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THE POSITION OF THE BRAND AND ITS MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN THE CRISIS PERIOD

Jana PŘIKRYLOVÁ – Ladislav PÁTÍK

ABSTRACT:
In recent years, the world has gone through, and continues to go through, periods that no one anticipated, and on the contrary, society excluded as even possible. In 2019, COVID-19 and its global pandemic appeared. In 2022, the war in Ukraine began. The whole world and society in particular, is thus facing a completely new reality and the changes that this reality brings. More than ever, human values and psychological aspects are coming into the centre of interest and attention. Within companies and business, especially marketing and marketing communication must react and adapt to these changes and trends. Their importance is growing primarily as tools for achieving company goals. The branding phenomenon is closely linked to marketing and communication. The brand, its image, persona, values, opinions, attitudes, but also its emotional state and archetype, these are the key factors for its current success and its power. The aim of our study is to describe the current state and trends in the field of marketing and marketing communication in close connection with the brand, which is essential for the success of the company. In the next part our study focuses on the brand primarily from a psychological point of view. The theoretical part is followed by the research part, in which we analyse in detail the studies by Kantar agency, which were focused, on the one hand, on the consumers, changes in their behaviour and decision-making, and on the other hand on the brand, its position and communication in times of crisis. Our objective was to identify key factors and recommendations for these areas that are appropriate and beneficial to apply in business practice.

KEY WORDS:
brand, consumer behaviour, COVID-19, crisis, strategy

1 Introduction

A crisis (a pandemic like COVID-19, the war in Ukraine) is bound to impact every market and firms' activities. These uncertain times need strategies not only for survival but also to gain competitive advantage in the market. Different sectors found themselves in difficult situations because the impact of the pandemic measures affected them differently.[1] Similarly, the researchers looked at different brands in various sectors.[2] There is no doubt that by the nature of the problems caused by the pandemic, some industries have benefited, and some brands have even changed their field of operation. Telecommunications, especially mobile operators, and Internet service providers have had a welcome harvest. The Internet has become an essential working tool, especially during lockdowns. As an example of a change, some brands from the beauty product industry can be used, which began to produce disinfectants.

Much has been written about changes in the behaviour of states, companies and people, but we are interested in customer experience, which is based on several pillars. Brands should respect customers in any, even in a crisis, situation. Our goal is to look at these developments during the pandemic so far (no one knows if will be the last) and, based on the results of various studies, to discuss the possibilities of further behaviour of brands.

As mentioned above, customer experience is the basis for behaviour from the other side, i.e., from brands and their owners. According to various literary sources,[3] it is possible to consider the six pillars of the experience and look at the impact of COVID-19, which in our opinion has brought about changes, some even permanent.[4] A personal approach or personalisation means the ability of the brand to offer a product or service tailored to certain needs. Various CRM systems, chatbots, AI and personal approach of staff in shopping situations, whether off- or online, are used for this. The customer is a lazy organism, which is the general maxim told to students of marketing communications. However, this precept says that the competitive advantage of the brand is to minimise the time and effort that the customer should devote to the purchase.

Successful brands know how to meet the customer's expectations because they have relevant information available, but this is not enough. They must be able to enchant and offer more than the customer expects. Brand credibility, especially after moving online, is the foundation of success. The customer must believe that the banking operation is safe, the ordered and paid goods were sent, etc. Solving a problem is a difficult task as well, because the customer often does not feel the problem. In the online environment, the situation is easier, because based on experience, a FAQ, chatbot or other customer support can be prepared, fast. Empathy is a quality that customers especially appreciate. It is the ability to understand and build a relationship. It is without question the hardest part of brand activity. The assumption is that the previous five functions work well. Communicatively, this is the most complicated work, because it is necessary to be reasonable, but not boring, inventive, but always corresponding to the profile of the target group. Empathy is a factor that is very closely linked to the brand and its strategy. Emotions, feelings, opinions and attitudes are associated with empathy. According to current research, it appears that the strength of the brand and its position have remained identical, if not stronger, than before COVID-19 and also the war in Ukraine. The basis of this brand strength is a strong and transparent archetype that forms the persona of the brand. Empathy is associated with the brand archetype. It turns the brand into a person with its archetype. Customers, being people, surround themselves with other people with whom they share the same or similar emotions, feelings, opinions and attitudes, whether private or towards society, the world and global events. A brand with a clear and transparent archetype and a built-in persona becomes this close person, the result of which is brand awareness, brand loyalty and ultimately purchase and consumption.[5]

Brand archetypes show what the customer's purchase behaviour patterns are and, conversely, what is lacking in their motivation to purchase a product or service. These patterns were manifested earlier in fables

1 See: THAPA, S., GUZMÁN, F., PASWAN, A. K.: How Isolation Leads to Purchasing Luxury Brands: The Moderating Effects of COVID-19 Anxiety and Social Capital. In *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 2022, Vol. 31, No. 6, p. 984-1001. [online]. [2022-08-24]. Available at: <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mcb/096/2022/00000031/00000006/art00009>.

2 See: CHUNG, T., LEE, K. Y., KIM, U.: The Impact of Sustainable Management Strategies of Sports Apparel Brands on Brand Reliability and Purchase Intention through Single Person Media during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Path Analysis. In *Sustainability*, 2022, Vol. 14, No. 12, Article No. 7076, p. 86-95. [online]. [2022-08-24] Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/12/7076>.

3 See: ROGGEVEEN, A. L., ROSENGREN, S.: From Customer Experience to Human Experience: Uses of Systematized and Non-Systematized Knowledge. In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2022, Vol. 67, Article No. 102967, p. 470-492. [online]. [2022-08-24]. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969698922000601>.

4 See: ANSHU, K., GAUR, L., SINGH, G.: Impact of Customer Experience on Attitude and Repurchase Intention in Online Grocery Retailing: A Moderation Mechanism of Value Co-Creation. In *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 2022, Vol. 64, Article No. 102798, p. 56-63. [online]. [2022-08-24]. Available at: <https://e-tarjome.com/storage/panel/fileuploads/2021-12-08/1638944018_E15873.pdf>.

5 KELLER, K. L.: *Strategické řízení značky*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 124.

and legends. Today, they also enter marketing. They make it easier to understand the motivations of different groups of people, according to what their emotions and desires are, what behaviours do they identify with and what do they look for in brands. Archetypes influence how a customer sees an ad. Under the archetype, we can look for a character, a brand that people identify with, that determines its differences. Archetypal identity is responsible for creating a sense of understanding and anchoring the product directly in the mind of the consumer.[6] The theory of motivation and archetypes connects the system of human desire represented on two axes (Figure 1).

