

# Consumers react to coronavirus crisis, increasingly move online

April 8 2020, by Erin Karter

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Consumers with family obligations, people older than 35, business owners and Democrats were more likely to be extremely concerned

about Coronavirus in mid March, just as the U.S. response and news about the virus was ramping up, according to an [analysis of consumer survey responses](#). The data also suggest the virus has accelerated the move to online, and particularly mobile, shopping.

Professor Martin Block of Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications analyzed a survey of 7,800 [consumers](#) conducted by the consumer research company Prosper Insights & Analytics, comparing data from March 2020 to averaged data from the previous six years.

The Prosper data is collected monthly online and is weighted and balanced to match the U.S. census. In March, the most recent monthly survey asked a series of standard consumer questions that are asked every March, but this year also included questions about COVID-19.

"The data provide a consumer lens through which decisions made by categories of people to comply with or defy social distancing and lockdown orders can be better understood," said Block. "The analyses provide a snapshot in time of consumer sentiment and emerging consumer behavior.

"Since mid March, the situation has become far more serious," he said. "The picture may continue to evolve when the mid-April data becomes available, which should reflect the impact of the stay at home orders."

Overall, 22.8% of all adults said they were extremely concerned about the Covid-19 pandemic in the March 2020 Prosper monthly survey, and 17.6% said they were not concerned at all. The balance of consumers said they were very concerned or slightly concerned.

Block measured the level of concern among groups, rating them as "extremely concerned" to "not at all concerned." Concentrating on the

extremes, the data suggest four general segments of consumer reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to being older, one of the groups most at risk from COVID-19, respondents who were extremely concerned were likely to have [family obligations](#), the data show. They tended to be people who are married, have children (and pets), and are often members of shopping clubs, like Costco and Amazon.

"The biggest variable in that group is having children; if you have children you are much more concerned than if you don't," Block said.

Those groups reporting significantly less concern or being "not at all concerned" include younger, single and childless people, the [data](#) showed.

Political affiliation is also an indicator. People who self identified as Democrats were more likely to be extremely concerned than people who identified as Republican.

The pandemic crisis also appears to be accelerating the shift to online shopping, particularly for mobile. Overall, physical stores sales have declined by an average -1.2%, whereas online sites show an average 1.0% increase, the survey showed.

"Over the last decade or more, we've seen a slow move to online, and now this (crisis) has really bumped it up," Block said. "In almost every category people say they are doing more on their phones. The increases in mobile shopping may be one of the most important impacts."

Provided by Northwestern University

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