history books as one of conquering challenges and revealing new opportunities. One of the advantages of an otherwise unfavorable situation is that customers have started to recognize the importance of retail in their lives. Covid-19 has revolutionized the retail landscape as well as the customer. Compared to the prior period, it was evident that there was a rise in average spending and an increase in purchases. Consumer confidence is down, and people are concerned about the next few years. Retailers have invested billions of dollars in anti-coronary measures. E-commerce is breaking records (Bunkanwanicha, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic has altered the shopping habits of consumers as well as the disease itself. Still, there are influences on how people shop based on their legislative, political, and economic aspects. The way we shop has changed, as has the way households run their lives, as well as the motivations behind buying and the accessibility of items and services have also changed. Whether the changes will be

permanent or back to their original form will be determined in the coming months and be the research topic following the article's findings (Hashem, 2020).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Through diverse updates from all over the globe, it was evident that people began to express gratitude to healthcare workers as well as their local grocery shops for providing them with essential items for their life. The feeling of national pride was evident in the actions of the citizens. The focus was on conserving money during the pandemic (Verma, 2021) due to the growing anxiety about unemployment due to an economic downturn that was devastating to the worldwide economy. The next section outlines the study of the literature on consumer ethnocentrism as well as attitudes toward foreign goods (ATFP) and nationalism and impulse buying.

### ***Consumer Ethnocentrism***

The concept of ethnocentrism in the consumer can be derived from three perspectives: the consumers worry about harming their home country's economy by purchasing imported goods; second, the morality behind purchasing imported goods; and third is, personal prejudices against imports. Therefore, ethnocentric people think that buying products from abroad is unpatriotic, results in the loss of jobs, and is detrimental to the local economy. However, consumers who are not ethnocentric evaluate foreign products on their merits without considering where they are produced.

To assess the extent to which consumers have an ethnocentric preference, which refers to consumers' preference for products from their country of origin. Customer Ethnocentrism Tendencies Measure (CETSCALE), a 17-item scale validated using multinational corporations' viewpoints, is widely utilized. (Stepchenkova, 2022). A version with six items of the CETSCALE was created to gauge the concept of ethnocentrism in consumers where domestic goods are preferred to foreign ones. The characteristics of the demographics of Australian consumers and the possibility that they could lose their jobs are linked to the sentiments of ethnocentricity.

### ***Transformation of Retailing***

The development and growth of the internet are bringing the retailing industry towards more sophisticated channels, and rapid growth due to digital marketing and e-commerce is gaining momentum. The retail industry changes in the past decade have provided consumers with more options and choices in the market (Ahmed, 2020). The variety of options available on the market led to an unstable environment that resulted

in different outcomes and consequences and increasingly complex customer attitudes and performance of retailers.

### ***Nationalism***

Although researchers have extensively studied consumer ethnocentrism, a topic has received very little consideration in the literature on marketing. (Wang, 2020) describes consumer nationalism as the assertion of their collective identities based on their nationality. This allows them to either accept or disapprove of brands and products from other nations. Consumer nationalism is also a reference to attempts to define purchasing and making it an expression of political conviction through the refusal to consume goods or services from a country that infuriates you or other countries and the consumption of one's national-produced goods and services. (Castelló and Mihelj, 2018), defined the concept of consumer nationalism as political nationalists and symbolic nationalism (Verma, 2021).

### ***Internal Influences***

The internal influences vary from one customer to the next, which affects the buying procedure and customer behaviour. These influences arise from various dimensions that relate to the customer, i.e., the personal aspect, culture, and loyalty of the customer

### ***Culture***

The cultural heritage is passed on from generation to generation. Every generation adds to or changes and saves some of the transmitted cultures. It is evident in human behaviour, and actions, and influences the decisions of humans and their features. People of the same culture have a variety of values, meanings, and differences. The cultural aspects are regarded as having a significant impact on customers' behaviour and decisions. Thus, companies always try to gain knowledge about their customers as well as the various people from different cultures in the market to increase awareness and understanding to meet and exceed customers' expectations. The impact of cultural elements is influenced by customer behaviour, attitudes, and buying behaviour (Peña-García, 2020).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Scientists recognize two methods of research that are inductive and deductive. Inductive research starts by observing an event and then analyzing patterns that are based on the event before finally formulating a theory on the basis of preliminary steps. This method is typically used when there are no reliable sources to investigate. However, the inductive method does not omit the application of existing research.

Qualitative research is commonly utilized in the inductive approach. The deductive research method is constructed from the opposite approach - it begins with a theory, based on which a hypothesis is created. This hypothesis is then tested generally using qualitative research methods. This theory can then be verified or disproved. If the researcher rejects the idea, it could be altered for further research.

In this study, secondary data and the online survey are utilized to gather data via social networks. Because of the lockdowns in place across the country, it proved difficult to collect face-to-face data from the participants. Therefore, social media, which is an avenue for socializing and sharing information, offers us the chance to connect with various people. The data come from 1,038 consumers ranging from 18- to 60 years old. Because the pandemic has affected the patterns of purchase and consumption, the purchasing habits of those who participated in the lockdown are more authentic and provide us with the opportunity to generate new ideas.