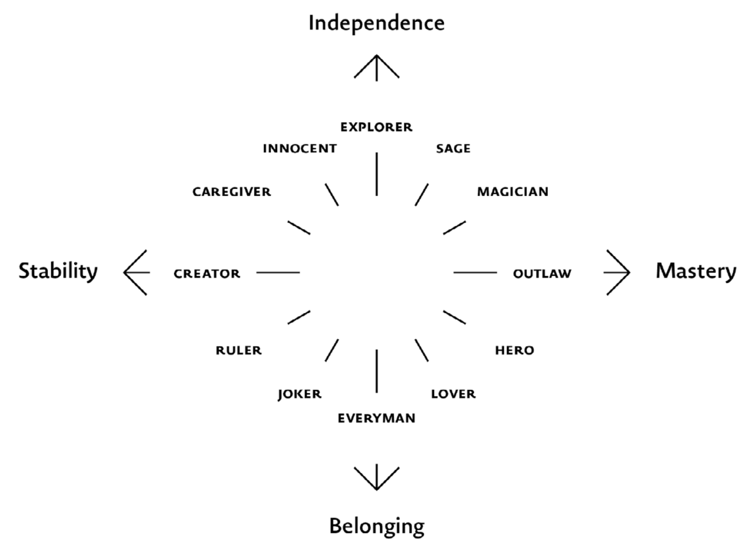

Figure 1: Theory of motivation and archetypes
Source: Own processing based on: MARK, M., PEARSON, C.: Hrdina nebo psanec. Brno : BizBooks, 2012.

In marketing, we find twelve archetypes. **The Innocent** is type of person who wants to experience well-being, peace, be happy and have a great life. We can find it in Coca-Cola, Disney, Procter & Gamble, McDonald's. The key aspect is a good brand identity that solves some simple problem related to health, nostalgia, childhood or cleanliness.[7] **The Discoverers** are mainly interested in freedom, tips for a better day, finding new ways, exploring the world. They are adventurers at heart, individualists, pilgrims.[8] It manifests itself in brands associated with travel, but also simplicity and freedom, such as Levi's and Patagonia. These people like to solve things quickly, letting them have time for new experiences, they like to do everything their own way, if they are hungry quickly, they will go to Burger King, for example. We include brands such as Starbucks, Amazon, Ford Explorer and the motto of living without borders. **The Sage**'s basic desire is the search for information, knowledge and the discovery of truth. It is usually a scientist, expert, critic or thinker. We find this archetype in journalism, in The New York Times, CNN, and National Public Radio. Brands strive to help the customer make decisions, showing clear data and presenting expert advice. Like the company Procter & Gamble places emphasis on research, on the basis of which it promotes its products. **The Heroes** show courage, combativeness, speed, success; they are team players, they can save the situation. They want to act like heroes. This is reflected in Nike, Federal Express, the Red Cross and most digital games. It is suitable for a brand with inventions or a solution to a social problem. **The Outlaw** is person who is against 'the system'. Their main purpose in life is freedom, disruption of the dysfunctional. Often referred to as a rebel, revolutionary or wild woman. It manifests itself in brands like MTV that parents hate but kids love.

6 MARK, M., PEARSON, C.: *Hrdina nebo psanec*. Brno : BizBooks, 2012, p. 24.
7 KELLER, K. L.: *Strategické řízení značky*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2007, p. 178.
8 MARK, M., PEARSON, C.: *Hrdina nebo psanec*. Brno : BizBooks, 2012, p. 36.

Calvin Klein shows the perception of sexuality in the image it is the way it presents itself. It is often associated with alcohol, cigarettes (Jack Daniels, Winston). Steve Jobs at the Apple brand shows a pioneering trend, emphasises a change in thinking for the better, differentiating from the competition. Customers identify with this portrayal of independent thinking.[9] Outlaws are attracted to everything forbidden; an indicator can be the promotion of wild night events. There may be products that are not healthy. It is about identifying with different values than most of society. **The Magicians** want to realise their dreams, learn the basic laws of the world, merge with the brand; they like the magic of the moment. Brands that talk about the magical moments include Champagne, Sony, Danone, Master Card, JBL, American Express. They often show the connection between the inner and outer worlds, like visions and birthday wishes. Marketing needs to be based on the fact that the quality of the product or service is just as important as who the customer is. It has elements of a spiritual and psychological component. The product or service expands the customer's awareness, promises transformation and brings reward. **The Everyman** shows the ability to be an ordinary person, a life without pretence and the reality of an ordinary day. Communication with other people, merging with the crowd is natural. The GAP brand shows young people dancing and enjoying life, while VISA stands out from luxury. They focus more on the appearance of ordinary people. We find connections in bookstores, food at sports clubs. These brands are mostly used every day and help people belong somewhere. **The Lover** likes cosmetics, jewellery, fashion, travel and anything related to pleasure. The archetype favours intimacy, infatuation, seduction, enthusiasm, pleasure, relationships with people, gratitude, passion, appreciation, devotion and elegance.[10] It can be found in Barilla pasta brands, Gevalia coffee, Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Coco Chanel. Using the brand helps people find friendship, love, trust and romance. It denotes those who belong to the middle to upper class. **The Clown**'s main intention is to live in the present, enjoy relaxed atmosphere, playfulness, light up the world and have a lot of fun. They take everything as a game, a joke; their behaviour is funny. We include brands such as Snickers, Pringles, M&M, Ben & Jerry's ice cream in this category. Based on the use of the brand, people classify and belong somewhere. **The Caregiver** aims to protect, help and do something for others. It is most often found at banks, insurance and health companies. The archetype is associated with empathy, communication skills; these brands always say they think about customers. These are brands such as BankOne, First Union, Marriott hotels. In services, the customers are provided with a competitive advantage. **The Creator** enjoys authenticity, creativity; the development of artistic abilities is essential here. Apple caught on to that and created MAC as a work of art or a Movado watch that donates to art. Products and services encourage self-expression, give choices, support art. **The Ruler** is interested in success, ruling, creating prosperity. Such a person builds on the values of responsibility, superiority and leadership. We include here the brands Microsoft, IBM, American Express, CitiBank, DKNY, Ralph Lauren. Not only are the brands perceived as rulers, but also their customers, to whom they give this feeling. These are luxury products with lifetime guarantees, products that help people with organisation, various protective functions.[11]

Below, let us look at a clear diagram of individual archetypes and examples of brands that represent them (Figure 2). This matrix and these archetypes apply not only to brands but products, experiences, services and anything money can buy. It is the essence of an organisation. This is a system for managing meaning in brand.[12] These brand archetypes should be used as a filter so that all brand visuals, language and feelings reflect the core brand archetype – the core *self* (ego) of the brand. These archetypes represent a core brand charter. They are means of awareness, attraction, and engagement – key relationships to customers.[13]

9 BLACKWELL, R., MINIARD, P., ENGEL, J.: *Consumer Behavior*. Ohio : Thomson South-Western, 2006, p. 86.
10 BLACKWELL, R., MINIARD, P., ENGEL, J.: *Consumer Behavior*. Ohio : Thomson South-Western, 2006, p. 92.
11 MARK, M., PEARSON, C.: *Hrdina nebo psanec*. Brno : BizBooks, 2012, p. 41.
12 GODIN, S.: *Fialová kráva: Marketing konečně jinak!* Prague : Fragment, 2010, p. 54.
13 See: WHEELER, A., MILLMAN, D.: *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team*. Hoboken : John Wiley and Sons, 2017.

