

BRANDS AFTER COVID-19 : GET INSPIRED BY CONSUMERS - A JPCR QUALITATIVE SURVEY

JPCR launched a **qualitative-‘co-creation’ research** among 45 Belgian consumers from 22 to 70 years old, in order to **inspire brands** for their **strategies and action plans after COVID-19**. This survey took place between the 12th and the 18th of May 2020 on JPCR participative quali online platform **Vox Populi®**. The following key topics were discussed on the blog: how consumers experienced the lockdown period, what has changed and the lessons learned. They also shared their views on the brands/companies that positively stood out in this 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. By fostering participants’ engagement and creativity through collaborative discussions and reportages/collages, our approach led to very rich insights. We summarize the outcome in **‘10 growth platforms’ for brands/companies for after COVID-19** and **many insightful examples** (given by consumers) to illustrate these.

#1 LOCAL

Consumers massively expressed their engagement for ‘local’ in the future. With this crisis, it has become crucial to escape from global dependency and to favour shorter circuits. They were charmed by local producers, farmers, horeca, traders, who managed to reinvent themselves and deliver fresh, quality and healthy products on time. For the future, they expect supermarkets to opt for more local products: proximity, quality, naturality, bio, simplicity, traceability, environment and support of local producers will be key. They expect brands/companies to be actively involved in ‘local initiatives’ and contribute to ‘community integration’ to favour our economy.

#2 ONLINE

‘Online’ has become more important in many aspects of our life, and people expect this to continue in the future. With the ‘social distancing’ norms, they have become big fans of online shopping and realized that everything can be delivered at home! They expect an explosion of webshops in the future, and are very much asking for Belgian e-shops. Excellence in e-shopping platforms and services will be crucial. Teleworking has become the norm and many were able to enjoy more efficiency and quality life balance. While sport centers were closed, Basic Fit and other fitness centers were quick to propose e-training programs. While festivals and other cultural activities stood still, some actors in the event sector took the initiative to propose a ‘Stay Home festival’ to overcome these difficult times with good music and positivity, dancing from home!

#3 CONSCIOUS CHOICES

During the lockdown, people have been able to appreciate the blue sky, the beauty of nature and a less polluted environment, a positive side effect of the coronavirus! They left their cars and enjoyed walking and biking. This period stressed again the importance of our planet and the necessity to protect our environment for a healthier and more sustainable world. People have been able to reflect on our ‘overconsumption’ society and what really matters, challenge our ways of working for more ethics, respect...For the future, they expect brands/companies to be catalyst and promote sustainability. This needs to be translated into meaningful actions and not just ‘marketing messages’ (no ‘green washing’ please!).

#4 HUMANITY & SOLIDARITY

It was amazing to see the positive spiral of humanity and solidarity during this period! Some brands/companies raised their profile through humanitarian contributions or even just support at a local scale. Decathlon’s solidarity act towards hospitals (with a donation of 30.000 diving masks) was exemplary. Companies in the telecom sector showed empathy for their clients with extra advantages during the lockdown. Bpost brought people closer to each other thanks to their ‘free postcards’ action. With their ‘Café Quarantine’, Studio Brussel actively supported artists. These are just a few examples of companies that showed empathy, offered ‘utility’ and were not only driven by ‘profit’. Like for ‘green/sustainability’, people need to feel the authenticity; they expect companies to be truly involved: no ‘solidarity washing’ please!

#5 BACK TO ESSENTIALS

In this deprivation period, people went back to essentials. They escaped from the ‘rat race’ and enjoyed ‘quality time’ with their family. They took time to select their products (quality over quantity), cook together, eat more healthily, enjoy simple pleasures. Delhaize ‘Cook & eat together’ campaign has been particularly inspiring. Initiatives like Nutriscore and Yuka app, which help people to make the right choices for their health, are appreciated. Consumers expect brands to take their responsibility, show by example and propose healthier and more qualitative products, for reasonable prices.

#6 HONESTY & TRANSPARENCY

During the lockdown period, people were overwhelmed and confused by (often) contradictory information (from government, media, social media...). They are fed up with the many fake news and also 'marketing' tricks. They need clear, to the point, responsible communication. They expect brands/companies to inform them in a concise, honest and transparent way.

#7 REINVENT YOURSELF

People observed that especially smaller actors did a great job to reinvent themselves! Group F proactively proposed a 'nacelle lift' to enable people on board to climb up to a window and see their old parents in a nursing home! Lots of restaurants showed resilience and creativity by proposing menus, brunch boxes, apero packages for home delivery. Hairdressers put together hair care packages, beauticians made videos about how to manicure yourself; fitness centers proactively proposed home gym programs. In the future, flexibility, creativity, agility, speed of action to meet emerging consumers needs will be a must to make the difference.

#8 CONSOM'ACTOR

People are keen to participate to make the world a better place. Colruyt and Ethias' initiatives to stimulate neighbours' mutual help are valuable examples. There are great opportunities to unleash the fantastic creative, participative and collaborative potential: together, companies, brands and people at the same level. RTL-TVI involved their audience in a creative way with their 'Belges à domicile' program and 'talents' contest'. Zara's new campaign was shot with 'models' from home (in quarantine, in their living room, bathroom...), which conveys greater authenticity.

#9 TAILOR MADE

More than ever, companies/brands need to actively listen to their target and offer personalised added value. Access to new technologies for the more vulnerable ones, horeca free delivery for ill people, priority access in supermarket for seniors/less mobile consumers/care givers, empathy with working parents to keep their children actively busy at home during the lockdown period are just a few positive examples.

#10 HUMOUR & OPTIMISM

In these hard times, one appreciates a positive, funny and optimistic note in advertising. Burger King campaign ('Le Big King de la Quarantaine'), was particularly liked, because of its humour and humility ('We are not essential, here is the recipe to prepare a 'big king' by yourself'). Devos Lemmens continued to communicate during the lockdown with a positive, light-hearted and 'close to people' tone-of-voice. Nike campaign 'If you ever dreamed of playing for millions around the world, now is your chance' (play inside/play for the world) is a great example of positivity and empowerment (turning the present situation into an opportunity), with lots of elegance and discretion.

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. **Key trends that were already present will become even more important** (local, online, sustainability, humanity&solidarity, authenticity, health&wellness, transparency, creativity & agility, quality at a fair price...). **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, uncover and meet consumer needs. They must give hope, instill a positive mindset, involve consumers, together for a better future: companies, brands & people 'at the same level'. To end up, let us quote Winston Churchill and his legendary ability to turn problems into opportunities: *'Never let a good crisis go to waste'.*

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(Full report available on request)

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