How Covid Memories Will Open New Connections Between Brands and Consumers



Our memories of 2020 and Covid-19 are already so deeply imprinted on our minds. And our reactions to those memories will be so strong, they are likely to alter the way we live and make decisions for many years to come. Brands need to look beyond customer sentiment, activities and context in charting their next course. Therefore, they need to factor in the memories consumer are likely to have following this strange period of upheaval. Despite the enduring hardships and struggle that greets 2021, the impact on consumers' memories will introduce incredible opportunities for marketers to modernize and humanize brands in 2021 and beyond.

From episodic to epochal memory

As the world shut down, consumers had to live with the sudden loss of long enjoyed and long underappreciated freedoms. This disruption caused deep-rooted distress, confusion, and even fear. Consumers were rightly concerned about life events,

affecting the mental health of people worldwide. At the same time, they proved their resilience, improving and making the most of disruption. With many common places shut down or with concern for getting sick in public, they quickly gravitated toward becoming digital first. Consumers learned to search and shop differently and ultimately, to try new things.

According to McKinsey, 10 years of ecommerce growth happened in just a few months. The firm also discovered that 75% of U.S. consumers had already experimented with different stores, websites or brands. Of those consumers, 60% reported that they would integrate new brands in their post-pandemic lives.

The pandemic forced changes in all our lives, a far longer time than the 66 days it is estimated to take, on average, for new behaviors to become automatic. These behavior changes also reshape mindsets, which sets the foundation for changes in values, norms and cultures. By all accounts, this is a once-in-a-lifetime, global, life-altering time. This is a brand-new epoch.

A doorway to a new genre of branding and engagement

Our memories are deeply personal and individual. Yet, at the same time, those thoughts are highly connected and communal, both autobiographical and cultural. This type of memory is so rare and profound that there’s not even a word for it, so we’re giving it one. We’re calling it “epochal memory” to distinguish it from common episodic memory.

Epochal memory is defined by a series of shared somatic markers, deep, emotional, visceral bookmarks that entwine Covid-19 experiences, feelings and all the unique dynamics of a world in turmoil. These memories affect the course of our lives consciously or subconsciously. They influence our values and decisions, affect our physical and mental wellbeing, and shape our livelihoods.

Understanding epochal memory and how new behaviors, sentiments and aspirations shift and continue to evolve can help brands identify opportunities to add value, earn relevance and build stronger communities.

A new mindset and heartset

How your brand groups and segments your customers moving forward requires swift re-examination. Your relationships depend on it. Demographics, purchase frequency, loyalty membership, products owned, don’t provide a true customer 360 view when viewed through a lens of the past. Segmenting your customers based on their emotional responses to this crisis and their evolving behaviors, interests and desired outcomes is more meaningful. Since their memories during this period are epochal, if their behaviors they are developing are long-term, the segmentation needs to be epochal as well.

“Epographic segmentation” exists at the intersection of demographics, psychographics and neuromarketing. Epographics more accurately reflect the human changes we are witnessing and learning to discover in behavior across the entire population that this virus has inscribed and continues to influence.

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