Figure 2: Brand archetypes

Source: MAIDMENT, A.: Brand Archetypes. Released on 23rd August 2021. [online]. [2022-10-08]. Available at: <https://marchbranding.com/buzz/brand-archetypes/>.

The combination of the above facts raises the logical question of how to effectively communicate with the customer and what marketing communication tools to use.[14]

2 Purpose and Methods of Research

The aim of this study is to document whether and, if so, how the marketing position of brands operating on the Czech market has changed in the post-COVID period compared to the international situation. Based on the review of literature, secondary research and results of primary research of Kantar, we aim to find resources and identify the causes and sources of pressures to change consumer and brand behaviour in the market.

The findings and conclusions of the study can be useful both in the practice of marketing and brand managers and in the marketing communication of brands, because changes occur not only at the level of the industries in which brands operate, but also in communication tools, which, with the rapid development of the availability of technology and the restriction of customer freedom, penetrated into target groups that belonged to the slow or reluctant ones in the adoption of technology.

The main research method we use is desk research. The core of the study is the analysis of the latest research by the specialised agency Kantar CZ and the determination of what changes in the marketing strategies of companies, brand and its marketing communication occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second research we analyse is the well-known research BrandZ which focuses on the brand, the development of its position as well as the marketing communications of the brands. Following a synthesis of these findings, we define the current position of the brand and its marketing communication within company strategies.

14 DE PELSMACKER, P., GEUENS, M., VAN DEN BERGH, J.: *Marketing Communications: A European Perspective*. Harlow : Pearson Education, 2013, p. 125.

3 Results

The first research we analyse is focused on companies and their strategies. Kantar CZ has been tracking consumer behaviours through the COVID-19 crisis since March 2020, providing impactful insights to its clients. This study is called COVID Barometer. As business sustainability matters, Kantar CZ decided to interview its clients to better understand the impact on their businesses and teams, thereby connecting the dots between its client's business strategy and its knowledge of consumer response to COVID-19. The general indicators about research are 40 companies in the Czech Republic (68% multinational companies, 32% local companies). The main objectives include foreseen business impact, concerns and scenario changes, public institutions, recovery. Through the analyses of Kantar research, we have identified the following key facts in company strategies and consumer behaviour which affect current marketing communications and their tools.

Over 80% of companies have already reported a negative financial impact on their business. The main concerns for businesses in the Czech Republic at this time are recession and possible financial issues. In response, companies have had to consider and put into place various actions. They are increasingly focusing on e-commerce capabilities, pivoting their business or adapting production to new products that will fit the changed needs of their customers. Three-thirds believe customers' habits and behaviours will change after the crisis and expect activities such as shopping, meetings and education to increasingly shift to online settings. Faced with a sudden downturn in their businesses and with concerns for the future, businesses are adopting recessionary behaviours. 64% expect their business to recover in 6 – 12 months.

Czech companies are slightly more optimistic but still plan decrease in comparison with multinational companies. 74% believe there will be a change in expected consumer behaviours in the future. Everyday activities such as shopping, meetings or education are moving to online settings. 58% plan to spend less on marketing and 45% communication and media decrease (see Figure 3).

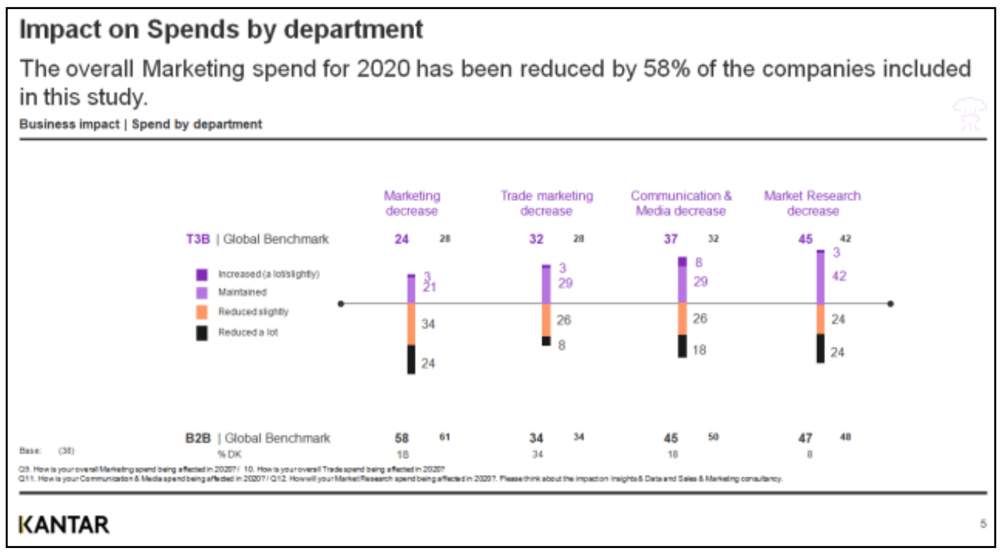

Figure 3: Impact on spends by department
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

The overall marketing spends for 2020 have been reduced by 58% of the companies included in this study.

