



COVID-19 Marketing Analysis: How Brands Can Support Local Communities

April 30, 2020

Framework for Managing Uncertainty

As we've navigated the recent unknown with our clients, we've created a framework consisting of three phases to help manage the uncertainty: **stabilize**, **empathize**, **optimize**.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, we spent the first few weeks working on stabilizing the welfare of our people, clients and business. **We are now in the empathize phase, where we gain an understanding of human needs in this new reality and how brands can answer them.**

Current Cultural Context

For some time now, the power dynamic between government, brands and people has been shifting. With government failing to address the change people seek on major issues, people increasingly expect companies to play a role in delivering societal change. This is true now more than ever.

Actions taken during (and following) COVID-19 will define how consumers interpret brands for a long time to come. Now is the time for compassion, decisiveness and action.

62%

of people agree we will not make it through this crisis without brands playing a critical role in addressing our challenges.

72%

of Americans believe that companies should focus on the health of their workers.

86%

say brands should be a “safety net,” stepping in where they are needed and able to fill gaps in the government’s response to the virus.



Self-
Actualization



Esteem



Love/Belonging



Safety



Physiological

**In the current climate,
brands should take a
bottom-up view of
Maslow's hierarchy of
needs.**

Current Human Needs

Empathy starts by meeting people where they are. Undeniably, the greatest value brands can provide today is helping people meet their most basic needs and navigate this new normal.

But navigating normal now means not only meeting basic individual needs but the greater needs of society, too. To answer these needs, brand actions must be useful, responsible and purposeful.

Useful

Utility is the truest form of empathy in a crisis. Define a role for your brand based on actual needs. We're craving safety, stability, reassurance, connection, a sense of normalcy, and moments of levity. For which of these needs can your brand offer the most utility and value?

Responsible

There is a lot of misinformation and confusion during this time, which makes it even more important to be sensitive and responsible in our communications and actions. We must help clarify, educate and remind people how to responsibly engage with brands in the broader context of COVID-19 guidelines.

Purposeful

To craft an authentic role for your brand, lean into your purpose. Which human or societal needs most align with your brand's guiding purpose and values? In these unprecedented times, what is the higher-order benefit your brand will bring to the world?

A wide-angle photograph of a city street at sunset. The sky is a deep orange and yellow. Tall buildings line both sides of the street, their windows reflecting the low light. In the center of the frame, a person is riding a bicycle across the street. To the right, a white SUV is parked or moving slowly. The street is marked with white lines, and traffic lights are visible on the corners. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY

All over the country, economic and social uncertainty is impacting how we experience community.



Jobless claims just topped **30 million** over the past six weeks. ([CNBC](#))

“This is the deepest, fastest, most broad-based recession we’ve ever seen.” ([NYT](#))

In the face of drastic revenue loss, small businesses are driven to cut employees’ hours and lay people off. One in five small business owners have closed their doors.



**“The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll;
the loss of connection.**

This is hitting us and we’re grieving. Collectively.”