The study also employed Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com/>) to see whether COVID-19 influenced people's choices for Customer behaviour. A number of 100 indicates the greatest level of interest in a particular area and time (i.e., the highest level of interest). In order to put the predictions to the test, the data were gathered on keywords related to Customer behaviour.

The research analysis demonstrated the observed shifts in the behaviour of consumers when purchasing food, drugs, clothing, footwear, and electronic items. The research paper from (Rossolov, Aloszynskyi, & Lobashov, 2022) assists in discovering possible changes in the purchase frequency, modifications in the mix of purchases, preferences for e-shops as well as the shopping time of items from the drugstore and food stores as well as the retail units were not limited in any way. For clothing, shoes, electronics, and clothing, the study revealed how significant concern for customers was the closing of stores as well as the frequency of shopping online in purchasing these goods. In each industry, various assertions were made that respondents had to indicate the degree of approval. The degree of agreement was to think about the purchasing habits of different people before the onset of COVID-19.

To investigate further the psychological determinants of consumer behaviour (Di Crosta, 2021) conducted, two hierarchical multiple regressions, respectively, using "Necessities" (Model 1) and "Non-necessities" (Model 2) as the outcomes. These predictors were included in Model 1 and Model 2. In particular, the sequence of each step was made to incorporate, first, socio-demographic data as a control variable. Therefore, they included the gender, age, and annual income brackets and education at the beginning step. In the second step, they also included personality tests (i.e., The Big-Five traits of personality) because these

traits are stable and not affected by specific circumstances. In the third step, anxiety, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress were included to study the effects of emotional predispositions on the consumer. They also determined to have a fear of COVID-19 as a fourth step to assess the impact of this particular aspect. They added the perceived stability of the economy in Step 5 after the psychological variables. This allowed them to study the effects of perceived economic stability after accounting for the impact of emotional antecedents on consumer behaviour. In addition, in line with the same principle, they included strategies for self-justifications.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Consumer Behaviour - Food*

For food items, there was no shortage of consumers in the online market 40% of respondents began buying food online in greater quantities than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the respondents are looking forward to reopening the markets for farmers. 64% of respondents remained in the same shops when purchasing food items. The majority of 414 respondents did not change their shopping carts. Around half of them changed how often they shop, which is in line with the findings of studies conducted in the country. E-shops were first used in more significant proportions by people aged 15 to 35 and in greater proportions by males in this age group. The active economic residents influenced the purchase time (Ćirić, 2020).

### *Consumer Behaviour - Drugstore*

Respondents did not show a preference for online stores, but they kept buying these items in stores and did not alter the time of purchase. The amount of time they spent shopping changed - they visited the stores less often, and their products were not as popular. The use of e-commerce began in greater proportions by those aged 25-35 and by women in this age group.

### *Consumer Behaviour - Clothes and Shoes*

Shoes and clothing stores were impacted by restrictions and bans imposed to stop the spread of the virus. For over 73% of those who participated, the closing of stores selling clothing or shoes was considered a major issue that led to an increase in the demand for this type of product. For those under 45, the use of online stores is significant. For those aged between 15-and 25, the percentage of shoppers who shop online is similar.

### ***Consumer Behaviour - Electronics***

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents agreed that closing stores equipped with Electronics were a big issue for them. 41% of them have used an online store at first. More than 50% used it with greater frequency. Over 70% of respondents said that the store closing caused less demand. The closing of stores was more problematic for people aged 55+. Moreover, the 45+ age group began using online stores for buying electronic products.

### **DISCUSSION**

Since the start of the first epidemic of COVID-19 in the early part of 2020, the way people shop has drastically changed from the norm. Closing stores, coupled with the fear of consumers' health, has resulted in immediate and dramatic growth in demand and the utilization of other distribution channels.

According to some reports, there has been an increase in concern about the virus spreading inside the family. Eighty percent of those surveyed said they were adapting well to social separation and that they were able to adhere to government guidelines for social isolation and distancing. Longitudinal studies showed that this affects people's mental health. At 1–2 months into the UK lockdown, self-reported levels of depressive symptoms had risen dramatically compared to 7 months earlier, and well-being had declined significantly. Clinical criteria for diagnosing major depressive disorder (HADS-D score 8) significantly affected depression symptoms (Simon Evans, 2021).

Just over a third of the sample may be classified as clinically depressed during lockdown based on the number of individuals who met this criterion, more than quadrupled from baseline to lockdown. Although significant levels of COVID-related distress were reported, no overall impacts on anxiety or loneliness ratings were seen. There was a high correlation between changes in anxiety symptoms and well-being, but not between changes in depression scores. Therefore, the lockdown did not lead to an increase in self-reported feelings of loneliness in this demographic, and the spike in depression did not seem to be linked to the increase in loneliness.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study on the subject, it is possible to conclude that there is an alteration in the behaviour of consumers within the UK because of restrictions that were imposed to stop the spreading of COVID-19. In all the analyzed sectors, including sales of food and drugstore products, clothes and footwear, and electronic products and electronics, there increased sales volume via the internet. For food and drugstore

items, there was a change in how people purchase and the frequency of purchase. The demand for footwear, clothing, and electronic items that were shut down by government policies has decreased, despite a rising number of online transactions. The question is whether the changes will last or customers will return to their usual buying routines.

