

Lessons Marketers Can Learn From a Recovering Chinese Market

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After months of extreme disruption, normality appears to be slowly returning to China's cities.

It's rare to be excited about traffic, but in China, gridlocked roads are a welcome sign that people are resuming their lives. Commuters are beginning to restart their daily public transport commutes and stores are flipping their signs to open. And according to China's National Health Commission, people can even stop wearing masks if they're at home or in well-ventilated outdoor spaces.

So, what has the pandemic changed for the Chinese? And what can businesses around the world, waging their own battles against Covid-19, learn from the post-outbreak recovery phase in China?

Here are some lessons business leaders can take away from China's experience:

Purpose takes a back seat to pragmatism

In a world where we've all suddenly become germaphobes, giving people a sense of control will go a long way to ensuring brand loyalty.

Each year, our research into meaningful brands shows the increasing expectations that Chinese consumers have of brands. Brands need to go above and beyond great products. However, these expectations have been brought into sharp focus by the

outbreak. The Chinese demand now is as urgent as it is clear: less talk, more action. So much so that 77% of Chinese consumers expect brands to use their advertising to talk about how they're helpful now.

Brands around the world need to address two simple questions: What is your brand doing to help ease people's everyday problems? And how quickly can you make your impact felt?

A generational divide in post-outbreak attitudes

In late March, 70% of Chinese consumers told researchers that they planned to increase their consumption as soon as the lockdown eased. This has certainly been the case, with consumption now running at -6% versus a colossal -52% during the peak of the outbreak.

But while the topline suggests that normal business has resumed, a deeper look into generational attitudes suggests otherwise, with Chinese consumers split on their post-outbreak outlooks.

Younger audiences are embracing it with an enjoy while we can attitude to all things consumption, while older, middle-class buyers are showing signs of being more selective in what they buy. They are leaning toward items of better quality that can be used for a longer duration.

Short-term isolation, long-term behavior change

The lockdown might be over, but the attitudes and impact are set to remain. Ecommerce is an obvious winner, with 89% of Chinese consumers saying they will be more willing to buy online once the epidemic is over.

But the outbreak has had a more profound impact on Chinese behaviors. Take food, for example, where self-sufficiency is key in a post-outbreak world. Sales of sandwiches have risen 1,500% so people can make paninis at home as restaurants struggle to attract their customers back. Likewise, sales of

heated lunch boxes have risen almost 350%. In a world where we've all suddenly become germaphobes, giving people a sense of control will go a long way to ensuring brand loyalty.

Another area that has come to the fore is fitness, with nearly one-third of Chinese consumers intending to spend more on fitness activities. It's a clear opportunity for brands to consider jumping on a new, healthier bandwagon.

China gives us a glimpse into post-outbreak life. For consumers around the world and the brands that seek to serve them, Covid-19 will continue to deliver disruption for the foreseeable future. China has seen firsthand that while "business as usual" is not an option, there are ways to continue to serve your customers while staying afloat.

The businesses that can quickly and efficiently address their needs have the unique opportunity not only to protect their business but to redefine the role they play in people's lives.

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