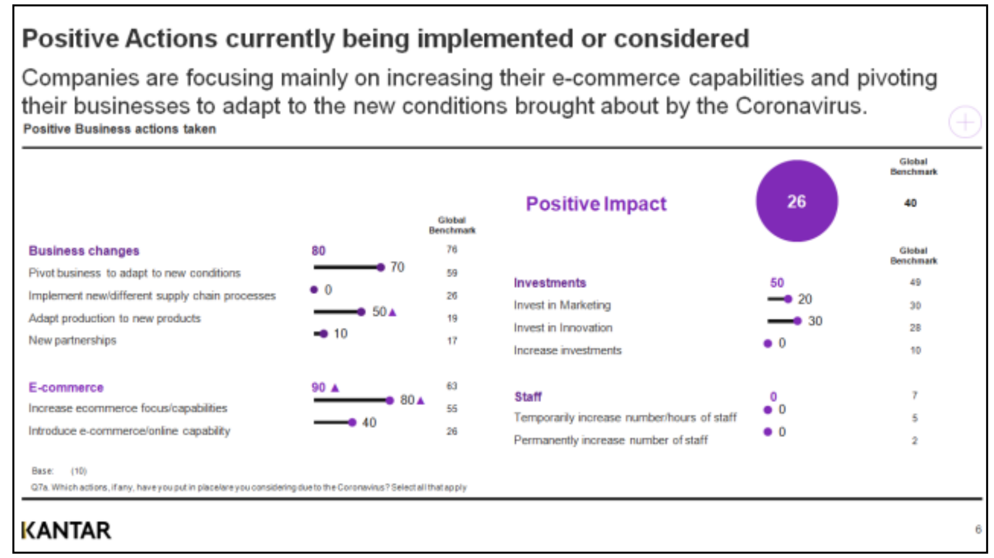

Figure 4: Positive actions
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Companies are focusing mainly on increasing their e-commerce capabilities and pivoting their businesses to adapt to the new conditions brought about by the coronavirus. Nine out of ten Czech businesses have been impacted by the crisis. Four out of ten are concerned about their overall performance. The main identified concerns are: recession, financial issues, regulation, capability, talent shortage, delayed decision-making. Czech companies are slightly more optimistic but still plan decreases in comparison with multinational companies. 74% believe there will be a change in expected consumer behaviours in the future. Everyday activities such as shopping, meetings or education are moving to online settings. 58% plan to spend less on marketing and 45% communication & media decrease (Figure 5).

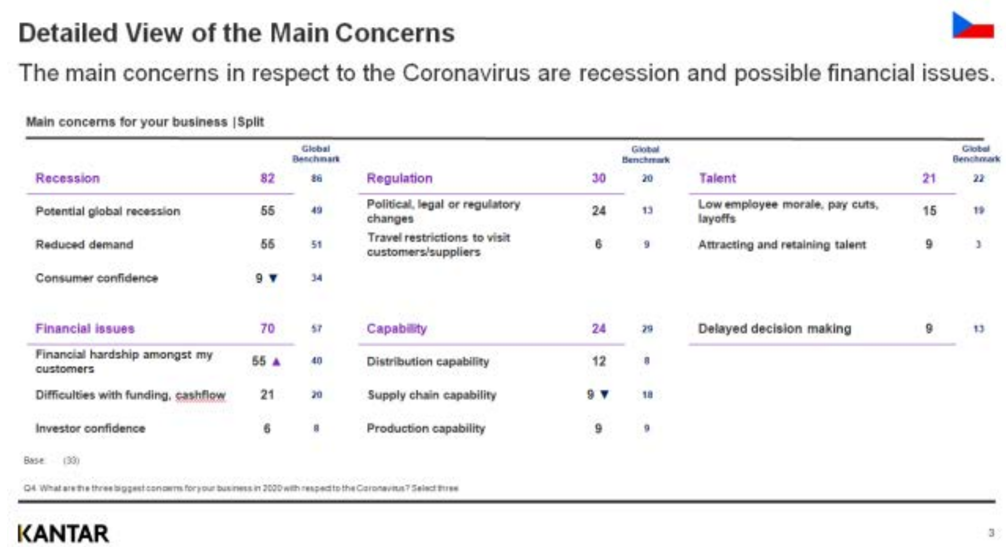

Figure 5: Detailed view of the main concerns
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

The following key indicators are important for defining the changes in marketing communications objectives of companies, based on the results of consumer behaviour research:

- A strong need for financial planning; 60% of consumers think the situation demands being more proactive about their financial planning (peaked in March 2020 – 70%; and has been stable since June).
- Intention to save money. 35% of customers focus on the future, by saving money and avoiding non-essential spending. Another 56% intend to find a balance. Only 9% intend to spend their money now.
- More than 70% of consumers pay attention to prices and 58% pay more attention to products on sale.
- Intend to delay or stop considering spending at all. 42% of respondents had plans to make purchase of durables/service categories are now delaying (27%) or are no longer considering the purchase (15%).
- Localism, a rising trend, has received a boost during the pandemic. 52% of respondents pay more attention to the products origin stressing domestic origin especially of foodstuffs.

Recent investigation of Kantar CZ confirms how financial attitudes have shifted across markets with the effect on new behaviours driven by COVID-19. We anticipate significant changes to their habits and behaviours afterwards as 63% of respondents think that consumer habits and behaviours will change; 22% think they will not change; and 15% do not know. The younger respondents are, the more likely they are to think their habits will change after the crisis (age 18 – 34; 69%, age 35 – 43; 65%, age 55+; 48%).

The second research we analyse is named Kantar BrandZ and it is focused on brands and their marketing communications. Kantar BrandZ ranks the most valuable brands in the world. It is the world's largest, consumer-focused source of brand equity insight, which also powers our proprietary brand valuation methodology. Kantar BrandZ brings industry leading brand valuations, along with research from the world's most extensive brand equity study: Over 4 million consumer interviews covering 19,250 brands across 522 categories in 51 markets. This brand valuation series began in 1998 to help researchers, planners and strategists to better understand the brands they worked on. The reports rank, analyse and honour the world's top brands. Kantar BrandZ has become a global standard brand value ecosystem, featuring their flagship Global Most Valuable Brands Ranking and Report. It also features country and regional rankings across six continents, and world class thought leadership on building strong brands. In total, we have 19 implications to consider, all of which are relevant to consider for future brand strategy both in the short and long term. Many commentators have observed that when we return to the 'new normal', the outpouring of empathetic communications showing how brands are helping during the crisis will become a wider consumer expectation. Brands will be expected to be helpful to people and society generally, to be purposeful and not just profit-oriented (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Brand strategy implications
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

The most strategic results, conclusions and recommendations for brands in times of crisis, which is not necessarily only COVID-19, but also the current war in Ukraine, can be divided into 4 key implications for brand strategy in times of crisis. The first one claims that brand building expenditure is an investment, not a cost. Experience proves that brands with the strongest brand equity are not only the best placed to grow their brand value and deliver superior shareholder returns but also to recover much faster during difficult economic times. With this in mind, marketing budgets should be viewed as a critical investment, not as an easily cut 'outgoing'. It is important to resist the temptation to reduce media pressure; the speed of recovery depends on it. The second principle is related to managing the short term. Right now, if a business category is not inactive due to 'lockdown' policies, it is essential to ensure the brand retains strong mental and physical availability, but without compromising its core positioning and values. This means thinking about aspects such as salience, reach, search, distribution and pricing. Even product: if it needed to constrain production, focus should be placed on the true core of the brand. Third, long-term planning is absolutely crucial. Meaningful difference remains the best indicator of long-term brand value growth. Salience brings a brand into the conversation but a clear, meaningful difference activates the brand at decision time. The fourth aspect is associated with trust and integrity being a powerful platform. The brand needs to be sincere, empathetic and consistent with values. The company's corporate reputation cannot be compromised. Reactive statements such as immediate actions, comments and announcements can have long-term ramifications for better and worse, so they have to be applied carefully. Consumers are seeking reassurance – the company should help in any way possible, particularly if sector expertise is needed or existing capabilities can be re-purposed in an appropriate way. In general, a crisis should not be seen as an opportunity to profiteer and seeking to do so is likely to be damaging.