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## Gaining Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Through Corporate Strategy: A Case study on Adidas AG

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### ABSTRACT

Gaining an appropriate sustainable competitive advantage industry seems to be a problem for most of the organisations in the sportswear industry. While existing research had generally examined how to gain competitive advantage and sustain it in other industries, there seemed to be limited research for the organisations in the sportswear industry. This article, therefore, attempted to fill the knowledge gap by examining this, with specific reference to how Adidas can gain a competitive advantage and sustained it over its rivals. Using a survey questionnaire to gather data, the study found that gaining a competitive advantage is yet a challenge for Adidas, as 51% of the respondents nominate Nike as a preferred brand and 32% for Adidas. Further, the study found that price and quality are equally important in terms of preference for the two consumers' behaviour patterns: *usual buying behaviour* 75% of the respondents were for price and quality and *reasons to switch to another brand*, 15% of the respondents were for the price, whereas 14% select quality). In accordance with this, the study found that "the hybrid" competitive approach, which is premised on a quality product at an affordable price, is overwhelmingly the most valuable option for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage with Adidas.

**Keywords:** Competitive advantage, Competitiveness, Hybrid strategy, Strategic performance

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For many decades, the German Sports Giant Adidas has been operating in the sports industry (Adidas, 2015); their vision *“to change lives through sport as core to individual’s health and happiness,”* determines the organisation’s aspirations as *“rooted in sports,”* which corresponds to the mission *“to become the global leader in the sporting industry.”* Adidas (2015). Adidas has diversified into developing a *“multi-brand portfolio”* of sporting equipment for different sports, which complement each other in a unique way to help athletes to perform at their best. The known brands of the organisation are Adidas, Reebok, Runtastic, and Ashworth. Which are of premium quality, precision, and innovative designs. The organisation strongly emphasises brand loyalty and customer relationship through emotional engagement, enforced by sponsorships of famous sportsmen and teams and sporting events (Adidas, 2017).

However, Adidas has come up to the point where it has been outperformed substantially by the main competitor Nike, in the background of fast-changing customer trends, technological advancement, and other fast-growing competition among the organisations in the sports industry. In this sense, devising the most effective competitive strategy for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage over rivals has become a priority (Porter, 1985).

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Adidas decided to follow a *“multi-brand”* strategy for differentiation, emphasizing on product features development and cutting-edge design to provide customers with a greater choice and complete product solution to their sportswear needs at a premium price, with the prospect of enhancing their performance to gain competitive advantage (Adidas 2015). This was their main corporate strategy in 2015 (Adidas, 2017). According to the organisation, this is for long-term sustainable growth by creating a new strategy for their growth acceleration beyond 2020. Yet, the competitive approach incorporated in the strategy, has not proved to be successful in improving the company’s competitive position (Poltz, 2016).

This was reflected in the organisation performance for the period 2015 -2017 (Adidas, 2017), coupled with lower brand desirability, giving a stake to their main competitor Nike (Jayawardhana, 2016). Firstly, the strategy performance failure was exhibited through the reduced financial results, which were the results of a decrease in sales and overall reduced strategic targets with the present strategy (Adidas Group Annual Report, 2020). Secondly, the high operating expenses reduced the net income because of the organisation’s inability to offset the high cost of the differentiation strategy (Bain, 2015); the management argued that the issue is temporal, declaring that the company is *“significantly stronger and better positioned than it was*

before 2015 ((Adidas Group Annual Report, 2020). Jayawardhana, (2016) argued that although the performance in 2015-16 has improved, Adidas is struggling to overcome the huge gap in its market share in comparison to Nike.

Moreover, the sportswear industry has reached the maturity stage, whereby the market is highly fragmented, and competition is based on similar products with high quality, style, and performance. (Bain, 2015). According to Jayawardhana, (2016) Puma and Nike are the main competitors of Adidas, with similar business models and product lines. However, a lot of smaller rivals successfully increased their market share. Germano (2015), argued that this is combined with rapidly changing customer trends influenced by technological advancement. Detailed research, therefore, is important to assess how the organization can overcome the challenges in this regard, considering that competition undergoes cycles, and any competitive advantage is temporary (Johnson *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, critical analysis of competitive strategies is beneficial in terms of improved competition practices and organizational profitability in the long term, bringing up fresh insights into organizations' behaviour and strategic choices (Ormanidhi & String, 2008).

