



What sticks with us from our Corona experience? How does it continue to influence our behaviour?

Reading time 9 minutes

I hope you have had a good start to the year and have successfully established your good resolutions. I have come across so many exciting insights in the first few weeks that I have found it very difficult to limit myself to one topic for this BrainCandy. So presumably the next issues will appear more quickly.

The pandemic has once again taken hold of my brain. An interview with Bamberg psychology professor Claus-Christian Carbon made sure of that. One of his focal points is memory psychology. This was appropriately timed to coincide with the current context, in which once again striking predictions by Health Minister Lauterbach had failed to materialise. Not only did the omicron-variant winter wave simply not appear, even the surely expected fulminant wave of influenza did not arrive, and even the stink-normal cold did not flatten us as the hallway radio in hospitals, offices and industrial halls had whispered. Even the constant warner, Prof. Drosten, (<https://de.howtopronounce.com/drosten>), was quoted as saying that the pandemic had probably run its course.

What remains of the pandemic? What did it permanently change in us humans? This is an almost medial question, because if you look at the pandemic simply as the biggest and longest communication firework, then it should have formed stable new constructs in our memories and in our behaviour.

This is probably why many renowned consultants had predicted that the pandemic would change us permanently. The 'new normal' of more ethical, more conscious behaviour was now to become widespread. For sure. Really. After all, the survivors of the pandemic wouldn't just be clapping from balconies, they would want to make a real difference. And not only with themselves, no, this new human would also expect its brands to actively shape the New Normal.

I already reported what I think of this in BrainCandy 57 in April 2020: Consultants: the pornographers of change'. Today I feel confirmed in the re-establishing Old Normal. Decades of experience about the real drivers of human behaviour cannot be shaken by such a pandemic, can it?

But even if we have not implemented a New Normal, we will not get rid of our experiences so quickly, we will always think back to the lost time of life, mourn the missed social encounters, relive the great fears of infection and intubation at the first scratch in the throat, the anger about vaccination refusers who are supposed to have been responsible for the harsh measures of politics. Or the school closures, the cancelled cultural events and the football matches in ghost stadiums. The bans on park benches, children's playgrounds and toboggan hills.



Surprised? How much of it had you already filed away? Professor Carbon comes with good news: "We know from psychological memory research that negative events are quickly repressed and forgotten." "In a few weeks we can leave behind even a routine that has dominated our lives for three years. Most of us are already shaking hands again".

Is it really the case that we have already forgotten everything or will soon have forgotten everything? No, the memories are not gone, but they will only be recalled when the context demands it, i.e. when we should experience a new pandemic. Then we will apply our experience. Will keep more distance, reduce contacts, occasionally use the mask and buy one more packet of toilet paper.



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But not only we, also the scientists and politicians will act much more prudently and intelligently. Carbon is sure of that. He hopes that in 30 years we will be cleaning out our attic and find a pack of FFP2 masks and only then will our memories stir us once again.

I am sure that Carbon is basically right. Everyone in our circle of acquaintances and in ourselves notices how quickly we arrive in the here and now and how preoccupation with the future dominates our mental space. War, inflation, energy shortages and climate change get our attention, while the necessary reappraisal of the last three years is, for most, a rather academic question. That is why it remains surprisingly quiet in the media. There is no great indignation about the fact that politicians and their experts want to move on to day-to-day business as quietly as possible. Not even the fact that the government has successfully called on platforms and media to censor dissenting opinions shakes us out of our slumber. Forgetting, which is so positive for us personally, seems to make it possible that comprehensive reappraisal is no longer demanded. The post-factual becomes reality.

I noticed while writing that my joy in forgetting, my resilience to bad memories suffered significantly, because the writing and research process washed up memories that I was reluctant to have present again and that triggered me again. Suddenly they were back, the images of sad children and teenagers. Masks enforced outdoors, the sealed-off old people's homes. Lonely dying people without company. The overly long held promises of vaccinations and the disproportionate 2G (double vaccinated) disciplinary action in Germany that went with it. The lack of will to collect comprehensive meaningful data. The central reproach to the Robert Koch Institute. The head of which is currently looking for the sidelines.



