Reflecting on our Past, Learnings for our Future: Traditional, Modern and Future Consumer

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Characteristics of Traditional vs Modern Consumers

In order to understand your consumers and adapt your marketing strategy accordingly, it is important to explore the evolution of consumer needs and purchasing behaviour. Reflecting on the past, **traditional consumers** of the 20th century were considered conformists, usually behaving in accordance with the prevailing standards or customs and typically avoiding unconventional behaviours (Oszust & Stecko, 2020). Moreover, traditional consumers were known to hold a low level of responsibility, had low consumer awareness, and were inclined to adapt themselves to the market (Oszust & Stecko, 2020).

Dynamic changes in the environment have led consumers to seek novel ways of meeting their needs. These novel ways have an impact on not only the consumer decision-making process and the formulation of new goals in the consumption process, but above all, on the evolution of a new type of consumer – the **modern consumer**. The modern consumer is well-informed, inclined to practice ethical behaviour and accept a high level of responsibility as well as possesses high consumer awareness (Oszust & Stecko, 2020). Moreover, the modern consumer looks for authenticity, emphasises individuality and is highly involved and independent. It is no surprise that modern consumers are engaged with the products chosen, eagerly sharing their opinions on products and services with others. Based on an interview with leaders from eBay, Chico's and Brooks Brothers, Alison Bolen (SAS Insights Editor) describes modern consumers as being **in control of their shopping experience** and having '**around-the-clock' shopping expectations**, hence challenging businesses to address those expectations quickly and on every possible platform.

Furthermore, modern consumers are **omnichannel shoppers**, stimulating businesses to eliminate the barriers between channels, and engage consumers online and in the physical store. With physical and digital worlds colliding for modern consumers (i.e., coined as "Phygital" Reality), delivering virtually enabled at-home experiences remains imperative to drive sales. **Content** has tremendous influence on modern consumer

behaviour. Since **social sharing** has become increasingly important, businesses need to invest in a new feedback mechanism to leverage these insights before introducing the products or services to the market. The modern consumers are **accustomed to a global economy and global experiences**, hence expecting to fulfil their needs with meaningful purchase-related interactions, regardless of their shopping destination. These changes in today's consumers, initiated by major societal and environmental factors, have led to a fundamentally different marketplace where companies need to constantly seek new ways to achieve marketing excellence not only by keeping track of the changes but also by focusing on **forecasting future trends** in consumers' behaviour.

Future Consumers: Emerging Trends of 2021

How should companies respond to the demanding, anxious and creative consumers of 2021? The Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped the way many consumers seek and attain contentment, prompting new behaviours and expectations. All the consumer behaviour trends discussed below reflect on changes accelerated by the pandemic and attempt to encapsulate the better future that consumers aspire to and towards which businesses can adjust their own strategies. For example, Gartner Consumer Behaviors and Attitudes Survey revealed that consumers are still adjusting to COVID-19 pandemic life in 2021, predicting that 'things won't be back to normal until the fall of 2021 or later' as per Kate Muhl comment (VP Analyst, Gartner). Based on the survey results, three trends are particularly important to observe. The majority of survey respondents (64 %) believed they are still at risk of COVID -19 exposure in public places, and 77% said that they are no longer comfortable socialising the way they did pre-pandemic.

Hence, the shift from public to private ways of living will continue and businesses need to lean into the aspects of their brand values that **support consumers' self-protective instincts**. This survey also revealed that **the wealth gaps (i.e, between affluent/higher and lower – income consumers)** have exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic, leading to adjustments in consumer spending. For example, the higher-income consumers are considering their purchases more carefully as a sense of guilt is constraining their spending; whereas for lower – income consumers, the lack of money is the key driver that constrains spending. This attitudinal gap will be very challenging for companies to address since it will be increasingly difficult to connect with the affluent and everyone else with a single message or a single brand. The third trend revealed that **equality** tops the list of consumer values in 2021. Given the growing importance of equality, inclusion and diversity, businesses need to review both short-and long-term communications strategies and realign themes to leverage consumers' increased focus on social justice and civic engagement.

Furthermore, based on research among 15,000+ consumers in 16 countries, the global consumer intelligence firm, InSites Consulting, identified 14 consumer trends (focusing on mind, body and soul) and linked each trend with relevant business opportunities and actions. For example, **Do It Yourself (DIY)** consumers, in the Mind category, express a desire for individuality and a shift towards sustainable living, driving the uptake in DIY formats. Business opportunities for DIY consumers revolve around platforms and solutions that inspire creative self-expression via self-serve apps, DIY recipes and cross-category competition. For **Attentive Consumers**, brick-and-mortar stores must reimagine their physical spaces to accommodate online order fulfilment and incorporate open-air components to bring these customers back safely. Technologies and virtual experiences, especially important for **Re-imagine Interactions** consumers, are driving customer interactions and facilitating human connections online and in person. Cashless payments and click-and-collect services allow businesses to generate revenue while providing the safety and convenience that is of paramount importance for **Designed for resilience** consumers. Purpose-driven initiatives will resonate with **Neighbourly network** consumers. Amidst social unrest, consumers want the facts and expect brands to act accordingly, especially appreciated by **Rebuilding trust** and **Unapologetic activist** consumers. Hence, communicating with compassion and supporting mental wellbeing are critical attributes to drive brand loyalty for these consumers.

