

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19



DESCRIPTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has escalated rapidly, infecting and taking many lives. People are being quarantined, hospitals are prioritising admission & treatment of patients and countries are closing borders and restricting citizen's movement – with the intent to reduce its spread and impact on all aspects of society.

Yet, not everyone is taking COVID-19 seriously. Worldwide, we see people breaching quarantine/ lockdown orders, people still travelling and gathering in large groups. On social media, irresponsible messages and acts of mischief are also going viral, generating more fear and confusion. COVID-19 is causing serious disruption at all levels of society, from personal lives to global networks. How can we exercise personal responsibility over the precautionary measures and the messages we put out for those in our networks?

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- COVID-19 is a serious issue.
- See the impact of our words and actions – when we trivialise matters, it might be insensitive, inappropriate. As a result, we influence others to trivialise it too, undoing the disease control interventions taken nationwide and worldwide.
- Take personal responsibility over our own social distancing/health and over the messages we spread to others.

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19

Influence and gain commitment from people

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19 – Part 1 (Exploring the Topic)

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LESSON PACKAGE THREE

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19

HOW SERIOUS DO YOU THINK COVID-19 IS?

GOVERNMENTS ARE TREATING COVID-19 SERIOUSLY

In Italy, a nationwide lockdown went into effect on March 10 that restricts virtually all aspects of life for its 60 million citizens, including retail, leisure, worship, imprisonment, and travel.

Spain became the second European country to impose a nationwide quarantine on Saturday.

France followed suit, closing nonessential businesses over the weekend. On Monday it implemented a full lockdown, banning public gatherings and walks outside.

BUILDING CONTEXT – Government measures and its impact across countries

The COVID-19 pandemic has escalated rapidly, infecting almost 400,000 people and killing more than 16,000 in almost 200 countries.

Impact of COVID-19:

Educators may ask students for a quick response.

- Lives are at risk/ lost
- People are being quarantined
- Workers are taking pay cuts/ losing their jobs
- Hospitals are prioritising admission & treatment of patients
- Countries are closing borders and restricting citizen's movement

[Quick Discussion]

From a scale of 1 to 10, how serious do you think COVID-19 is?

Are you concerned? Why or why not?

- *Let students share their own perspectives. If there are viewpoints on both ends of the spectrum, allow for the discussion on why it should be concerning/ not concerning.*
- *There is no need to land on an agreement/ conclusion at this stage.*

Governments worldwide are treating COVID-19 very seriously. Countries all over the world are locking down their cities at varying degrees, ranging from travel restrictions to total lockdown whereby all citizens have to stay at home.

The total lockdown started in China, then we saw governments in Europe follow suit as the virus reached their population.

We see COVID-19 spreading across continents. As time passes, more and more countries impose ever-increasing

GOVERNMENTS ARE TREATING COVID-19 SERIOUSLY

New Zealand enacted a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all individuals entering the country.

Kenya has closed schools and blocked non-residents from entering the country, becoming the first African nation to impose such measures.

The Malaysian government announced Monday that all business operations will be closed except essentials like markets, utilities, broadcasting, banking, and healthcare.



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22 MARCH 2020 BORDER CLOSURE TO TOURISTS & SHORT- TERM VISITORS

ADDITIONAL BORDER CONTROL MEASURES TO REDUCE FURTHER IMPORTATION OF COVID-19 CASES

22ND MAR 2020

In view of the heightened risk of importation of COVID-19 cases into Singapore, all short-term visitors will now not be allowed to enter or transit through Singapore. This is also to contain measures to our own Singaporeans.



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levels of measures to stem to spread of COVID-19.

Lockdown measures are huge decisions as they have widespread impacts on our lives. Lockdown will help curb the spread of COVID-19, but it is not without cost.

The costs of implementing lockdown measures:

1. Society will almost come to a stop – everyone will stay in their own homes and maybe only leave home for specific reasons dependent on the country, like to see a doctor, to purchase essentials/food. For the Malaysian workers in Singapore, this means not seeing their family for weeks while staying in a foreign land alone until the lockdown is lifted.
2. Work for many people will stop. While there are Work From Home (WFH) measures in place for many companies, many blue-collar workers simply cannot work from home – their job requires them to be physically there. Hence, under a lockdown, many of them cannot work.
 - Without work, where is the money to sustain the family?
 - When COVID-19 is over, will they still have their jobs?

Despite all these tradeoffs, governments still chose to lockdown the countries while incurring great costs. This should communicate the severity of COVID-19 as the governments are willing to go to such extents to keep the people safe.

One of Singapore's measures

On 22 March 2020, Singapore made an unprecedented decision to close our borders to tourists and short-term visitors.

