

Adjusting to life after lockdown

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Consumers won't automatically re-engage with their old routines. Our global Covid-19 Community reflects on how easing restrictions will impact behaviour.

Consumers have learnt to cope with peak pandemic, but now they face a new challenge: transitioning back to a life that resembles normality and trying to pursue their hopes and dreams against the backdrop of a looming economic crisis.

To get a real sense of consumers' mindsets and feelings both in lockdown and as restrictions are eased, we spoke directly to consumers across seven markets, including

China, Germany, Russia and Spain, about how they are navigating the new uncertainties and explore what this will mean for companies and brands.

One of the most interesting observations was the similar experiences people have had regardless of geography, driven by the fact that blanket social distancing, quarantine and shielding approaches were common features of global attempts to overcome the virus.

Planning has been key to help consumers navigate lockdown – from purchasing groceries and essentials to managing daily routines and personal health and safety. Over the last few months, consumers have become experts in planning and adapting their lives. Brands and companies that offered positive solutions rather than barriers really gained favour.

Planning will become even more important as restrictions ease and people are given more freedom to venture away from their local surroundings. Many remain cautious, prioritising familiarity and the local area for essential tasks, as well as looking for solutions that reduce shopping time for routine purchases.

People face a fundamental dilemma

The feeling of isolation caused by the lack of physical social contact and the sense that life is on hold have been some of the toughest aspects for people to cope with during this period.

These have driven key behaviours such as the digitalisation of communication across all generations and people seeking more purposeful activities to fill their time. However, the greater freedom allowed in recent weeks has effectively given people greater potential to regain their physical connections and return to some resemblance of their previous lives.

Freedom to move, however, is matched by worries around safety and the lack of control away from their local areas. For some, moving further away from home feels like taking on greater risk. Nevertheless, the desire to see loved ones is a key driver for spontaneous travel and, despite the prospect of a second spike, people are willing to take that risk.

In a study carried out in May across 10 markets, Kantar found 50% of consumers were looking forward to meeting friends and relatives once the pandemic started to subside.

Moving into the holidays, consumers are hoping for more positive news about transmission rates, information that would give them the confidence to make summer holiday plans. Perceptions of safety will still play an integral role in consumer choice, with the current view being that domestic or local holiday options are the most likely.

Research from GWI carried out in late June suggest that 49% of respondents were planning to take domestic holidays and 32% were planning a “staycation”. Just 9% were planning long-haul breaks.

July and August will also be a crucial time for brands – how can they make people feel positive about the holidays and enable people to have the best possible time without compromising their sense of safety?

Positivity is key as consumers are well aware of the potential longer-term economic impact. When talking about their perceptions of the future, people express a desire to make up for lost time but also fear they will have fewer resources to do so.

GWI data from the same survey found that more than 56% thought Coronavirus would have a big impact on their country’s economy and 28% thought it would have a big impact on their personal/household finances.

Lockdown has also forced people to put major decisions on hold. Whereas before people had control over delaying certain decisions and life milestones (like getting married, moving home, searching for that dream job), that power was taken away from them. For some, the idea of trying to catch up is a stressful prospect. Many people will be looking for opportunities to make up for lost time and brands that can offer solutions and are sensitive to this will help consumers get back on track.

Personal goals aside, there is also a sense of responsibility amongst consumers about the

need to support the local economy; not only to help bring their local community back to life but to also support local stores that have been supporting them through lockdown. Whether that's been maintaining services during the period of restrictions in a safe manner or indirectly giving them the opportunity to socialise with people outside their own household, consumers know they need to repay that contribution.

73% of respondents agree that "shopping in local stores is important for the community" reports Kantar.

There are some big challenges ahead. Consumers aren't blind to that fact but brands and companies that listen to and support the changing needs of consumers as they navigate their own challenges will gain significant long-term favour and trust.

To find out more about the MediaCom COVID-19 online community – please contact the global insight team: MCMEMEAInsightTeam@mediacom.com

Consumer voices from around the world:

"I miss being able to go with my friends for a few beers on a terrace in a bar, or go to the movies, or shopping. But even once you can do those activities, I'll still wait a little to make sure it's safe, as everyone will want to go out and it can get chaotic."

Spain, female under 25

"I'm getting busier and busier recently as we have to work overtime now. I talk to my family less now, because of work and because they are busy too."

China, female under 25

"I like to go to the small shops, bakers and butchers, where it is at least a little bit more personal contact."

Germany, male over 25

"I think it's really important to help the local economy now, so I want to try and buy in small stores, markets and when possible domestic products."

Spain, female over 25

“Brands that have thrown their strength at real help, have chosen the right start. Brands shouldn’t just be selling themselves; they carry a social function too. Brands that showed support at this time are close to me, and in the long-run I would choose these brands more.”

Russia, male, over 25

This survey was conducted in these seven markets: Germany, Italy, Russia, China, Spain, Netherlands, and the UK.

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