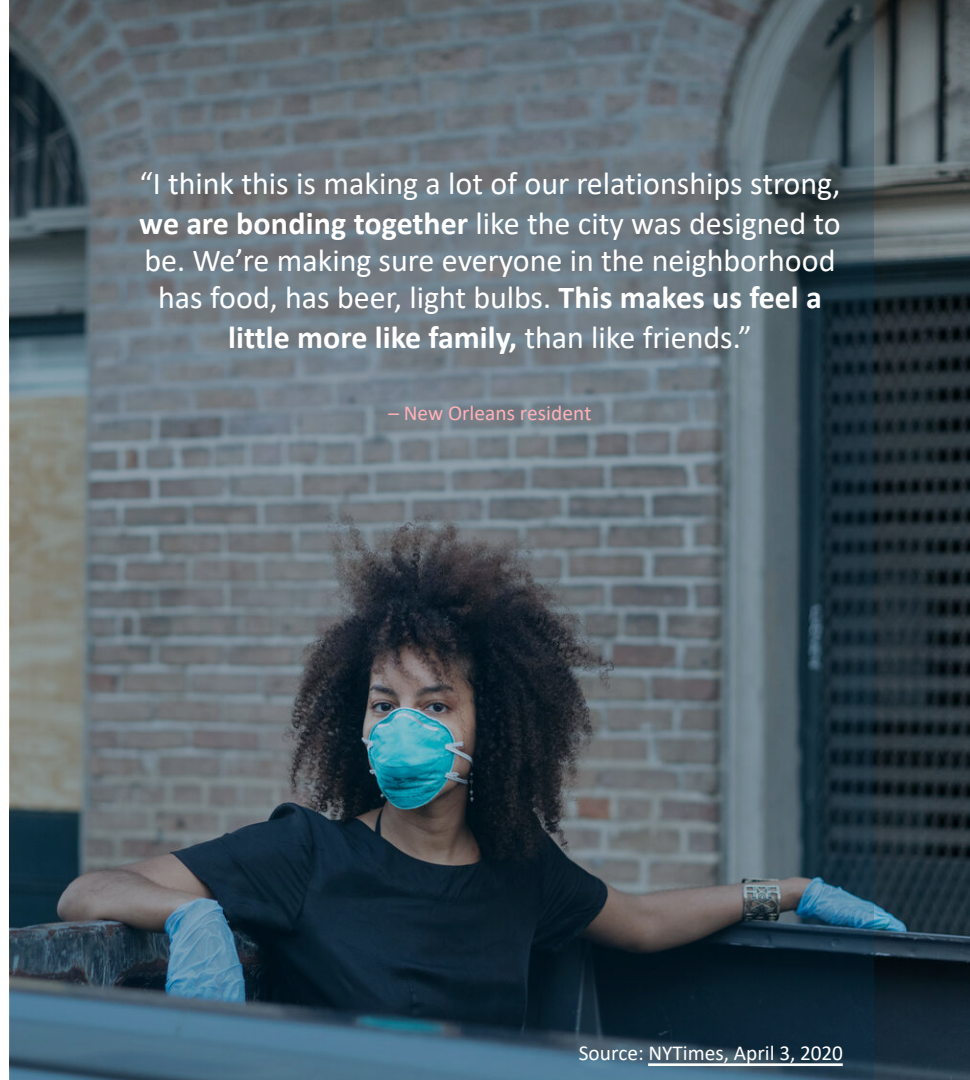
([Harvard Business Review](#))

We can’t see our friends and families, can’t eat
out, drink, shop or gather at local businesses that
used to be hubs of community engagement.

Against all odds, local
communities are
stronger
than ever.

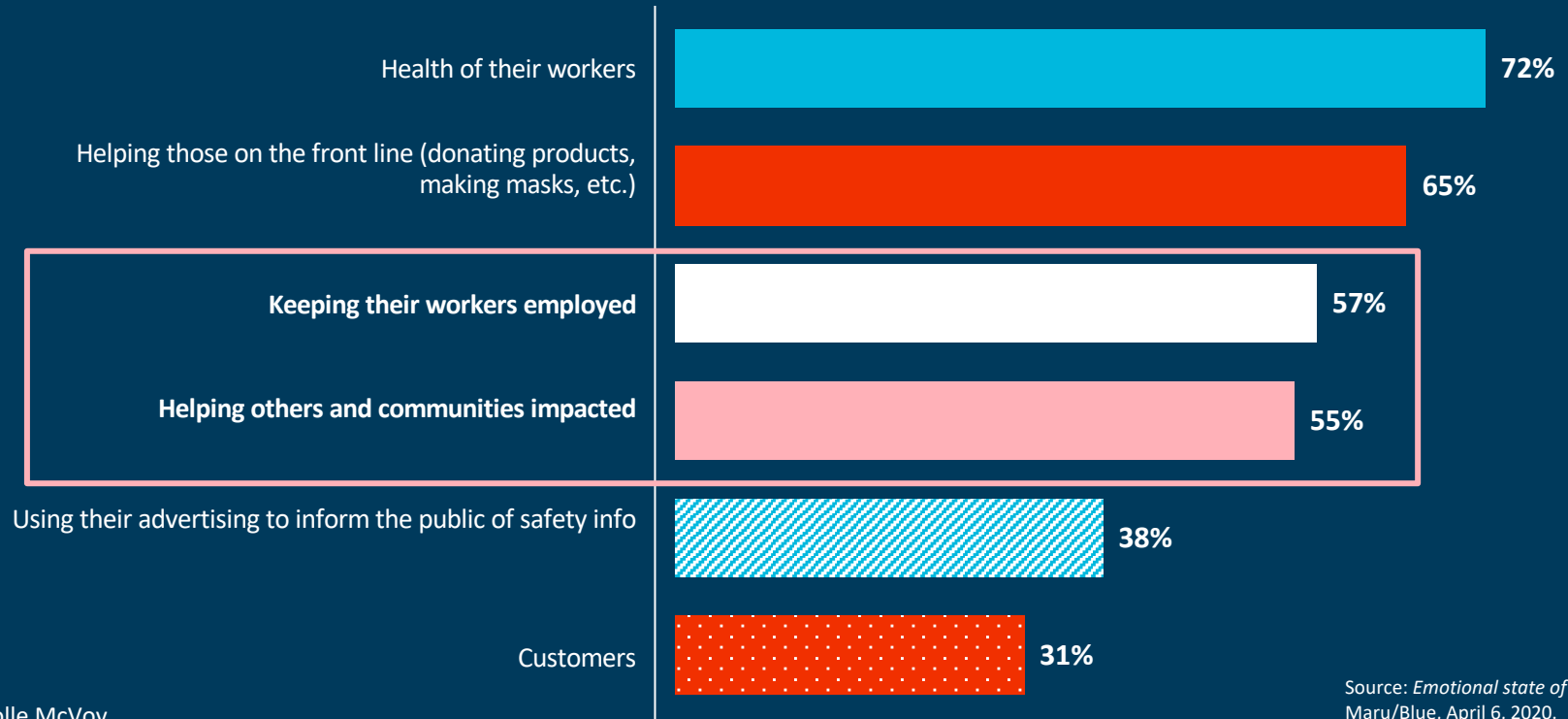
“I think this is making a lot of our relationships strong,
we are bonding together like the city was designed to
be. We’re making sure everyone in the neighborhood
has food, has beer, light bulbs. **This makes us feel a
little more like family**, than like friends.”