This is significant because Singapore is a tourism hub – 4.1% of our GDP is dependent on tourism dollars. This measure has widespread economic impact. It is not just about GDP, it is also about the livelihoods of employees who work in the tourism industry – the freelancers see their income fall to zero, employees see themselves on compulsory no-pay leave/ face the threat of retrenchment and some business owners see the prospect of closing their businesses.

**24 MARCH 2020
IMPACT ON AIRLINES**

SIA slashes capacity by 96%; group's cost cuts to affect 10,000 staff

Another industry which had a huge hit is the aviation industry. With the border control measures in various countries, including Singapore, SIA has grounded most of its fleet and the staff took varying amounts of pay cut and compulsory no-pay leave.

Loss of income and job is not a trivial matter. It's not just about the economy – it's about livelihood. What does this mean for the pilots, the air crew, the ground crew etc? What does this mean for their families?

[Quick Sharing]

- Anyone here has parents working in the affected industries, e.g. aviation, tourism, hospitality?
- How does your family feel about COVID-19?
- How is your family coping? What changes have you noticed?
- Who here had to cancel tuition, reduce frequency of dining out, sell the family car etc because your parents had to take a pay cut/lost their jobs?

In light of the proportionally large number of imported cases in Singapore, the measure might be a necessary and sound decision. But do not forget the tradeoffs we as a society will have to take for the decision made. Something will always have to give – it is not an easy decision to make.

- Despite the tradeoffs, why do we still do it?
- What happens if we don't?

Other measures in Singapore

On the same day, new measures also went out to enforce social distancing via restrictions on entertainment venues, tuition centres, malls etc. No more watching of movies at cinemas, no more tuition/enrichment classes, no more concerts for us.

Effectively, we should limit our time outside of home to work/ school, purchase food and essentials and stay at home as much as we can.

This is very disruptive to our daily lives. For those who work in affected industries, their livelihoods are similarly disrupted.

- What is going to happen to those who work in these industries and their families?



This measure also restricted religious gatherings. For a country that prides ourselves in racial and religious harmony and freedoms, this is a huge move. Places of worship are closed/ restricting access. This requires us to come to terms with practicing our respective religions differently from what we are familiar with.

- We are not invalidating the belief that we might have – that the soul (spiritual needs) matters more than the physical mortal body (which can be afflicted by diseases).
- At the same time, how can we practice and live out our beliefs in a way that does not compromise the well-being of others (including those who might not share the same belief)?

Once again, it might be a logical decision to enforce social distancing measures to greater effect. However, do take note of the tradeoffs

Note that these set of questions were a repeat. Educators may compare how students react to the same questions when framed with a different context.

- Despite the tradeoffs, why do we still do it?

Though we may not be able to enjoy these now, we do it with the hope that we will be able to enjoy these things in the future once the virus dies down.

- What happens if we don't?

The situation will prolong or worsen. We may have to suffer the consequences for a longer time.

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19 – Part 2 (Relating to the Topic)

AT THE SAME TIME...



AT THE SAME TIME...

More than 50,000 people in Italy charged with breaking quarantine rules



BUILDING CONTEXT – Trivialisation

At the same time, not all the population views COVID-19 as seriously as the governments and global health officials do.

In the United States, the university students are still travelling around and having beach parties and large gatherings despite the government advisories and health risks.

Italy currently has the highest infected numbers outside China as well as a death toll exceeding China's. People are supposed to be under lockdown in efforts to curb the spread. Yet, Italians are finding excuses to head out of home – walking their dogs, playing sports, continuing with large gatherings

AT THE SAME TIME...



TikTok user @avalouise generated huge waves of criticism as she took a video of herself taking on the “Coronavirus Challenge”, whereby she licked the toilet seat of an airplane toilet.

This video caused more users to follow what she did, some licking a variety of items like train handles and door knobs! Such behaviours can be dangerous and socially irresponsible, as people on your social media network will see, be influenced and follow. Imagine if the surface is indeed dirty and contaminated, be it from coronavirus or other things.

[Quick Sharing]

These are overseas examples – people of think that COVID-19 is nothing serious and ignore the rules/advisories or make jokes out of the situation. In other words, they are trivialising the situation.

Do we see the same things happening in Singapore? What do you know of?

BACK IN SINGAPORE

3 male teens, aged 15, investigated for spitting on lift buttons at Rumbia LRT station in Sengkang
Investigations are ongoing.

Boys, 12 & 17, investigated by S'pore police for allegedly spitting on lift buttons in Punggol & AMK
Two separate incidents.