Brand Building Expenditure Is an Investment, Not a Cost

Brands make our lives easier in several ways; from providing an immediately recognisable guarantee of a certain level of quality, to simplifying decision-making, to providing a degree of certainty and reliability. In uncertain times like these, however, consumers look to brands to provide a degree of confidence and reassurance where there is otherwise little. We will answer one of the most common questions a business faces in times of economic difficulty: *"Should I reduce or cut my marketing and brand building expenditure?"* The answer will, of course, vary from market to market and sector to sector depending on the specific circumstances faced by a given business. However, looking back to what happened after the Great Recession of 2008 may be instructive. Several sectors can be expected to take a bigger hit from COVID-19, but these brands will be looking to regain growth:

- Luxury;
- Apparel;
- Personal care.

Marketers should be looking for trend data which will help to indicate which areas consumers are most likely to resume spending fastest – brands in these areas need to be prepared most to take advantage of recovery. Brands in other sectors are likely to be less affected or even see renewed growth as a result of the current environment:

- Technology – especially those that are coming to the fore during epidemic behaviour changes;
- Fast food – short-term losses in these sectors will be quickly regained.

Some sectors are certainly likely to feel the impact for the long term, however. Automotive sector – and others more permanently disrupted – need to focus on innovation and transformation. Taking all of this into account, our experience proves that brands with the strongest brand equity are not only the best placed to grow their brand value and deliver superior shareholder returns but also to recover much faster during difficult economic times. With this in mind, marketing budgets should be viewed as a critical investment, not as an easily cut 'outgoing'. Media pressure should only be reduced as an absolute last resort; again, the speed of recovery depends on it (Figure 7).

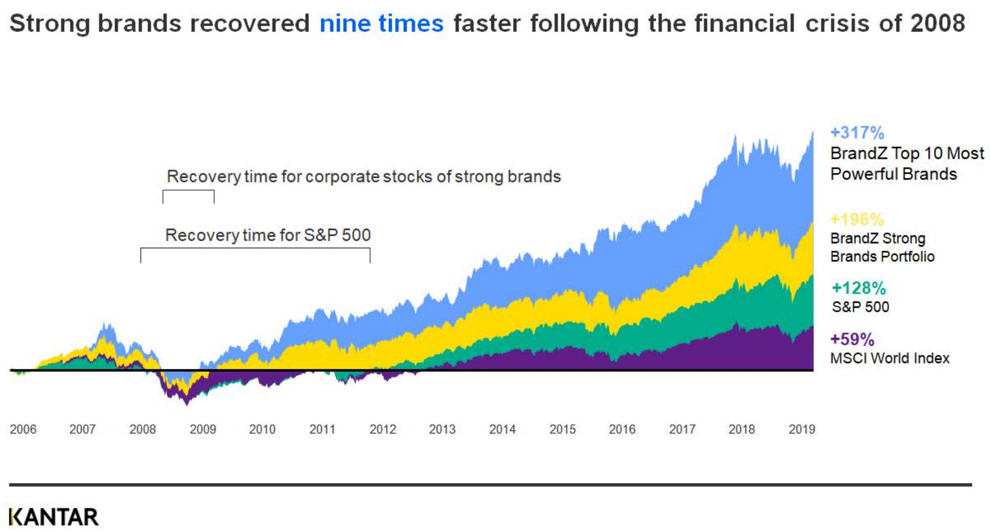

Figure 7: Brands recovery in crisis period
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

With uncertainty all around, the natural inclination is to want to pause. To find out more. To delay decisions. To stop investing until we are surer about what to do. Right now, however, if a business sector is not inactive due to 'lockdown' policies, the brands included in it need to retain their strong mental and physical availability, but without compromising their core positioning and values. This means thinking about aspects such as salience, reach, search, distribution and pricing.

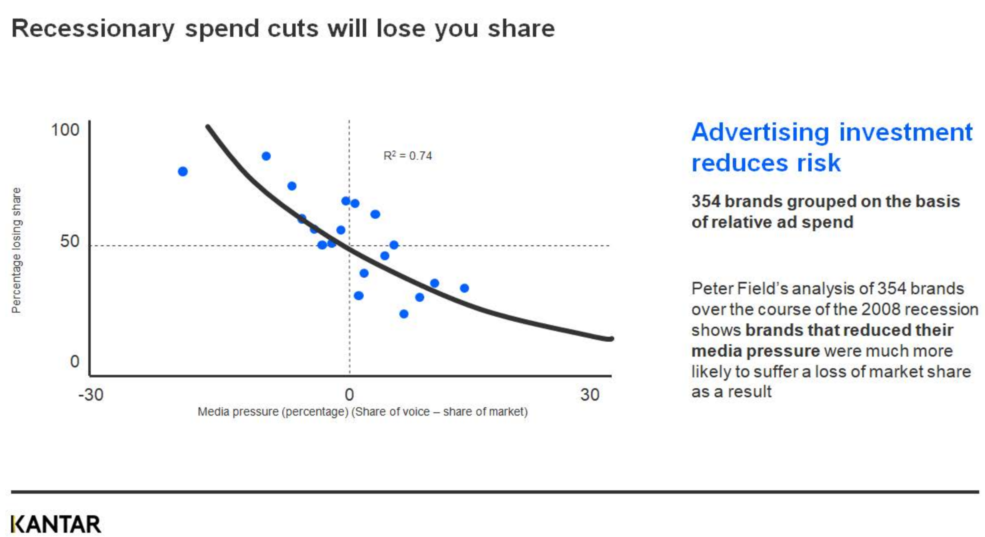

Figure 8: Advertising investments
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Managing the Short Term

Brand activities are expected to be practical and realistic and help consumers in their everyday life. They should attack the crisis and demonstrate that it can be fought. Becoming an example and guiding the change, brands should remain optimistic and the companies should think in an unconventional way while promoting them. These processes are meant to reduce anxiety and understand consumers' concerns, using specific knowledge to explain and inform (see Figure 9).