— New Orleans resident



People Want Brands to Support Communities

Right now, companies should be focused on...



Recommendation 1: Foster community connections to combat social isolation.

25%

of Americans have helped an at-risk friend or neighbor with errands.

Source: The Harris Poll COVID-19 Survey Wave 5, March 28-30, 2020.

Insight

Though social distancing keeps us apart physically, the human need for connection has generated a resurgence of community. We're stepping up to support each other, to meet the need for love and belonging and make our neighborhoods feel closer.



To help us help each other, [Nextdoor](#) created the Help Map feature, which connects neighbors with those nearby who need assistance with errands. User engagement on Nextdoor grew by 80% in the first two weeks of March. Throughout the crisis, neighbors have continued to use Nextdoor groups to discuss at-home hobbies and provide advice to parents dealing with school closures.

Recommendation 2: Champion the local businesses that have long championed their own local communities.

45%

of Americans have a more positive view of small businesses since the start of the pandemic.

Source: The Harris Poll COVID-19 Survey Wave 7, April 11-13, 2020.

Insight

Showing love to our local economies is top of mind. But small businesses need help as they struggle to maintain their role in holding up the communities they serve.

\$TREETIFY

EVERY DEAL, EVERYWHERE

Online platform [Streetify](#) will provide free access to small retailers for one year.

[Lululemon](#) set aside \$2 million for a new Ambassador Relief Fund to support small studio owners and operators tied to the brand.

[lululemon](#)  [athletica](#)



 **Mark Cuban** ✓
@mcuban

We in ! Just sent the email for Mavs and My companies. Anyone who buys from small local, independent (sorry big company owned chains) , will get reimbursed for their lunch and coffee/teas. We will start with this week and go from there [#buylocal](#) [#supportlocalBusiness](#) [#buysmall](#) twitter.com/mcuban/status/...

Billionaire [Mark Cuban](#) promised reimbursement to employees for shopping small and local.

Recommendation 3: Inspire hope through shared communal experiences.

38%

of people want brands to make them feel hopeful to counter their worries.

41%

of people will enjoy entertainment outside the home as one of the top five things they will do post-crisis.

Sources: *Consumers and Coronavirus, Wave 7, Savanta, April 22, 2020.*
Emotional state of the nation, Maru/Blue, April 6, 2020.

Insight

We're in search of positivity and optimism while we mourn the temporary loss of normalcy. Shared communal experience, even if only virtual, can give us this sense of hope while we await a return to our neighborhood eateries, entertainment venues, and watering holes.