### ***Purpose of the study***

The study, therefore, aims to assess how Adidas might gain a sustainable competitive advantage through the implementation of an appropriate specific strategy. Reflecting on the main generic competitive strategies and their frameworks. It will attempt to suggest a competitive strategy that would enhance the competitiveness and recommend an appropriate course of action. Therefore, among the key objectives of the study were:

- To assess how an organisation might gain a competitive advantage to increase market share in its respective industry and to contribute to knowledge and research in the area
- To undertake a literature review in the area by using secondary sources of data. This would help to gain insights into past research and studies of the existing area

As in any research of this nature, an underpinning research question should be driving the study. Therefore, the study posed the main research question:

- How might an organisation gain a sustainable competitive advantage through a specific competitive strategy?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The choice of competitive strategy as a business-level strategy, as informed by a corporate entity, refers to a purely strategic choice an organization can make of how to compete successfully and position itself more favourably in its industry. (Porter, 1980; 1985; Johnson *et al.*, 2008). According to Jayawardhana (2016), Nike has a larger market share in the sportswear industry than its main rival Adidas. Wells (2019) argued that Nike has been able to target those between the ages of 11 to 45 years through its segmentation and targeting tactics to cultivate long-term customer loyalty; this has contributed to its larger market share in the sportswear industry. This is coupled with its ability to offer a quality product at value-based and competitive pricing (Mateos, 2020). Jayawardhana (2016), therefore, argued that Adidas needs to devise a sustained competitive strategy to give them an edge over their main rivals to increase their market share in the sportswear industry. This view is supported by Thompson *et al.* (2012), who argued that in order to increase its market share in an industry, an organisation needs to devise a sustained competitive strategy that will give it an edge over its rivals.

Porter (1985); D'Aveni (1994); Bowman (1998) & Johnson *et al.* (2008) share the same view about what *competitive advantage* is, namely: the ability to provide customers with what they need and/or desire more effectively; or in a greater extent than rivals. Kotler & Armstrong (1999) clarify that customer needs and wants to create the value consumers expect to receive from the product or service they acquire, describing the *competitive advantage* as the ability to propose to customers greater than rivals' value for money so that considerable lead is achieved. According to Burney, (1991) gaining *competitive advantage* is not only implementing value creating strategy, but furthermore, the one is not to be applied by other existing or potential competitors simultaneously. Barney & Tyler (1991) complement that for the *competitive advantage* to be sustainable, in addition to all the discussed conditions, other competitors should not be able to duplicate the strategy benefits. Porter (1985) extends that higher rates of return and "above-average" profitability are maintained in the long term after an organization successfully positions itself favorably, equal to sustainable competitive advantage.

### *Sustainability of Competitive Advantage*

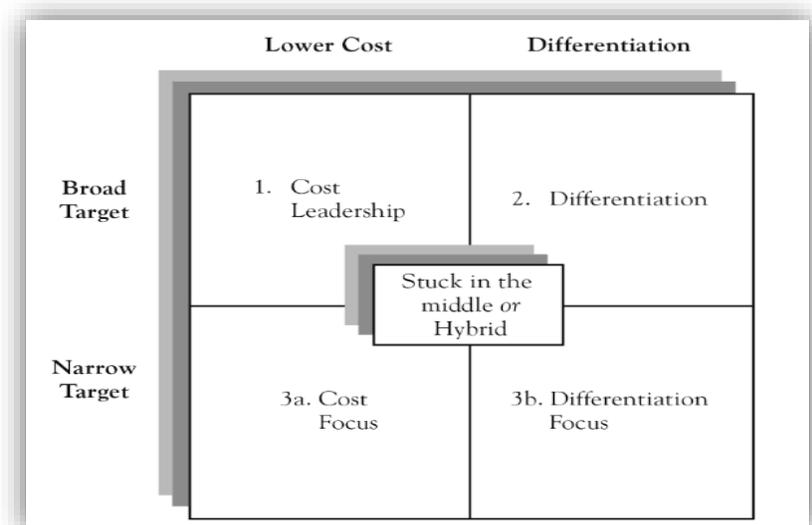
Yet, neither of the definitions in the literature specifies the exact period of time in which the competitive advantage should exist to become sustainable. Porter (1985) and Jacobsen (1988) simply suggest that it should be present for a "long period of time". Rumelt (1984) argues that competitive advantage is maintained and sustained only when efforts to duplicate the advantage of the organization's rival cease.

This makes the definition of sustainable competitive advantage an equilibrium one, with no need to define the exact amount of time competitive advantage is sustained. (Hirshleifer, 1982). On the other hand, it is not the time specified that determines the existence of sustainable competitive advantage but the inability of another existing or potential rival to duplicate the strategy that contributes to this sustained competitive advantage by an organisation (Burney, 1991).

**Frameworks for Gaining Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

GENERIC STRATEGIES: PORTER’S FRAMEWORK

According to Porter (1985), superior customer value as the value customers heartily pay for the product/service offered by the firm, derives from two main attributes: “lower than competitor’s price” or “unique benefits” that overwhelm the price, outlining two main types of competitive advantage: cost leadership and differentiation. These are generic, i.e., not industry or an organisation dependant, whereby an organisation must choose what type of competitive advantage to choose, and determine its exact scope; otherwise, it will be “stuck in the middle” (Porter, 1985).