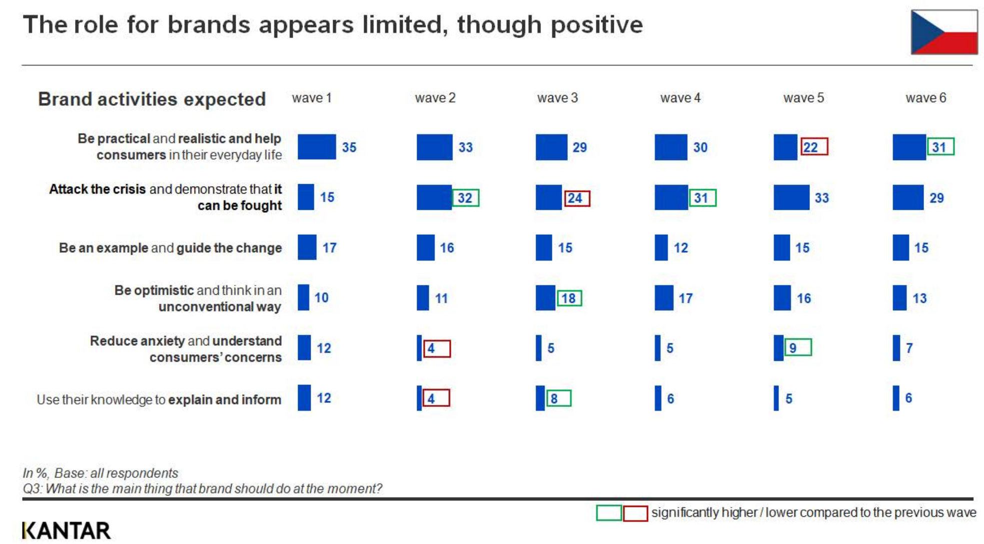

Figure 9: The role of brands
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

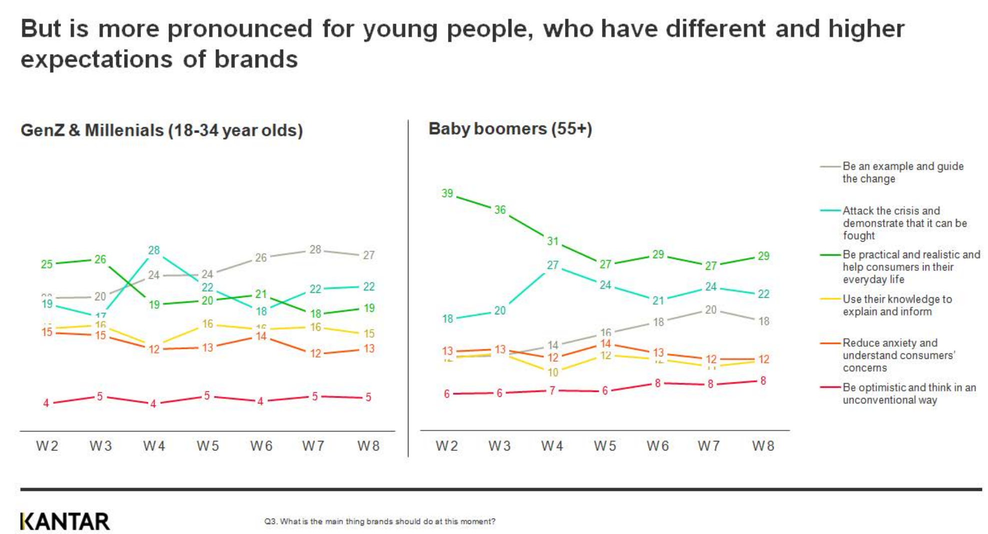

Figure 10: The role of brands in generations
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Brands are rarely as important or salient as other elements of everyday life. BrandZ data tells us that though many brands are well enough liked, very few indeed are actually loved. But brands are part of the texture of our lives. Right now, brands are emblems of 'normality'. Thus, the key objectives the brands should focus on is to be the everyday opportunity, i.e., to be a guarantee of product/service consistency and quality people can rely on, be available, perform their function admirably, ensure clarity and consistency, deliver an appropriate experience and build positive associations and trust over time.

If brands want to matter, then more than ever they need to understand their audiences and what they care about. Increasingly, people look to the businesses they work for or buy from to offer them a match to things they care about. Whether that is excellent performance, a relevant innovation or a higher purpose, a brand must know what matters to its audiences and respond (and lead) accordingly. An authentic purpose, alongside a clear positioning, offers an opportunity to drive more meaningful relationships with audiences. If brands want a significant role, this is a chance to demonstrate that they can play it. We have to keep in mind these facts:

- An unprecedented crisis that still draws comparisons with a war. We see this is far from over. We have significant uncertainty about the progress of the disease and anxiety about re-entering society. People have had very different experiences, as seen in the tribes segmentation, and will emerge with different needs which brand owners need to understand and meet.
- However, not everything has been bad. Large numbers have found some benefits in the new behaviours that have resulted from a forced change in circumstances. While human nature does not change, new perceptions about family, community and the environment along with some new behaviours have become established.
- While politicians, economists and other commentators debate the shape and speed of the recovery and people everywhere try to resume their former freedoms, there is also a clear appetite for change, leadership and greater resilience. Companies and brand owners should take this opportunity seriously and help people to achieve the change they say they want.
- As always, goods and services must keep people safe. Visual reassurance is now needed – evidence that they are secure. Companies have a role to play as purposeful employers, citizens and as brand owners, meeting practical, emotional needs and aligning with what their audiences care about, some of which may have changed.

People will change as a result of COVID-19. Their needs, aspirations, values, lifestyles and means will be affected. This will have an impact on categories and demand spaces, moments that matter, the value and relevance they ascribe to brands and the channels through which they access them. Brands need to understand this change to remain relevant and to pivot successfully to new conditions. Evidence from recessions shows that brands which continue to build in a recession emerge more strongly. But COVID-19 is much more than a recession. Whether a company continued to advertise or chose to withdraw, it needs to dive into the equity, status and relevance under new conditions. Some categories have done very well during COVID-19 and some brands have even enhanced their relevance and reputation. Many others need to recover fast by identifying the opportunities of scale which lie at the core while preparing for the future. They need to revisit their fundamentals (needs, audience, offer, purpose, positioning) or review their execution (experience, communications, channels, innovation, etc.). People and businesses have been forcibly reminded that they are part of a wider world, which is both global and local. There have been crises of leadership and we have all had to play our part. There is evidence that expectations have been raised about the role of business in general; brands have an opportunity, particularly with younger audiences, to be part of the solution.

Plan for the Long Term

Meaningful difference remains the best indicator of long-term brand value growth. Salience brings a brand into the conversation but a clear, meaningful difference activates the brand at decision time.