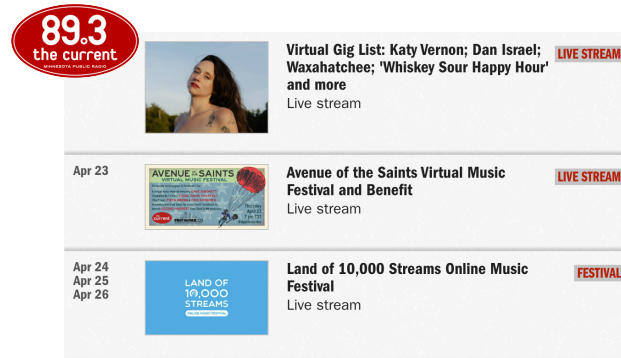
PAY FORWARD PROJECT

Seattle startup [Pay Forward Project](#) is inspiring hope by offering future communal shared experiences. They created an online marketplace for purchasing gift cards for future use at small restaurants, bars and other businesses.

MAGNET THEATER

[Magnet Theater](#) of N.Y.C. continues to deliver improv and sketch comedy via Twitch livestream.

Local Minneapolis radio station [The Current](#) created a Virtual Gig List featuring upcoming virtual performances with an emphasis on local musicians.



The screenshot shows the '89.3 the current' website's 'Virtual Gig List'. It features a grid of upcoming virtual performances. The first row shows a live stream on April 23 featuring Katy Vernon, Dan Israel, Waxahatchee, and 'Whiskey Sour Happy Hour'. The second row shows a live stream on April 23 for the 'Avenue of the Saints Virtual Music Festival and Benefit'. The third row shows a festival on April 24-26 for the 'Land of 10,000 Streams Online Music Festival'.

Date	Event	Category
Apr 23	Virtual Gig List: Katy Vernon; Dan Israel; Waxahatchee; 'Whiskey Sour Happy Hour' and more	LIVE STREAM
Apr 23	Avenue of the Saints Virtual Music Festival and Benefit	LIVE STREAM
Apr 24 Apr 25 Apr 26	Land of 10,000 Streams Online Music Festival	FESTIVAL

Recommendation 4: Step in to support the heightened needs of those who support local communities.

40%

of most stimulus checks have been spent on food, gas, and money transfers before other living costs.

8X

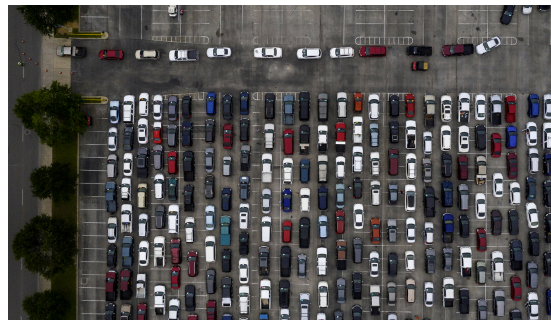
increase in demand for aid from U.S. food banks.

Sources: [CNBC](#), [The Guardian](#)

Insight

Grassroots efforts in individual communities signal a need that's greater than what traditional institutions can meet. Nonprofits and social organizations are under pressure to deliver while trying to stretch their dwindling resources.

'Never Seen Anything Like It': Cars Line Up for Miles at Food Banks



Brands should do more than write a check. Tangible resources and expertise are crucial to delivering real help to people. Emulate the voluntary spirit of local efforts making a small but mighty difference.

Autonomous Groups Are Mobilizing Mutual Aid Initiatives To Combat The Coronavirus



Wisconsin dairy co-op to donate cheese to Midwest food banks



Recommendation 5: Protect the health *and* the jobs of employee communities.

90%

of people believe brands must do everything they can to protect the well-being and financial security of their employees and their suppliers, even if it means suffering big financial losses until the pandemic ends.

Source: 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust and the Coronavirus, Edelman, March 26, 2020.

Insight

A single business is a community, too. What goes on internally impacts broader communities in turn. Right now, workers face threats to their human needs for safety, security, and belonging.



All 30 [Major League Baseball](#) teams have pledged a total of \$30 million to cover the lost wages of ballpark workers affected by the postponement of the 2020 baseball season.



Adda, Rahi, & Masalawala Staff Support Fund

\$27,518 raised of \$100,000 goal

[Restaurant groups](#) in San Francisco and New York have organized online fundraisers to support their staff, many of whom are undocumented workers and ineligible for unemployment insurance or access to health care.



We believe meeting people where they are will lead to more meaningful brand communications and actions, and we hope these data-led thoughts on beginning with empathy are useful to you and your team.

Please let us know what other questions you may have. Through social listening, search patterns, online forums, trend monitoring, and qualitative and quantitative research, we are seeing emerging trends and inspiring examples across categories that we can translate to your specific challenges.

Because the cultural context and human needs are shifting rapidly, we will continue to update this point of view.



Thank you for your partnership.
Stay safe and well.