

Introduction

Toward a Post-COVID-19 Society

COVID-19 was identified in December 2019 as “a viral pneumonia of unknown cause” in Wuhan, Hubei, People’s Republic of China. In just over three months, COVID-19 infections, coupled with the circulation of people and goods due to increasing globalization, had spread around the world. The outbreak led the Japanese government to declare a state of emergency on April 7.

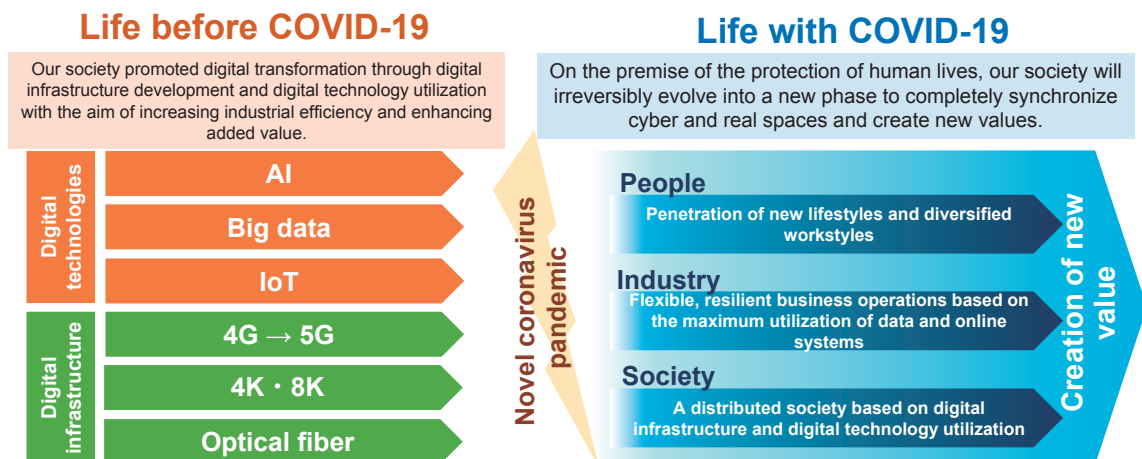
To cope with the pandemic, the national and local governments along with media organizations proactively issued information about the COVID-19 disease via communications and broadcasting channels. The government also called on people to stay away from the three Cs — closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings — as well as to avoid going outside on non-essential trips and to postpone events in order to reduce risks of infection. In response, telework was introduced, online education was introduced, and regulations on online medical care were relaxed. The virus’s spread made a chance to cause the digitalization wave to surge forward, even in fields that had not ventured far into the online realm, in the interest of maintaining social and economic activities while protecting human lives and overcoming this unprecedented crisis. Information and communication technology (ICT) has become more vital than ever as “essential tech” for preserving citizens’ livelihoods and economic activities.

The state of emergency was lifted in all prefectures on

May 25. Various restrictions will be eased gradually depending on the state of pandemic’s resolution. Japan’s post-COVID-19 society and economy will have moved irreversibly toward a new society and economy that will be in a distinctly different phase than the time before the pandemic. With long-held practices crumbling and activities based on digital and remote platforms taking root, transformations leading to the generation of new value will take place on every level — personal, industrial, and societal.

Digital transformations realized previously through digital infrastructure development and digital technology application have made industry more efficient and added higher value. In this process, they have also furthered the integration of cyber space and real space. There are indications that after the resolution of COVID-19 we will be headed for a society in which both spaces are in complete synchronization, and people’s activities will likely shift from real spaces to cyber space. Key efforts in moving toward this post-COVID-19 society and economy are revising regulations and practices that are inhibiting this shift and removing as many of the borders between real and cyber as possible. The use of fifth-generation (5G) mobile communication systems and other digital infrastructure and digital technologies like AI, the IoT, and big data will become more central than ever.

Figure 1 Before COVID-19 and with COVID-19



Source: Prepared from MIC materials