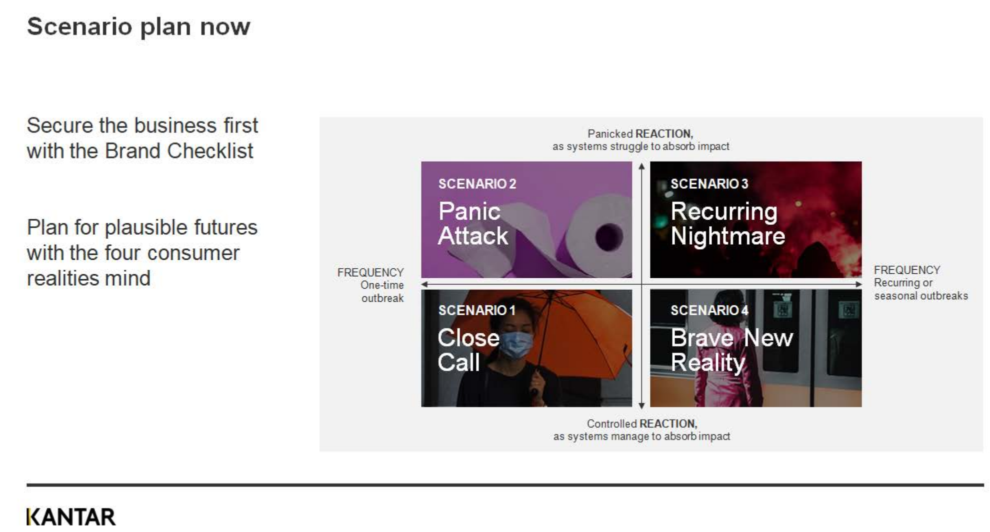

Figure 11: Brand long-term plan
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Many commentators have observed that when we return to the 'new normal', the outpouring of empathetic communications showing how brands are helping during the crisis will become a wider consumer expectation. Brands will be expected to be helpful to people and society generally, to be purposeful and not just profit-oriented.

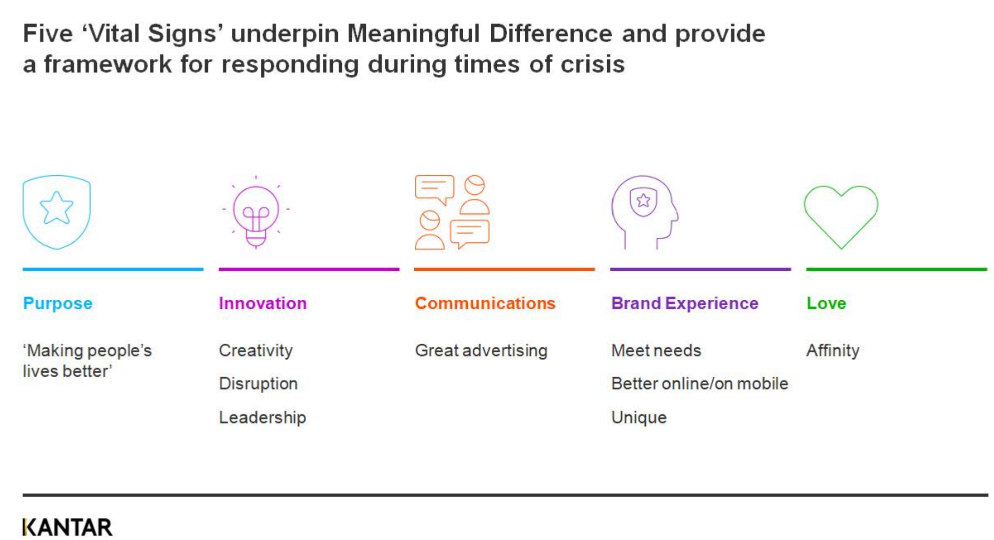

Figure 12: Five vital signs for brand
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Trust and Integrity Are a Powerful Platform

Brand purpose is the foundation on which a brand and its values are built. Leadership and responsibility are the key pillars of reputation – and never more so than in a time of crisis.

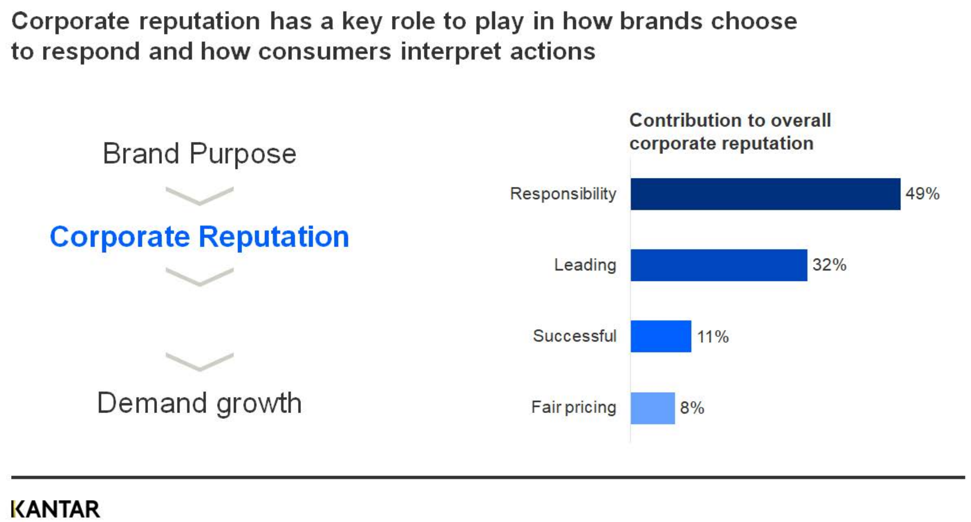

Figure 13: Corporate reputation
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Being responsible means to respect the environment, society, employees and supply chain, so from the foundations of a helpful brand purpose and with the benefit of a positive corporate reputation. Brand must be trusted by consumers to deliver on their expectations.

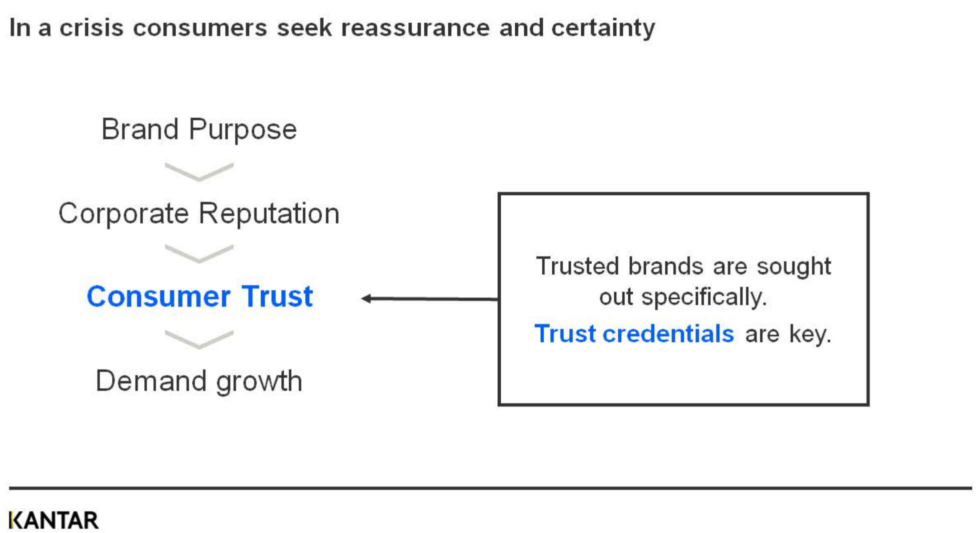

Figure 14: Consumer trust
Source: Internal materials of Kantar published with approval

