BRANDS AFTER COVID-19 – 'NEW NORMAL': GET INSPIRED BY CONSUMERS - A JPCR QUALITATIVE SURVEY

In October 2020, **JPCR** updated their **qualitative-'co-creation' research** with **120 Belgian consumers** from 22 to 70 years old, in the **'new normal'** period in order to **inspire brands for their strategies and action plans after COVID-19**. Consumers shared their experience, feelings, priorities and worries. They also shared their views on brands/companies that positively stood out in this 'new normal' period (spontaneously, from all sectors / all sizes) and on what they particularly appreciated. They expressed their expectations and messages towards brands/companies for the future. We summarize the outcome in the **update** of our **'10 growth platforms' for brands/companies for after COVID-19**. Many insightful examples (given by consumers) to illustrate these trends are available in our detailed report (available on request).

1 LOCAL

Local is still very relevant 'in new normal', even if there has been a 'back to normal' regarding purchases in supermarkets after the first lockdown (less time to visit local producers, 'all in 1' stop is easier and faster). People expect to find more 'local' products in the shops. Key drivers remain valid: less global dependency, favour shorter circuits, support local stores/local economy, proudness feelings (made in Belgium), more ecological, more safety. However, price is a key factor: many are not prepared to pay much more for 'local' (food and especially non food e.g. clothes).

#2 ONLINE

'Online' has grown in importance in all aspects of our life, and the rise will continue: e-shopping, e-working, e-training, e-entertaining. Key drivers are : convenience, time-saving, less stress / more quality time, price comparisons, safety. Even those who found their way to online with the lockdown experienced this positively. Ideally, people prefer to favour 'online + local', but price remains a key factor (success of Amazon). And local stores must propose online solutions as well (accessibility is key!). Excellence in online platforms and webshops is crucial to offer a '360°' experience. Nevertheless, people miss social contacts, and the digital fracture is still present (older generation).

#3 CONSCIOUS CHOICES

Overall, people have become a lot more 'conscious' and they hope people's habits will continue to change 'for the better'. In their daily lives, people mention less waste/less 'packaging', more sorting, more second-hand purchases, eat more healthily, purchase more local, more 'seasonal' fruits & vegetables, less meat, cultivate their vegetable garden, more bike / less car in their mobility habits. For food, there is more awareness about what they eat, where it comes from, what it does for their body, traceability. For the future, they expect brands/companies to be catalyst and promote sustainability, show by example.

#4 BACK TO ESSENTIALS

In the 'new normal', people continued to go 'back to essentials' and to spend 'quality time' with their family. They enjoyed simple things: cook together, bake their bread, play together, bike, go for a walk. They took time to select their products (quality over quantity). They focused more on 'home & garden' investments (cf. less spending's on out of home, less travel).

#5 HEALTH & WELLNESS

'Health & wellness' have grown in importance with COVID-19. People focused more on nutrition and exercise for themselves, physical & mental wellbeing. 'Immunity, stay healthy' are crucial concerns. Consumers expect brands to continuously improve their product composition (e.g. less sugar, less salt, less 'badditives') and to be transparent. Nutriscore and Yuka are 'guides' for consumers (even if not perfect!). However, we also observed the need to 'compensate' and the success of 'comfort & indulgence' food (apero/desserts cf. less restaurants, less going out).

#6 VALUE FOR MONEY

'Value for money' has grown in importance with COVID-19. People want 'quality at fair price'. Consumers perceived important price increases in supermarkets during the first lockdown and only partial 'back to normal'. Price is a key factor, especially in these difficult times and for households who lost their job, are in 'temporary' unemployment. Consumers have become even more sensitive to promotions and they expect brands to propose attractive deals & advantages. They also expect their 'loyalty' to be rewarded.

#7 HONESTY & TRANSPARENCY

Anxiety and uncertainty feelings with the many 'fake news' and 'lack of consistency' in governmental communication during COVID-19 have made the need for 'honesty and transparency' even more present. People need clear, to the point, responsible communication. They expect brands/companies to inform them in a concise, honest and transparent way and to clearly address their fears & questions re. covid/risk of contamination in this period.

#8 REINVENT YOURSELF

'Flexibility' is key with COVID-19. Many people have 'reinvented themselves' during this period: they have become a cooker, a teacher, a hairdresser, they experienced new ways of working and shopping; some have started a new activity, discovered own talents. It has been a moment to stand back and reflect on what is important in their life and (re)allocate their priorities. During the first lockdown, many positive examples came from small/local stores who were creative and agile to reinvent themselves. 'New normal' offers 'new opportunities' for brands/companies to adapt and meet emerging consumers needs, offer them a safe place to live, work, travel, entertain.

#9 HUMOUR & OPTIMISM

'Humour & optimism' are more important than ever! Brands are expected to continue to communicate, with a 'positive' mindset, lightness and a funny note/humour. This also creates proximity (there is enough sadness in current climate!) and helps to stand out. Brands can also stimulate reflexion with their messages. However, it is not necessary to systematically refer to covid in communication, unless there is real relevance for the brand's message (people got an 'overdose' of 'COVID-19' 7/24). It is also important to be true to brands' values/DNA, inspire people but not 'moralize'.

#10 HUMANITY & SOLIDARITY

It was amazing to see the solidarity during the first lockdown but we observe more individualism since then. And it is precisely because of people who do not cooperate that we are back in this situation. While solidarity and empathy are expected from brands/companies in this period, there is also some skepticism towards 'big brands', perceived as 'mainly driven by profit'. People need to feel the authenticity; they expect companies to be truly involved: no 'solidarity washing' please!

To sum up, the world is changing: there will be a 'before' and 'after' COVID-19 in people's values, ways of living, working, consuming, shopping. People hope that our habits will change 'for the better'. **Most trends highlighted in our first study (May 2020) are growing further**: local, online, sustainability, health & wellness, transparency, flexibility, value for money. Humanity and solidarity remain important, but there is also a lot of skepticism. **Brands must keep connected with their clients in 'good' and 'bad' times.** They must be there for 'the best' and 'the worst', have a meaningful vision, show by example. They must listen, show empathy, be transparent/authentic to create trust and adapt to new consumer needs. They must give hope, instill a positive mindset, involve consumers. Brands/companies who apply the famous Winston Churchill's motto ***'Never let a good crisis go to waste'*** and are able turn 'problems into opportunities' in an agile way will make the difference in the future.

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