3 S'pore teens, 17-19, arrested for spitting over 4th floor railing of shopping mall in town
They could be fined up to \$2,000 and/or jailed up to three months for public nuisance.

Back in Singapore, there was a spate of acts of mischief by different groups of teenagers, generally involving them purposely spitting on lift buttons and in public spaces.

In the 3rd case where youths spitted over the railing, it actually landed on a customer that was having his meal. This process was captured on video and spread around social media.

From 20 March 2020, all travellers entering Singapore will be served a 14-day Stay Home Notice (SHN)

[Quick discussion]

What do you know about SHN? What is allowed/ not allowed?

- Must stay at home throughout for the 14 days
- Not the same as Leave of Absence (LOA), which allows for people going out to purchase food and essentials

S'porean man openly flouts SHN after returning from Myanmar, called out by Facebook friends

The Ministry of Health has announced stricter penalties for those who do not comply with Stay-Home Notices.

BACK IN SINGAPORE



On 25 March 2020, a man who came back from Myanmar was served a 14-day SHN. Yet, he went out for a meal and posted photos of his meal on Facebook. He was subsequently reported to MOH by his Facebook friends.

**25 MARCH 2020
BEFORE CLOSURE OF
ENTERTAINMENT VENUES**

"One last night of fun": Revellers throng nightspots before closures, but merry-making masks worries over shattered livelihoods

"Although we could catch (the virus), it's better than having to stay at home"

"We can just have one last night of fun, so why not?"

As we heard earlier, the government announced a closure of entertainment venues by 26 March 2020. The night before, we saw crowds heading out to "party" and "hang out" just before the venues close.

One interviewee said "Although we could catch (the virus), it's better than having to stay at home". Another said "We can just have one last night of fun, so why not?"

This was the mindset of some of these patrons which explained why they are still heading out despite the various appeals to stay at home and avoid crowded places.

TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19 – Part 3 (Exploring impact of problem)

**PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORIES ON
COVID-19 REVOLVE AROUND
1. SOCIAL DISTANCING
2. PERSONAL HYGIENE**

**YET, WHY DO PEOPLE IGNORE
THESE ADVISORIES?**

[Discussion]

We have talked about how governments are viewing COVID-19 as an important issue and have put in place various public health measures. Yet, both globally and in Singapore, people are ignoring these advisories, gathering in large groups or just engaging and spreading their acts of mischief.

Why do people ignore these advisories?

- Why do people trivialise these issues?
- Many of these stories involves youth. Why is that so?
- Is it just ignorance/poor judgement? Or lacking in empathy?
 - Part of the issue might be ignorance – youths don't see/ understand the seriousness of it.
- Is it selfishness? [Self vs collective interest]
 - Our self-interest makes sense individually, but can cause problems collectively.
 - Students who insist on having a "good holiday" that they have paid for makes sense for them, but sabotages the containment measures that protect the society.
 - Citizens who insist on their freedom of movement is not wrong, but this puts others in the society at risk in today's climate.
 - Partygoers who wanted to meet their

<p style="text-align: center;">21 MARCH 2020 2 DEATHS FROM COVID-19</p> <p><small>Singapore</small> Singapore reports 2 deaths from COVID-19</p>	<p>friends before the suspension of entertainment venues reflects their self-interest, but by doing so they hurt the collective interest of social distancing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could it be some of us don't know how to respond to all these anxiety and fear so we trivialize the situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When everyone around us is tense, sometimes the way for us cope with these negative feelings is through humour – making light of the situation - Humour itself is not wrong, but when inappropriate and it comes across as trivialising an issue, it can be very irresponsible as it hurts feelings and lead to others laughing about it and trivializing it as well. - This is true whether or not the topic is COVID-19. When our friends lose a prized wallet, some of us might joke about it and brush off the situation. When our classmate has matters at home, or personal issues, instead of helping them confront the problem, we sometimes laugh it off and make insensitive comments. <p>On 21 March 2020, Singapore reported its first 2 deaths from COVID-19.</p> <p>[Quick Sharing]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How important is COVID-19 to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While some of us don't think it's important, others might feel it is an important issue to them. - When we trivialise the issue, we can be invalidating their experiences, their fears and potentially their grief. <p>Optional: [Sharing] Build empathy – let statistics become a real story</p> <p><i>If the class is mature and ready, the educator can invite students to share their personal stories of how they are affected by COVID-19, particularly students who have loved ones infected by COVID-19.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the student is open to share and the class is ready to listen with sensitivity and maturity, we would like to hear how was their experience
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seeing a loved one go through the process, and its impact on the family members

- How does it feel to have a family member in isolation and communication is limited?
 - (if applicable) How does it feel to have a loved one in ICU, in critical condition. Yet, you cannot visit him/her, and the only source of updates is via the hospital – you never know whether the next update is a positive or negative one
 - How do you feel when people trivialise COVID-19?
- *For this to take place, it is recommended for educators to identify and communicate with the student(s) before the session, so that they can prepare themselves for the sharing.*

**25 MARCH 2020
YOUNG ADULTS FORM THE LARGEST
GROUP OF COVID-19 CASES**

Young adults now make up largest group of coronavirus patients in Singapore

On 25 March 2020, the infected number in Singapore reflected that young adults (20 to 29 years old) has overtaken patients above 60 years old, forming the largest group of COVID-19 cases.