**Figure 1. Porter’s Generic Strategies**

(Warner, 2010, p. 101, adopted from Porter, 1985)

*Cost leadership* achieved through “cost advantage” by “trading standard products” (Porter, 1985) combined with “aggressive pricing” (Porter, 1980) in one or more related industries refers to organization’s

efficiency and overall low cost, appearing from various sources according to industry structure. Higher than rivals' profit is achieved by selling at the average price, or the market share is increased if selling at lower than competitors' price. (Ireland *et al.*, 2011) Cost leadership reaches "above-average" profitability through proximity and parity, translating the cost advantage into higher than rivals' returns without offsetting its cost advantage (Porter, 1985; O'Sullivan, 2012)

**Differentiation** core in offering different customer segments a unique product at a premium price, whereby few product features are chosen to be of extreme value by buyers. (Porter, 1980; Porter 1985; Johnson *et al.*, 2008) The differentiator becomes an "above-average" performer in its market when the premium price exceeds the incurred extra cost of differentiating, and thus sustainable competitive advantage is attained. Increased profitability derives from various factors, such as marketing approach, product, product delivery system, etc. (Porter, 1980; Porter 1985). Customer perception and firm image are the turning points, based on the difference and distinguishing product features superior to rivals,' because they assist in building customer relationships through product personalization. (Thompson *et al.*, 2008) Thus, differentiator increases profitability through quality, brand loyalty, and reduced demand elasticity of consumers (Porter, 1985).

**Focus strategy** suggests the "exploitation of narrow target differences from the balance of the industry" (Porter, 1985), creating a segment market niche. (Davidson, 2001; Porter, 1980, 1985) A group of industry segments is chosen, and company strategy is directed to satisfy their needs to the exclusion of others, thus achieving a competitive advantage. If the targeted segment is not different than others, the strategy will be unsuccessful. Strategy variations *focus on cost leadership* and *focus differentiation*, which are determined by the differences in customer behaviour within the chosen segments – price sensitivity (cost focus) or uniqueness sensitivity (differentiation focus). If the company can achieve a competitive advantage with the focus (either differentiation or cost), when the segment is still attractive, sustainable competitive advantage is confirmed. (Porter, 1980; 1985)

Whereas industry attractiveness is beyond company control, competitive strategy holds the power to make an industry more or less attractive, and in this sense, it not only replies to the environment but tends to shape it in an organization's favour. (Porter, 1980; 1985) In fact, the industry attractiveness analysis in many strategic planning concepts is at the expense of simply chasing market share increase. (Yamin *et al.* 1999; Thompson *et al.* 2008).

#### HYBRID STRATEGIC APPROACH

Porter (1980; 1985) argues that generic strategies are mutually exclusive, supported by Minarik (2007), who agrees that strategies are not equally appropriate. Both insist on choosing one strategy, to prevent being “stuck in the middle” and becoming an under-average performer in the industry. Dess & Davis (1984); Parker & Helms (1992); Nayyar, 1993) complement that a company must concentrate all available resources and competencies in one single strategy, to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Porter (2001) reiterates that new internet rules have not changed the tools required for the strategy, and organisations still compete on the same basis. This point is supported by Thornhill & White (2007) study of 2,351 organizations, confirming that the “strategic purity” relationship with performance is still significant in favour of a single strategy, which might be a “mixed combination” of offering quality and unique products to customers at an affordable price lower than that of your competitors (Thompson *et al.*, 2012).

Yet, Porter (1985) assumes the application of a hybrid strategic approach by innovation pioneers and acknowledges the risks each generic strategy holds, such as a higher risk of imitation of the business model by rivals, loss of proximity and/or parity in cost leadership and differentiation, technology advancement, sub-segmenting the industry, loss of customer demand, etc. This is supported by Banker *et al.* (2014) research findings, showing that cost leadership and differentiation positively influence “contemporaneous” performance, as differentiation enables maintaining of current performance at a higher extent but comes with higher risk and “unstable performance” whereby the relationship is examined between strategic positioning and company performance through analysis of 13,000 companies’ achieved data for the period 1989-2013.

Miller & Friesen (1986); Buzzell & Gale (1987); Hill (1988); Allen & Helms (2006); Huebsch (2017) also support the idea that a hybrid strategy suits better organization’s circumstances and firm can profitably adapt a simultaneous combination of competitive strategies because they form a close cycle. Reitsperger *et al* (1993) extend that only a few organisations apply the generic strategy, arguing that hybrid strategy is the norm with the complexity of business practices, especially in industries that have reached the maturity stage of strong rivalry.