Key Strategic Factors the Brands Should Respond to in Troubled Times

All brands have particular areas of prowess and competence. However, lack of 'relevant expertise' is not an excuse for a lack of contribution, even simply a financial one. If a brand has purposeful values at the core of positioning, a crisis is a critical point at which to deliver on those values with action – failure to do so is very likely to have a damaging effect. The response should embrace consumers, customers, society at large and employees as well as partners comprising a supply chain – being consistent and sincere is essential here. Clearly times of crisis should not be exploited for the benefit of a company's bottom line but a well-coordinated response may trickle down to positive brand associations in the medium to long-term.

Even in difficult times true innovators do not stop innovating to adapt to a changing environment and meet emerging consumer needs. Businesses should continue to invest in R&D as much as possible to maintain relevance both during a crisis and beyond. The brand's service or product offer could be enhanced and upgraded in a directly helpful and constructive way for the benefit of customers. Creative solutions are not limited to advances in functionality and product design. Changes to usual rules of engagement and modes of operation may result in much needed assistance, and are not quickly forgotten.

Experience proves that an increase in marketing pressure during economic difficulty can bring advantages in the long run. Thus, brands need to evolve and tailor existing content and media planning with a relevant message, or make existing assets work harder by prioritising the most effective to date while taking care to ensure their focus remains suitable. Being playful in a crisis is a double-edged sword – it can provide refreshing respite but it also has the potential to cause offence. If pursuing humorous or light-hearted content (particularly if directly related to the issue at hand), has to content fit well with brand heritage and style. CEOs and all brand ambassadors need to be extra cautious in times of heightened sensitivity. A PR own goal has even greater potential than usual to cause lasting long-term damage. A consistent and well-coordinated message is paramount.

Service disruptions must be mitigated and focus on the customer should help the brand learn what could be improved in the future. Reliable standards become even more important as consumers seek reassurance through service and may be unable to replace or upgrade products as easily as before. Brands must uphold standards as far as is possible in order to prevent softening confidence. There is an opportunity for brands to be inventive in service and experience delivery. It is necessary to identify which specific aspects of existing experience need to be dialled up or back to make people's lives easier – particularly for existing customers.

Brands with existing emotional connections can provide moments of relief and calm during a period of stress. Helping with relevant suggestions, recommendations, guidance and even just staying in touch – without needlessly imposing – is likely to be appreciated if done with genuine concern for customers. Trusted brands evoking national or community pride have a unique opportunity to make a difference with inspirational action; lifting spirits and providing a lead for others to follow. Care is needed; behaviour needs to be genuinely altruistic, possibly even without official PR support. Mobilising resources to bring a practical edge to a brand's existing strong emotional connection is likely to be a powerful mix in moments of uncertainty.

Kantar's brand equity framework brings together a brand's ability to meet needs and develop an emotional connection into a single metric – being meaningful to consumers. The most successful brands can achieve both.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, we dealt with the principles of customer satisfaction towards brands, which are based on the general characteristics and expectations of customers. A personal approach is the ability to meet personal needs and wishes, which should simultaneously offer the customer a certain pleasure and a solution to their potential or current problem or give more than they expected. The brand should inspire confidence and at the same time be able to empathise with the buyer's situation. All this should be minimised in terms of time and effort. We have mentioned empathy in several places, which is one of the basic qualities that are also related to the brand archetype. In practice, it is not very common for companies to clearly profile their brands, but it also often may not be unambiguous if the portfolio of brands is large and extends into multiple categories. However, in the context of crises, and not only COVID-19, it is also clear that in and after the crisis, customer expectations and behaviour change, as shown, for example, by the 2008 economic crisis, which lasted until 2012, especially in some industries.

Our post-COVID analysis confirmed the previous general statements and brought concrete findings, presented in the text of this study, namely that most households will plan their purchases in the long term, will rather save and focus more on sales, will stop or postpone purchases of durables and will buy more goods of domestic provenance. This fact follows from the assumption that transport costs will not make it more expensive, but also the general environmental trend, i.e., the reduction of the carbon footprint. Our data also confirms this change, especially for the younger generation.

Therefore, in such times, companies should also work with brand archetypes that correspond to the social mood, i.e., more rational behaviour, which means planning, saving, finding quick solutions and empathy. These can be The Sage, The Everyman, The Clown or The Caregiver. At the same time, they should be able to demonstrate their usefulness in times of crisis, as well as how their owners have treated the environment, social issues, employees or supply chains.

Another challenge for companies and their brands is the fact that at a time when they are generally talking about savings in all areas of business, they should not, on the contrary, slow down in communication and reduce budgets. There will be important investments that will help in the long term, but also in the medium term to return to normality, so brand communication should be an emblem of 'normality', but at the same time it should respect the changed situation both in the international and domestic economic environment, as well as the shift in social expectations, not only of their customers.

As the COVID-19 experience has shown, life has moved to the online environment, and even after the crisis has passed (we assume that it will not return to such a range of bans), part of not only educational and cultural activities will remain online. In particular, the purchasing behaviour of the young and middle-aged generations will not return to the pre-crisis situation. Therefore, it will be essential for brands to make use of the offline and online communication tools we discussed above. This will make it even more challenging to integrate marketing communications. Artificial intelligence will certainly be the solution, albeit comprehensively probably in the medium term. AI is a combination of the ability to collect and analyse data about customer behaviour, create target groups that match individual brands in companies' portfolios, and identify the most appropriate ones. Furthermore, it derives from media behaviour the most effective communication tools and channels to address the customer and then continue to guide them with an 'empathetic face' through the decision-making process. AI will gradually be able to customise to individualise communication, that is, find optimal communication channels for any individual.

In our study, we pointed out the fact that the world, society and the consumer have changed. The brand is one of the key strategic elements within the company's marketing strategy. Its growing power is primarily based on its persona, psychological profile, values, language, opinions and attitudes, i.e., its archetype. Within the overall marketing strategy, the following fundamental trends appear: individuality, personal approach and personalisation, solution of the problem, offering more than customers expect, credibility and also empathy. The way to transfer these essential factors (both brand and marketing) to the consumer are marketing communication channels, where we encounter new tools and trends such as AI and customisation.

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