

Food for Thought – Marketing and branding in a global crisis

Questions we didn't get around to asking during the webinar – responses from Michael Brown.

1. Do you think the "stop hate for profit campaign" will gain wider traction? For which brands will this be important?
 - a. 100% important. It's being driven by the US, and New York especially, where the situation is 'on fire' and evolving quickly. Led by North Face and Patagonia, brands with modest spend, we are now seeing some of the biggest advertisers like Coca Cola and Unilever follow suit. My feeling is that many brands from all categories who wish to make an ethical statement will join this movement.
2. Black Lives matter is a such a long standing issue. Why has it taken so long for the society to accept it do you think?
 - a. I think the stillness of the global Covid 19 lockdown has afforded people the stillness and reflection to truly focus on the great injustice that continues to exist across the world. The pandemic has created a platform for change.
3. The conflict between historic background and improved ethic standard today. Should Yale and Cass business school change name due to the historic link to slavery trade? Is there a boundary for how far things should be changed? Will there be a self sensor created to actually 'put minority to a prime situation' rather than 'be equal'?
 - a. There is a delicate balance to be struck between not deleting history (though it can be painful), and making a statement against the evils of the past. Ultimately, I feel there is no objectively right approach to this. Where practical, a census of opinion should be carried out amongst communities to decide what the majority wishes to see happen.
4. Do you feel brands often opt for 'tokenism' instead of actually promoting inclusion and diversity in their firms? How do we change that?
 - a. There is indeed a lot of 'tokenism'. But where equality statements are made inauthentically, they tend to be called out by consumers. So, companies should do so at their peril, or the new democratized consumer world, powered by Twitter, will teach them a lesson.
5. The narrative of "doing the right thing" can often be diluted with companies doing so without much meaning behind it i.e. just to show we care so perhaps it may boost revenue Long term. How can companies perhaps show the integrity externally?
 - a. By offering meaningful support to communities and charitable projects and investing hard cash in these.
6. As per WSJ, China witnessed a splurge in the luxury market. Do you find that trend hopeful? And anticipate a similar plunge in other parts of the world?
 - a. As luxury is a particularly embedded category in the Chinese market, I don't think this is necessarily an indicator for elsewhere. I think in the West people will buy luxury items less frequently going forward, though there will always be a place for it.

7. What are examples of covidwashing that you have seen?
 - a. [Facebook's campaign](#) seemed to be to be done particularly 'by numbers'.
8. Do you think that the sectors which are not performing well currently like the luxury sector will expect surge in demand due to the rebound effect in the coming years?#
 - a. There *will* be some rebound, with people wanting to reclaim the trappings of extravagance of past lives, but it will be limited. Many markets will enter recession, bringing less job security, and so there will be less disposable income for luxury.
9. Is the difference between authentic and unauthentic just action? For example a company that currently doesn't have the means to help in a meaningful way and can only give a statement of support. I assume they would be seen as unauthentic by the people who don't necessarily know what a business is and isn't able to do
 - a. It's a great point that not all companies are able to afford lavish corporate social responsibility programmes. As well as action, having your 'house in order' is so important. So, if there's not enough resource to pay for big charitable initiatives, having an internal culture where people are valued, equal and treated well is vital.
10. I guess one thing to notice is how brands can balance the reacting actions towards this situation vs. standing stronger through the storm & preparing for the new normal, brands might not want to move too far from what they stand for just to fit them themselves into the situation. Do you have a view on how brands can find that long-term & short-term balance?
 - a. Every company's reality has been changed, and with change comes the need to react. I believe that consumers will judge businesses (from Nike right the way down to your local newsagent) by how they behaved during this time. So, all brands should change their brand in some way right now, as the world has changed and it will never quite be the same. We are living a moment of accelerated cultural change that will be remembered in history for many years to come.
11. Any examples of companies being able to track the difference in impact of meaningful vs conventional campaigns?
 - a. There is a very important report by the IPA called Long & Short of It, which evidenced – using a very large database of campaigns – that campaigns with a brand message are more effective than conventional campaigns. The success of Unilever's brands is a good example of purpose being effective.
12. Are companies rethinking their general image now? Seeing that it is much easier for a company like Brewdog to seem authentic (because they are looked at as a hip brand anyways)
 - a. I think the current situation is making everyone, from people to companies, re-evaluate their situation, direction and values. Big changes, such as restructuring businesses, are happening far and wide.
13. Is there any examples of brands taking advantage of digital transformation that is happening around as a result of Covid lockdown & all of that?
 - a. [I wrote a piece recently that mentions some digital innovations that have been driven by the current situation.](#)

14. If a brand remains 'too still' wouldn't that increase the risk of the consumer forgetting the brand?
 - a. Possibly. Some brands need to be 'still' right now if their marketplace is paralysed by the pandemic. Travel brands, for example. It would be unwise to spend on advertising a category that is currently inactive. Some brands, say a champagne brand, might also be considered too tonally frivolous and incongruous with the current situation. It's important for brands to 'read the room' and think carefully about whether this is the right time for them to be in-market with a campaign.