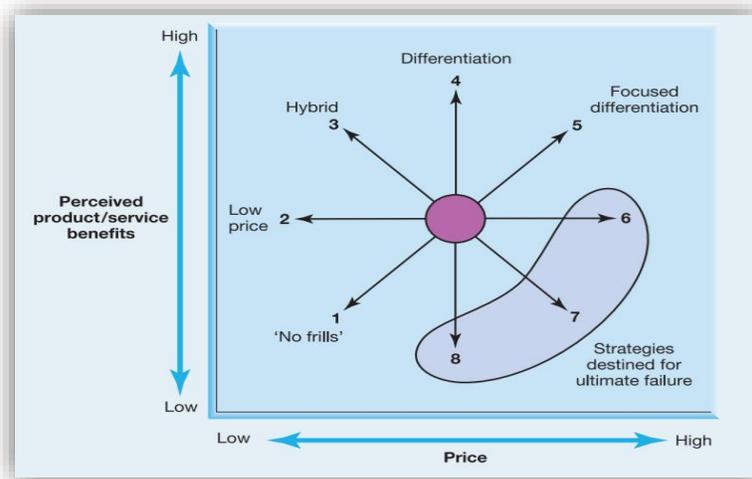
Hendry (1990); Thompson & Martin (2005) consent, arguing on broad and narrow focus value, stating that industry boundaries are constantly blurring under the technological change and niche markets emerge at all times within globalization. Huebsch (2017), therefore, argued that the complexity of the environment coupled with the complexity of buying behaviour of recent customers had necessitated

the “mixed strategy” approach for organisations to gain sustainable competitive advantage. According to Kotler & Armstrong (2013), most people in their early youthful ages are mostly influenced by price and quality, and brand perspectives. This assertion supports the view of Thompson *et al.* (2012) that price and product quality uniqueness which can be premised on “mixed strategy,” seem to influence consumers' purchasing behaviour. Also, in the sportswear industry, opined (Jayawardhana, 2016).

BOWMAN'S STRATEGY CLOCK

**Strategy clock**, developed by Faulkner & Bowman (1995), is a framework enshrining Porter’s categories for differentiation and focus, along with price, embracing the hybrid strategic approach. **(Figure 2)** The model proposes *eight different competitive positions*, where consumers choose according to their perception of value for money, combining product/service benefits with the price, as follows: *low-value positions* “no frills” and “low price,” at which low-cost leader under the pressures of lower competitors’ prices, sells greater volumes at the expense of quality; “*hybrid*” position – at which competitive advantage is based on customer loyalty through relative good product quality and fair price with perceived product value, higher than the one in the previous two strategies. At *differentiation positions* (“differentiation” & “focus differentiation”) the Strategy clock reaches its peak with high perceived value in terms of high quality and uniqueness, charged a premium, as critical for gaining competitive advantage.

The bottom line suggests *three positions* for “certain failure,” with the following combinations: increased price for a standard product (*position 6*); low value but the high price (*position 7*); low value with normal price (*position 8*). (Faulkner & Bowman, 1995; Bowman, 1998; Johnson *et al.*, 2008)



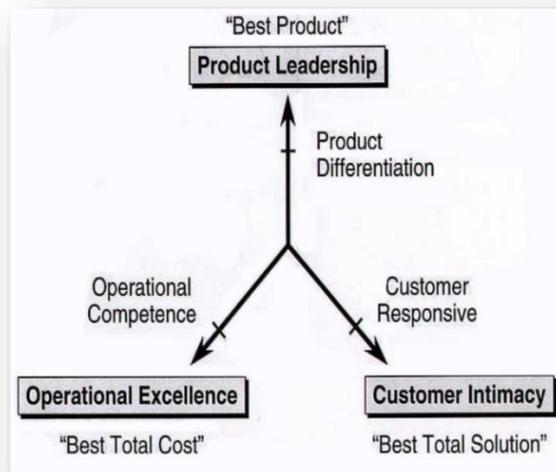
**Figure 2. Bowman’s Strategic Clock**

(Johnson *et al*, 2008, adapted from Faulkner & Bowman, 1995)

Faulkner & Bowman (1995) suggest this tool is useful for more favourable positioning in the industry to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, taking benefit from the company’s competencies. Miller & Friesen (1986); Johnson *et al* (2008) extend that understanding each of the eight positions enables an organization to assess its current strategy and identify whether adjustments can improve its competitive position. Simister (2011) argues that Strategy Clock is biased in terms of assisting in directing competitive strategy to raise market share, with no clear prescription on the profit impact from actions within the customer matrix. Yet, customer behaviour is unpredictable (Mathur & Kenyon, 1997), meaning that company moves within the tool may not have the expected effect on customers. (Simister, 2011)

VALUE-DISCIPLINE MODEL

Another framework deriving from Porter’s Generic concept is *Value-Discipline Model*. Whereas Bowman’s Strategy Clock propose favourable positioning, devising different generic strategy combinations between price and value relationship, Treacy & Wiersema (1993;2007) emphasize on the identification of what companies want their customers to value them for, outlining three “value disciplines,” where an organization can focus on gaining competitive advantage (See Figure 3)



**Figure 3. Value-Discipline Model**

(Treacy & Wiersema, 2007)

Bowman (1998) identifies clear similarities between Treacy & Wiersema, Bowman's, and Porter's models: *Operational excellence* corresponds to Porter's cost leadership strategy and "low price" of Bowman's, offering acceptable quality and purchase convenience that no other competitor in the industry can offer, via core process optimisation, but not establishing customer relationship, whereas Treacy & Wiersema (1993) at least clearly identify that strategy targets particular segment type. (Bowman, 1998)

