



What people think,  
feel and do

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Brand marketing in a crisis:

How to give consumers a very merry Christmas



21 July 2020

## 'Twas 5 months before Christmas...

Christmas.

It's a word that strikes fear and joy into the hearts of marketers and brand managers in equal measure. And perhaps never more so than this year.

The continuing uncertainty of the pandemic and the potential economic downturn has meant that over half of all UK consumers feel apprehensive (53%) and anxious (55%) about the future. Whilst disposable incomes have, overall, started to rise in recent weeks, deliberation over purchasing continues to increase with 60% (+7%) claiming that 16 weeks into lockdown they are taking more time to consider where they spend their hard-earned cash.

### Deliberation over purchasing continues to increase

What are people's attitudes towards spending and interest in brands?  
 From the 8<sup>th</sup> week of lockdown to 16 weeks in

● 12th – 15th May ● 10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> July



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
 2,004 UK adults

### And all was quiet on the High Street

But, the festive season is, as we know, a rule unto itself.

The problem for the beleaguered High Street is that over half of all UK consumers (54%) state that they are going to try to avoid shopping in person over the Christmas period and over two in five (45%) claim to be planning to buy more of their gifts online. The possibility of a series of very silent nights for bricks and mortar stores looks highly probable.

On the surface, this all sounds like good news for online retailers, but uncertainty over income remains rife with nearly a third (32%) of the public stating that they are worried about their finances over Christmas, and nearly two in five (39%) intending to spend less on gifts this year. Intentions and reality are of course two very different things, but with a third of the population aiming to start

Christmas shopping earlier than usual, brands may have to brace themselves for a bumper Black Friday.

## Decking the halls or battening down the hatches?

But are consumers looking forward to the festive season?

Well, yes and no.

Fear of infection, of harming loved ones is playing heavily on the minds of the UK population with 43% concerned about endangering the health of their friends and family, whilst just over a third (35%) claim that they are not looking forward to Christmas this year.

There are, however, some glimmers of hope.

Just under half (48%) of the population are aiming to shop locally as much as possible providing a boost for community-based businesses, whilst 46% believe that Christmas is going to be more important than ever. And, although many may have spent the last 16 weeks in very close proximity to their family members, two in five (40%) intend to spend more time with their family over the holiday period than in previous years.

## Christmas shopping is set to be as online and local as possible, with more importance and anxiety than usual

Which of the following best describes how you feel about Christmas?  
10th – 13th July (16th week of lockdown)



To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about Christmas?  
c.2000 UK adults



## Shopping in a branded wonderland?

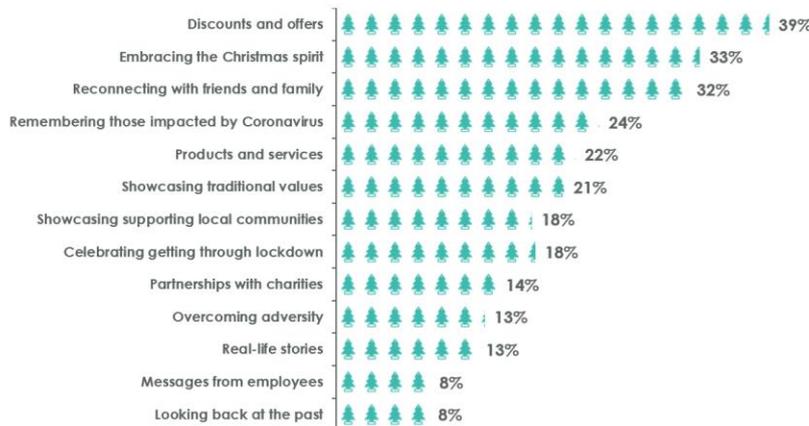
With the fear of recession looming on the horizon it's unsurprising that consumers want to see communications which feature discounts and offers above anything else.

Communications preferences popular during the initial weeks of lockdown are out. Partnerships with charities are low down on the list of priorities at 14%, along with tales of overcoming adversity (13%), real-life stories (13%) and messages from employees (8%).

Instead, consumers want to escape the restrictions of lockdown (at least momentarily) with a third stating that they wish to see content which embraces the Christmas spirit and focuses on reconnecting with friends and family (32%).

## People would most like to see discounts and offers, as well as content that embraces the spirit of Christmas

What type of communications content would you like to see over the Christmas period?  
 10th – 13th July (16th week of lockdown)



We'd now like you to think about different types of communications from brands over the Christmas period. Would you prefer these to focus on...  
 c.2000 UK adults

## Not just jingles all the way

With escapism high on the agenda, over a third (36%) only want to see content from brands that concentrates on Christmas.

However, there is an understanding that brands can't simply ignore the past 16 weeks. Just under half (48%) would prefer to see content that focuses on Christmas but acknowledges Coronavirus and nearly a quarter (24%) of all consumers want communications to remember those impacted by the pandemic.

## And when it comes to the trade-off between Christmas and Coronavirus in advertising, Christmas wins out

Would you like advertising to be about Christmas or things related to Coronavirus (e.g. lockdown, social distancing or responding to the crisis)?  
10th – 13th July (16th week of lockdown)



Would you like advertising to be about Christmas or things related to Coronavirus (e.g. lockdown, social distancing or responding to the crisis)?  
c.2000 UK adults

### One final thought

People across the UK have undergone huge changes to the way they interact with each other and brands, yet over the course of our research we've found consumers to be resilient and resourceful. As the current recession and economic impact, let alone a potential return to lockdown, begin to bite, it is now the turn for organisations and companies to also show resolve and innovation – especially at Christmas.

If you'd like to make sure that your advertising and communications strikes the right tone and conveys the right messages, get in touch to find out about our advertising optimisation tool at [research@opinium.com](mailto:research@opinium.com)

# About Opinium

**OPINIUM** is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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