The Table below encapsulates all identified consumer trends in each category as per InSites Consulting report, listing relevant business opportunities and actions.

Overall, based on the modern consumer characteristics and emerging future consumer trends, businesses should offer value-added products and services providing multifunctional, multichannel and affordable solutions for consumers. With mounting uncertainties reshaping the world, businesses should prioritise and reinforce consumers' environmental and safety needs to foster a brighter future. Flexibility, agility, transparency and technology will pave the way forward!

Consumer Trends	Business Opportunities/ Actions
Mind	

1. **Life coach**– Consumers are turning to personal projects, rituals and routines that offer a sense of control and stability in a changeable world.	1. Brands that easily fit into everyday rituals will form part of consumers' long – term routines.
2. **DIY everything**– The desire for individuality and shift towards sustainable living is driving the uptake of do-it-yourself formats.	2. Opportunities to offer platforms and solutions that inspire consumers to creatively express themselves on their own terms through maker collaborations, DIY recipes, self-serve apps and cross-category competitions that tap into DIY entrepreneurship.
3. **Attentive experiences**-Consumers are craving slow moments that allow them to reach 'flow' and escape from their everyday lives.	3. Both online and offline, brands can offer immersive experiences that connect with consumers in new ways, allowing for full engagement in the present moment.
4. **Wild and weird** – Consumers are consciously creating time for spontaneous, 'silly' moments to fight the relentless cycle of negativity in the world.	4. Brands that embrace digitally-driven satire, social media challenges and celebrating the weird and wonderful in their campaigns will be valued.
5. **Re-imagined interactions** – From the rapid rise in home working to the adoption of online appointments, the way people interact is changing moving forward.	5. Brands should show how they are uniquely positioned to become part of consumers' new working and social lifestyles, with tools and spaces designed to keep people connected.
6. **Sentimental optimism**-In times of crisis, consumers typically look back to happier times for comfort and social connectedness. Today there is a fresh take on nostalgia, with consumers blending decades that focus on youth culture.	6. To tap into this, brands should transport consumers to carefree times with coming-of-age content featuring well-loved popular culture references.

Body

7. **Nurturing nature** – Consumers are experiencing a new immediacy with nature, realizing its importance for better physical and mental wellbeing.	7. Bring nature into the home/ restore natural spaces: unadulterated ingredients, alternative materials, and services that support enjoyment of the great outdoors in ways that make a positive impact on people and planet health.
8. **Fights for immunity –** Consumers are now familiar with a range of biological terminology driving deeper engagement and fascination with personal biology.	8. Focus on immunity – boosting ingredients and formats that help build resistance and make tailored recommendations based on specific health needs.
9. **Designing for resilience:** Resilient environments are more important than ever to make consumers feel protected against outside forces, and to build resilient mindsets against future worries.	9. Help consumers feel safe and secure with new innovations, designs and systems that address future -focused needs, including mental health, hygiene and urban pollution.
10. **At-home pleasure**: Consumers are spending more time at home, but still crave highly pleasurable and sensorial experiences.	10. Bring rewarding and luxurious moments into the home, from perfectly crafted cocktails to high-end furniture.
11. **Rebuilding trust**: In an age of widespread misinformation and fake news, consumers are leaning on brands to deliver solutions that instil trust and restore a sense of security.	11. Innovations in safe ingredients and tamper-proof packaging will thrive, as hygiene and safety become core needs, while tackling misinformation in the form of trusted accreditations, verifications and expert opinions will become a true marker of trust.

Soul

12. Disentangling taboos: Consumers are seeking knowledge and understanding of topics deemed uncomfortable taboos, such as poverty, disability and menopause.	12. Identifying, educating and uplifting social stigmas. Real-life storytelling and visually raw campaigns will help actively challenge societal norms and the status quo.
13. Unapologetic activism: Consumers have been exposed to visible systemic injustices, causing a spark to act and drive social reform.	13. Positively impact a cause and call out deep-rooted discrimination in society. Authentically calling out relevant issues specific to local markets is a key for success.
14. Neighbourly networks: Accelerated by Covid-19, consumers are recognising the value of community ties to their social lifestyles, while new platforms are enabling local networks to tackle growing concerns about education gaps, loneliness and sustainability.	14. Partnerships or upskilling schemes that actively support specific communities and small businesses.

Table developed based on InSites Consulting

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