*Product leadership*, equal to Porter's and Bowman's "differentiation" strategy, suggests high-quality, cutting-edge products offered to customers, with emphasis on innovation and product development, creating customer loyalty. *Customer intimacy*, similar to Porter's and Bowman's "focused differentiation," tailors specific customer needs and relies on business structure based on relationship management and solutions' development. (Treacy & Wiersema, 1993; Bowman, 1998) All three value disciplines should be developed at a good level to lead to sustainable competitive advantage, although the focus should be on one single discipline. Furthermore, a single choice is made, as with the value discipline choice, organization is selecting the customer category it will serve. (Treacy & Wiersema, 1993).

### *Summary of the Literature*

The above review of the literature makes sense for Adidas to find out the best competitive strategy that helps to position itself most favourable in the sporting goods industry in a way to create and sustain competitive advantage; however, the main distinguishing feature of the competitive advantage is its uncertainty and temporality and once created, others try to copy it (Johnson *et al.*, 2008). In this regard, the following distinct features of *sustainable competitive advantage* have been identified by (Dess *et al.*, 2006; Blazey, 2008); the adopted strategy should be rare and inimitable, and it will be very difficult to be duplicated by other rivals.

On the other hand, the global challenge of today dictates the revision of Porter's theory to better capture reality through a "combined-emphasis" competitive strategy, namely "hybrid", "mixed", and "integrated" models. (Miller & Friesen, 1986; Buzzell & Gale, 1987; Hill, 1988; Allen & Helms, 2006; Huebsch, 2017) The mixed strategic approach offers the most attractive choices in many circumstances, although the research on competitive strategies will further continue, scoping different organisations, on their size, sector, and country (Baroto *et al.*, 2012; Salavou, 2015). Johnson *et al.*, (2008) argued that this strategic dimension has become unabatedly important for gaining sustainable competitive

advantage in terms of providing customers with premium value, hence might increase an organisation's market share if an organisation adopts it.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods have been considered as options, being both systematic. However, quantitative research was chosen for this study. The quantitative research method allows primary data to be collected and analysed fairly, quickly, and less costly, enabling numerical data to be analysed for statistical purposes (Nykiel, 2007).

The survey was employed in the research because of its proven success in gathering various types of primary data for business purposes by: "asking people questions about their knowledge, attitudes, preferences, and buying behaviour" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011) and also, as it is the most effective survey method to collect genuine data relatively quickly, which also less costly (Malhorta & Bricks, 2006) Questionnaire designed of open-ended and closed-ended questions was chosen because of it regards to greater flexibility when choosing most convenient among various options of how to collect a needed data (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). The questionnaire was piloted before distribution through simple random sampling, and the sample size was 100 respondents. The questionnaire was meant to assess customers' perceptions and what might influence them should they intend to buy their favourite sportswear. The targeted population for the study was considered from two shopping centers in London, namely, Westfield and Shepard's Bush, with both being done in January 2022. The responses were recorded onto Microsoft office data recording and analysis software.

## **PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

The survey had 100% response rate. In terms of respondents', gender and age were captured. Genders were relatively well distributed, with males being 4%, overwhelming the females. In terms of age distribution, 20% of the respondents of the age groups 18-24 took part, and the percentage of people from age groups 25-34 also 36%, while 45-54 were also 12% of the various age groups that were part of the respondents. The respondents' aged 35-45, were also 30% of all the surveyed people, whereas those of age groups 55-64 and 65 and above were only 2%. The results from the gender turned out to be 48% females and 52% males.

The survey attempted to assess where Adidas stands in comparison to its rival in terms of brand preference. The results 32% of the respondents, stated their preference for Adidas, 51% for Nike, 12% for Puma, other brands were 3%, while 2% were indifferent.

Identifying how the two generic dimensions of cost and differentiation (quality uniqueness) as perceived by consumers of sportswear, namely which one is most important in their final purchase decision, 77% of the respondents were of the view, they will consider cost, while 13% stated their perspective as indifferent, with 10% stating they were less likely to consider the cost. Also, with the quality uniqueness features, again, 75% said stated they are likely or most likely to consider that, while 15% stated they were of the indifferent perspective, with 10% that their perspective was not likely to consider that. On what might prompt switching brands, 41% believed that they would consider quality uniqueness, while 40% opted for price. In addition, 12% stated their perspective as a result of buying convenience, while 7% were not specific but stated other reasons.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study confirmed the findings of competitiveness being an issue and yet critical for Adidas because 51 % stated their preferred brand as Nike, while 32% were of Adidas, requiring urgent action due to its low brand preference as compared to Nike (Jayawardhana, 2016). Hence, the impacts of its performance in the sportswear industry. Therefore, the study found that the two critically important factors determining consumers' buying behaviour, are price and quality. Hence, Adidas would be "stuck in the middle" if it chose a single strategy, confronting the opinion of Porter, (1985) and (Thornhill & White, 2007). This is inconsistent with the perspective of Thompson *et al.* (2012), who argued a mixed strategy of offering products at an affordable price coupled with good quality uniqueness might give an organisation a competitive advantage. Kotler & Armstrong (2011) are of the opinion that these are important parameters determining consumers' buying behaviour.

