



The coronavirus: how the current situation is keeping us in panic mode! What to look out for.

There's already a tsunami of information on the coronavirus – why is a market researcher also now expressing an opinion about it? Simply because far too little is understood about the psychological aspect. And too many well-meaning preventative actions will have unintentional but highly negative consequences. It's like trying to avoid scorch marks in the carpet and burning the house down as a result.

The fear of the unknown is probably the strongest, most irrational force that we know¹. Evolution has done a great job here. The only problem is that evolution didn't know about social networks or the media landscape and couldn't anticipate that panic and fear is often negative for the survival of society.

We normally have this fear of the unknown well under control, and mostly don't pay much attention to it. With the exception of those with OCD. However, our brains unconsciously register any deviations from normality and assess what they could mean. And all of a sudden we have an entirely new context here. We hear of deaths in China, reports of sealed-off cities, cruise ships and big hospital projects. We hear of mask shortages and stolen disinfectants.

We hear from experts who use the opportunity to promote themselves in front of a microphone with the most ominous statements possible. Media we all know then take this 'wisdom' and feed it to their worried readers.



Reasoned voices perish in this maelstrom. The networks are starting to glow assiduously and are excitedly and repeatedly updating their reports, enriched by their tendency to be over-dramatic and seasoned with a pinch of apocalyptic conspiracy theories. And as if that weren't enough, concerned minds are now being confronted with emptied supermarket shelves. The ultimate proof that panic really is now appropriate. Anyone who coughs represents a personal Chernobyl.

Now, all of a sudden, even people who really ought to know better are cracking. People like Spiegel editor Maack, who is simultaneously allowed to be hysterical in an article for Spiegel Online² (one of the better German news portals) and to beg for understanding for his panicky behaviour.

Gabor Steingart³ (Best rated news podcaster) does a much better job in his Morning Briefing of 4/3/20 where he allows voices of reason and current figures to be aired. The bottom line is this: in Europe, the current course is suggesting it is comparable to the flu.



Although, for most people, it's much nicer to come down with coronavirus than with the flu. If you get the flu, you're properly ill from day one. 85% of those infected with coronavirus experience rather mild cold symptoms. I'd go for coronavirus, but I've actually been vaccinated against the flu.

Approximately 100,000 have had the flu this season in Germany. There are around 1100 cases of coronavirus as of March 9th. Alexander Kekulé from the University of Halle-Wittenberg has issued a warning – not about the virus but about panicking: "It's not as contagious as the flu or measles."³

Steingart spoke with Professor Hendrik Streeck. He is the Director of the Institute of Virology and HIV Research at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Bonn. Steingart reached him after a visit to coronavirus patients from Heinsberg in North Rhine-Westphalia, where around 1,000 people have been put under quarantine.

"You don't need to be really worried. If you're healthy, you can deal with it very easily."

"We're now expecting a mortality rate of 0.3 to 0.5 percent, which is comparable to the mortality rate of normal flu. It won't be any great phenomenon that people die from this illness. We should concentrate on making sure that the people who are seriously ill get optimal help and care."³



Unfortunately, panic doesn't just stop with normal people: it makes people feel like they're in danger and influences decisions which have much more far-reaching consequences than Mr Smith buying himself a couple more packs of noodles. Be that politicians, association officials or business leaders. Those who, in good faith, want to help combat this mysterious danger. Those who don't want it said that they put their employees at risk. Those who cancel their participation in important commercial events such as trade fairs and thus force the organisers to postpone or even call off the trade fairs. Those who won't let their employees travel anymore....

That makes it about much more than just limiting their contact with other people. It immediately becomes about the many, invisible victims of these acts. The taxi drivers, the hotel operators, the employees of the big trade fairs, the restaurants, the trade fair craftspeople, the haulage companies, the bus companies, the railway companies and airlines. The people who run the snack shops in train stations or airports. This directly affects an extremely high number of people, putting many of their livelihoods at risk. Especially if this example is repeated and trade fairs are cancelled in quick succession. Millions will be directly and indirectly affected very quickly.



If other high-profile events – such as the European Football Championship or the Olympics – were cancelled, our panic buttons would be pressed in even more firmly and result in further knee-jerk reactions. No cinema, no theatre, no stadium, no restaurant, no sports club, no visits to the red light district (okay, there's probably little sympathy for that one) would cause large-scale existential fear, and not just among sex workers.

For Professor Streeck, the measures taken by many event organisers seem excessive: “We can't cancel every gathering for the next two years due to a virus. That would cause society to break apart. **I personally tend to think that you shouldn't cancel such big events.**”

Over the past year, we've had to mourn the death of a good 3000 people due to traffic incidents. You could probably prevent that by stopping motorised transport. That's clearly a short-sighted idea. Unfortunately, we're not taking a long view right now when it comes to coronavirus.

As a BrainCandy reader, you have just as little protection from knee-jerk reactions as I do. But you can keep reminding yourself that your gut feeling is pushing you in the wrong direction. And that there will be surprisingly far-reaching consequences if we all do that.

It isn't just Google having all its employees work from home. Maybe Google should use its famous artificial intelligence from time to time when emotional human decisions are clearly being made in panic mode!

I myself only modify my behaviour to the extent that I consider precautionary measures – such as frequent hand washing and antiviral strengthening of my immune system (vitamins A and D, zinc and copper, monolaurin acid/coconut oil⁴) – during flu season. And I concentrate on the rational voices in the media coverage and try to block out the sound of hysteria. (Of course, I'm prepared to change my behaviour if information changes.) I will still make trips to customer meetings or studios, although I prefer to travel by car. Aha – so you're worried about trains. No – I'm worried about everyone being tarred with the same brush and being stuck on the train for many hours if there is a 'suspected case'. I'm off to the gym.

1. <https://www.spiegel.de/gesundheit/psychologie/angstforscher-ueber-nervenzitgel-gibt-es-eine-deutsche-angstlust-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000169705044>
2. https://www.spiegel.de/gesundheit/psychologie/coronavirus-wie-schuetze-ich-meine-freunde-a-a2395f3e-ad28-43ac-95bd-a3505603aad4?sara_ecid=soci_upd_KsBF0AFjflf0DZCxpPYDCQgO1dEMph
3. <https://www.gaborsteingart.com/morning-briefing/>
4. If you're interested in reading about this, I'll be happy to provide you with the literature



Buchempfehlungen

Von Ralph Ohnemus:

Markenerleben. Die Strategie im Hyperwettbewerb und Informationstsunami [> hier bestellen](#)

Markenstaunen. Gewinnen im Informationstsunami [> hier bestellen](#)



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