THE UNEXPECTED UNCERTAINTY GAME

MARKETING AFTER PANDEMIC

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ADBA MARKETING CONSULTING INNOVATION

The Unexpected Uncertainty Game: Marketing After Pandemic

This is a call for the humankind. From how we clean to how we communicate and work, COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting the way we live, think and feel. Whether the cause is a virus or not, the process is still a roller coaster and each of us need to find a way to adapt.

We call it "**the unexpected uncertainty**". Future has always been uncertain, but luckily there was always a bit of expectations into it, and within the last 2 months it is all gone.

The good news is that the "unexpected uncertainty" is democratic and affecting all the individuals, SMEs, enterprises and even governments in a fair way. Cards have been re-distributed and the rules are re-defined by a cause out of control.

Something is obvious; The more empathy you have, the more power you will gain throughout the process. So it is safe to remind ourselves that this pandemic does not mean a "new normal", yet it needs all of us to transform into "better". In other words, rather than trying to decode what the new normal is, we better should be aware of the fact that our actions will shape up the new normal!

Here are the **5 key learnings** of what COVID-19 has brought into our lives:

1. Size really does not matter! Your company size is not enough for consumer trust. You need more.
2. People want to be sure and see it all. Be brave and get ready to show it all in your value chain.
3. People love physical retail. But not because of your assortment on the shelves! Rethink your physical retail's roles and responsibility.
4. "What is in it for me?" will be asked more often by your customers. Impulse buying will fade away for a considerable period. Refine your value proposition.
5. It is not either or. Digital is not an alternative to physical, nor the vice versa. It is an interplay. Think "phygital".

LEARNING #1: PRAISING THE LOCAL

Nowadays, consumers have trust issues with all; including public institutions, brands, media and many others regarding how well they are taking actions for the well-being of people and whether communicating the correct information.

Transparent and **genuine communication** is and will be demanded continuously by the consumers in all levels of the business. This will yield a much more **fact-based**, **human centered** and **empathic** brands in the short run.

By now, it is crystal clear that "trust" is the key. So, what is the measure of "trust"?

Before the pandemic, company/brand size was an orientation for reliability. Now, **familiarity** serves as the factor of reliability. More than the big and fat numbers about size of branches or revenues, your **people** standing for your brand and managing the relationship with your customers give more orientation for building "trust"!

In conclusion one can say; Local businesses and also big network brands who can achieve to **act local** will gain power rapidly with their ability to **connect with communities** on a more genuine level. This move is also fueled with the motive to support the local businesses to survive which became a big potential for the emergence of social impact, a new craft movement, local sourcing or local staffing. We advise big network brands to motivate their POS' to act like a local business of the area they are located in, rather than seeing themselves as just a branch spot of the network.

LEARNING #2: PROCESS LIKE A GLASS

Health-conscious shopping has already been a trend over the past couple of years. COVID-19 outbreak significantly increased the importance of where, how and by whom the product had been produced.

Brands should accept that consumers are now interested in the product's journey before and during in-store. It is expected that people will tend to steer away from products that travelled long distances with multiple human touchpoints.

Consumers do and will want to acknowledge the whole value chain, with a **complete transparency from production to the shelves**, and explanation of the **precautions taken** to assure their health.

In China, “person-based transparency” has already become a norm. Couriers from online food retailers give customers a guarantee slip that even demonstrates information of the body temperature of cooks’ and other workers who got involved for getting the order to the customer. Needless to say, disinfection processes to meet consumers’ high level of transparency demands are also reflected openly.

The need for getting information about the products or processes drives the tendency for being more connected on a real-time basis. This will lead even more need of **connectivity anywhere, anytime**.

LEARNING #3: SHORTER PERIMETERS

Due to the awakened concerns, people will consider “distance” and “crowd” as 2 perils of the post-pandemic period. It is expected that **cocooning** and **near-by store shopping** will lift off**.** People will be **less willing to travel** and try **to minimize their movement** especially for non-essential activities.

Less-motion trend is also being fed by the Zoom-boom, growing online grocery shopping habit and on-demand services usage. With this in mind, the questions regarding to necessity of being face-to-face and interacting physically have begun to arise.

So, do we need “physical” retail?

The answer is a clear “Yes”. People love it and will keep on loving it! The gist is; Brick-and-mortar should stop on trusting the access they give and the product assortment they have in-store on their shelves as a visit trigger since customers are already aware of the options they have available online. Thus, retailers and brands should rethink their physical touchpoints’ **roles and responsibility** in customer engagement. Which is all about creating "new reasons and memorable experiences” to convince customers for paying visit.

LEARNING #4: THINKING TWICE

Within this “Unexpected Uncertainty Game”, people are having increased concerns for future, which lead them to think twice; before they spend, before they go out, in short before they decide what so ever. These all lead to a **diminishing impulse buying** tendency.

Undoubtedly, there will be a prolonged period of time where people will tend to buy **only what is required** since consumers have already a set of “essentials” in their minds which they accept as "must-haves" at home. All the other products will crawl down to the very bottom of the shopping list.

In order to overcome this challenge, brands and retailers should approach with empathy and focus on solutions that are designed to meet consumer needs and their current reality. **Empathy** will be the main winner in this period which will lead retailers to revisit and refine their **value proposition** of their products and services that is being offered to their target market.

LEARNING #5: BACK TO MORE PHYGITAL

There will be a **surge in visits to retail location and social venues.** Although the younger generation will be more likely to get back faster, the former footfall numbers will be missed for a while. The pandemic period has caused **a noticeable shift** in terms of where people go, what they do and how. In fact, consumers already missed their pre-pandemic lives, including the **moments** and how it made them **feel**. But this doesn't mean that they will restart from the state where you had left them before.

Before pandemic, every one of us were aware of the need for **digital transformation**. However, what we have experienced is; "2 years' worth of digital transformation, happened in just 2 months". Brands which were focusing on building physical experiences in their stores, are now supposed to blend digital and physical in one pot at their POS' in order to create a cutting-edge experience in terms of memorable "moments", "safety", and "convenience".

Due to Interbank Card Center, in March.2020 every 1 payment out of 5 was contactless and 2,5 million credit cards with contactless function and 3 million cards on internet were used for the first time in Turkey. As a consequence, voice commands and sensory readings are expected to be come forward to offer high-level of touchless experience.

Therefore, customers will be expecting more precautions and hence **intelligent retail solutions** in physical venues. This brings the need to tune the **customer experience** along with it. One should note that it is also crucial for the brands to share what has changed or not with their consumers already in pre-visit phase so that expectations can be managed at its best.

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