Again, concerning the perspectives on customers' switching to other sportswear brands, most respondents also stated that they might switch to other brands if their preferred perspectives of what they might deem as quality uniqueness do not match their expectations. In addition, most of them also were of the view that they might switch based on their perspectives on pricing. Both of these perspectives are more likely to impact consumer behaviour, as opined by (Thompson *et al.*, 2012). This implies Adidas needed to alter its single competitive differentiation strategy, which has affected its market share and, hence its profitability (Group Annual Report, 2015), compared to its main rival Nike.

From the perspective of various demographical age groups, most of the respondents were between the ages of 18 to 45 years. Wells (2020) argued Nike had become a market leader in the sportswear industry because

of its tactics of segmenting and targeting those within this age bracket. Mateos (2020) is of the view that Nike's ability to offer quality products and uniqueness to its main target market and in addition to its value-based and competitive or affordable pricing strategies, might have contributed to its large market share in the sportswear industry. This supports the perspectives of Thompson *et al* (2012) that price and product quality uniqueness which can be premised on "mixed strategy," seem to influence consumers purchasing behaviour. Also, in their study (Kotler & Armstrong 2013), they opined that the price and quality uniqueness of products influence the consumer behaviour of most people at their young ages.

Brassington & Pettitt (2013) supports this view by arguing that with the trend of consumer buying behaviour of most youth, organisations that produced good quality products at affordable prices, which might be lower than their competitors, to the admiration of this target market, are likely to increase their market share in their respective industries. This confirms the similar opinion shared by Huebsch, (2017), that the key to gain and sustained competitive, behove organisations to consider the hybrid or the "mixed strategy approach". This implies that not all is lost; Adidas might gain its market leadership in the sportswear industry if it considers the hybrid strategic approach as a means of sustaining its competitive advantage over its rivals (Banker *et al.* 2014). However, Dess *et al* (2006) and Blazey (2008) opined that in sustaining the competitive advantage, the strategy should be rare and inimitable.

However, although the study provides insight into how Adidas might gain a sustained competitive advantage, further studies should be considered on the said organisation, to assess its validity. The study acknowledges its further limitations. For instance, the topic under review is extremely dynamic, and with the business environment changing fast, there will therefore be the need for continuous studies on organisational competitive practices and behaviours (Ormanidhi & String, 2008), due to the complexity of the issue from globalisation point of view. Therefore, an investigation from various perspectives, including the combination of different research methods, does not limit the research scope to only a quantitative approach but also could include a qualitative research perspective (Malhorta & Bricks, 2006). In addition, while the study had a high response rate 100% from sampled 100 respondents, a higher number of respondents would have given further perspectives to the above-discussed results.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the research findings, the study recommends the "hybrid" strategy as the most effective in order to add premium customer value, which might be a complete product solution, and thus, for

Adidas to outperform Nike in the complex globalised matured sportswear industry, (Bain, 2015). In addition, to gain a sustainable competitive advantage with the proposed “hybrid strategy”, steps should be taken to right-balance between cost leadership and differentiation (Johnson *et al*, 2008) in terms of determining the optimum price-quality proportion. Implying the price of their sportswear should not be very high price, with sustained good quality. Both were confirmed to be of greater importance among the surveyed customers.

The sportswear industry is in its maturity phase, which puts additional pressure on Adidas to be extremely proactive when deciding product value offering to gain sustainable competitive advantage, which as per the study, does not include premium price, while the quality should be sustained high. It is impossible to achieve this by single cost leadership or differentiation strategy to increase an organisation’s market share (Huebsch, 2017).

Therefore, as per the study, more buyers could be attracted through the application of “hybrid” strategy, grounded on the balanced price and quality uniqueness of the product (Huebsch, 2017), which could result in an increase in market share, hence, could improve profitability and reduced the cost for the differentiation through Adidas strong brand name, which is well established worldwide (Poltz, 2014).

## **CONCLUSION**

In the light of the previous studies discussed in the paper and looking from a customer perspective, the undertaken research proposes different reading, linking past and present strategic thinking on gaining sustainable competitive advantage through specific competitive strategy, which should be well-balanced between the quality and price to form greater than rivals’ value for money offering. In this sense, the results acknowledge the importance of Porter’s Generic framework as still useful, stressing its revision requirement to fit the upcoming business reality.

Yet, the current study is among others in the field, posing that investigations in the field will unabatedly not stop, falling under the greatest interest of practitioners and researchers when it comes to gaining substantial competitive advantage in the challenging business environment of the modern world. (Baroto *et al*, 2012; Salavou, 2015) Most importantly, business scope organizations of any industry sector, country, or size will always strive to find out how to gain sustainable competitive advantage and what competitive strategy would suit best.

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