Previously, we often hear how COVID-19 is more likely to infect the elderly. The recent developments suggest that young people are also very likely to be infected.

**SOCIAL DISTANCING
#ITSNOTABOUT YOU**



We might be young and even if we are not too concerned about contracting COVID-19 ourselves, we might be asymptomatic and become silent carriers of the disease.

When we go home and interact with our family members, we might transmit this disease to them.

Social distancing and hygiene measures are not just about us, it is also about the people around us.

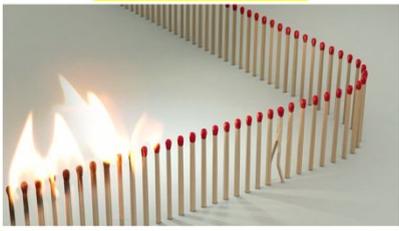
The thing about social distancing is that it is inconvenient – it takes us away from friends, from the outdoors, from recreation and social lives.

At the end of it, say 2-3 months later, if everything turns better, we relax our social distancing rules. We might feel that nothing has changed, and hence ask ourselves “Nothing has happened. Why did we even put ourselves into the misery of social distancing?”

Only then will we realise that that outcome is precisely the reason why we do social distancing and that outcome

<p style="text-align: center;">SOCIAL DISTANCING #ITSNOTABOUT YOU</p> <p><small>Make no mistake. When loved ones are removed from your home by ambulance because the virus has hit them hard, you are not going to be able to follow them there, sit by their hospital bed and hold their hand. You are not going to be able to pop in at 7:00 pm for visiting hours. They are going to have no one other than exhausted and brain hospital staff to see them through days or weeks of barely breathing through a ventilator until they either die or recover. They are not going to be well enough to text you.</small></p> <p><small>You are not going to be able to phone the ward to check in on them regularly (staff will be too busy for that). During that time, they will be completely alone, while you sit at home waiting to hear whether they have made it through.</small></p> <p><small>Imagine that person is someone you love dearly. Because it's going to be a reality for many in the coming weeks.</small></p> <p><small>And if that person in hospital happens to be you, going through that ordeal completely alone, it would be nothing less than terrifying.</small></p> <p><small>Please stay home and only go out if absolutely necessary. Social distancing is imperative right now for your family and mine.</small></p>	<p>is itself the success of social distancing. If we do it well, we might avoid the worst of COVID-19 pandemic and everything will go back to (more or less) normal at the end of the day.</p> <p>At the core of the message is this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. COVID-19 is serious. 2. Young people are vulnerable to COVID-19 as well. 3. Social distancing (and other health measures) is not (just) about us as young people. It is also about keeping our families safe.
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TRIVIALISATION OF COVID-19 – Part 4 (Solutions)

<p style="text-align: center;">HOW CAN WE TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY?</p> 	<p>CONCEPTUALISING SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS WITHIN OWN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE</p> <p>Social distancing works to reduce the spread of the disease. The more we collectively engage in social distancing, the fewer people the infected cases can spread to, which in turn results in fewer new cases. Eventually, social distancing (along with personal hygiene) can potentially stop the spread the COVID-19.</p> <p>[Discussion]</p> <p>What is our personal responsibility during this time, to ourselves? e.g. Social distancing, taking care of our own health and hygiene</p> <p>1. Win together:</p> <p>What is our personal responsibility during this time, with regards to social media/the things we do/say/share with family and friends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E.g. Fact-checking, so that we don't spread fake news that might result in more fear or complacency - E.g. Correcting misunderstandings, so that people who are not aware can be made aware of the seriousness of COVID-19 and the appropriate measures to undertake - E.g. Check in with friends and family. If they are overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, how can we support them emotionally through this time, while letting them know the boundaries of appropriate humour and behavior?
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	<p>2. Lead with a positive response: What is our influence on others (including our influence on the digital space), and how can we wield our influence wisely?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Know that our words and actions have impact on others- If we were to have an impact on others, what kind of impact would we like to leave? How can that impact be one of responsibility, maturity and assurance?
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