

Marketing in the Covid-19 age

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Those of us in marketing have to be concerned with questions concerning the impact of Covid-19 on our work, our clients and the impact on the industry. Plenty has been written about it. And published everywhere. Here are some thought starters that focus closer to the marketing world.



Image source: [Unsplash](#).

The big question is how long the Covid-19 age will last. The mathematics of epidemiology are remarkably accurate and is getting a great deal of airtime in illustrating the progress of the pandemic. It is the same mathematics as is used in forecasting the sales of new products where one treats a product innovation as an infection in the population. Using past experience on modelling the introduction of innovation, some thoughts are discussed which may help us understand better what is happening and what some outcomes may be.



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mike broom 12 Apr 2018



The basic structure to modelling are:

1. Not everybody can be infected. There will be people who will not get infected. Medical science can't predict how many yet, nor why. Clearly, if the number is high, duration would be reduced. The really terrible news would be if there is a high reinfection rate. In other words, cured people get sick again. In the new product modelling context, a reinfection would be good news, because that is, mathematically, a repeat purchase. High repeat means high sales.

2. Not everybody can be cured. In medical terms these are deaths, in marketing terms, these would be loyal users who have become committed to the innovation. Those who have been infected and have recovered are Influencers on the rest of the population and play a role in promoting actions and processes to prevent others from catching the disease. In the new product innovation context, the marketer would hope their influence would positively promote the innovation.

3. All things being equal, without a cure the same number will be killed by the disease. This is driven by point 1 above. On the other hand, if there can be reinfection then many more people would die. If, however, a cure can be found, then fewer people will die. In the case of Covid-19, to date, there is successful treatment in 41% of cases, and a fatality rate of 4%.

In the marketing context, this would translate to 41% awareness to trial rate, a level at which the marketer would be very excited – this is a seriously good innovation. Of those who get the disease 10% are dying. Or, in a marketing scenario, 10% of triallists become advocates for the innovation. Those numbers for a marketing innovation would be hailed as a great success.



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The future

Having put the impact of the disease in business terms, we can now bring some of our marketing thinking to speculate about the future.

In marketing, we would do everything in our power to promote the innovation. Medically, everything must be done to limit the exposure to Covid-19. Why? Two reasons:

1. Because it gives medical science time to develop improved recovery rates. In the new innovation context, this would mean making it extremely difficult to find the product in the store. Also, time for competitors to develop powerful counterarguments for people to try the innovation.
2. Providing time to develop a vaccine which would drastically reduce the infection rate and eliminate reinfection. In marketing, perhaps a malicious social media campaign led by Influencers who bad mouth the innovation would be the analogy.

Given the above, we can use the same modelling approach to estimate the potential duration. The current ratios above point to something between 3 to 6 months before 'life returns to normal'. However, life will never be normal because; while there is always a bigger, better idea, so there is always another deadly disease coming.

Implications for marketing

So, what is the new normal going to be like for marketers? Here are some thoughts ...

Research

Any form of face-to-face information will disappear. Especially the fiction of probability sampling. Focus groups in central venues will never make sense again. 'Normal' people will not be guileless enough to interact with unknown people again. Not when there are online research panels that are properly run with advanced technology for qualitative, longitudinal and multimedia interaction.

Online shopping

The chaos occurring in malls and supermarkets, and the enhanced infection possibilities will move much larger segments of the population to only shopping for a wider range of their needs. In essence, shopping is now less entertainment and more of a dangerous chore.

Media

Digital will boom as people get their news where they shop, where they communicate with friends, family and colleagues. It's possible that radio could have a resurgence as its immediacy and local relevance merges well with digital context for the external stimuli that it provides.

Transport

When will we learn that it's madness to spend 2 to 3 hours every day in traffic jams, sitting in a vehicle that costs you far more than what you put into your pension? Travel when you need to, collaborate online with colleagues, your activities can be logged by your employers if necessary, through your phone. Life can be more productive, more effective and more enjoyable.

We have learned already that life and society will be altered by this virus. It will change many things permanently, and most of all will change how we think about marketing in the future.

The most dramatic change will be in human interaction and what that change will have on information generation to support marketing decision making. If your company is not using online research panels, questions should be asked as to why not! Any measurement tainted by social interaction is flawed.

ABOUT MIKE BROOM

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