What bothers me about Corona at the moment? The fact that regular boosting is still being advertised without the actually prescribed randomised studies having been carried out. That was okay in the dramatic beginnings of the pandemic. Today it is no longer. Renowned virologists warn against uncontrolled continuous boosters across all age groups. There is a threat of the 'original antigenic sin' phenomenon, in which the immune system is 'distracted' in an undesirable way and illnesses could become more severe instead of easier. Nevertheless, 8 doses of vaccine are said to have been ordered for every resident of Germany. Presumably no one is responsible for this. I'm out of it. Three vaccinations and one infection are enough for me until good data are available.

What amuses me? The black side of my sense of humour celebrates how the Minister of Health is now even dropping Prof. Drosten because he would have advised the school closures, which ultimately made little sense, because the Minister of Health, a fan of very strict actions, doesn't want to have done it. Or when the virologist Melanie Brinkmann, who was one of the best-known advocates of the Zero Covid movement, says today that "very little was known at the time". For this she is now receiving the renowned BrainCandy Award for unwavering self-assurance in the face of too little knowledge.

I hope that the hardest hit, the children and young people who have been unnecessarily deprived of important learning and socialisation experiences, will be able to compensate for this over time without permanent damage. That they are still capable of bonding as young adults.

For most people, therefore, Corona now plays a secondary role and behaviour is once again quite logically oriented towards the currently pressing tasks and the expectations and fears associated with the future.

The context of inflation and recession will make behavioural adjustments necessary for many. Again, this is not a change in attitude, but an automatic reaction to the context. Where money is lacking, logical automatic decisions are made that we can observe in the market.



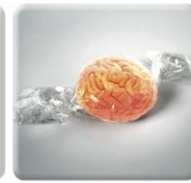
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Low-priced brands are being bought more often, special offers are being looked at even more closely, and instead of organic, normal vegetables are now doing the trick. Less energy is consumed, even if not as much less as the grid agency would like. Because many people simply can't stand a room temperature of 19 or even 20 degrees. Tested for you in our company.

Spending on pleasure will be curtailed. Fewer restaurants, less culture, fewer paid leisure activities, cheaper holidays, if holidays are possible at all. As with Corona, not everyone is affected equally by the context, the better-off can sit this period out, not really needing to cut back unless you fear for your job security.

I therefore advise marketers to do two key things.

1. Worry less about the attitudes of your target group. Get to know their concrete contexts and find out how they behave in them.



2. Do everything you can to ensure that your brand remains salient; this must be a priority, even if budgets are tight, otherwise the brand will not benefit in the next upswing. It is important that the target group thinks of your brand as a solution in the purchase situation, even if they end up buying the special offer.

As a context fanboy, I don't want to withhold one thing from you at the end: Because a rather embarrassing thing was just argued with a context reference:

This news delighted the media landscape: Two young climate activists were to appear before a Munich court. However, they did not have time, as they had just flown on holiday to faraway Bali. The organisation LastGeneration explained this double standard with context.

“As activists they had protested against CO2, but in the context of private citizens they had flown on holiday. You have to be able to separate the two.” Of course, this was wonderfully satirised on Twitter. One user wrote that he was not going to a brothel as a husband, but as a private person. You have to be able to separate the two.

With this in mind, keep Corona running in the background and focus on how the current contexts affect people's behaviour. It's a tough time for climate activists. No, not because of Bali, but because there are more acute problems in many households. An incredible 75% of Germans are in favour of keeping nuclear power plants running. Less because of the indisputable CO2 savings than because of the hope of falling energy prices. When was the last time you saw Germans of one mind? The broad context makes it possible.

Narrated by: (your name)

Book recommendation

By Ralph Ohnemus, Uwe H. Lebok, Florian Klaus:

Context marketing

The key to consumer behaviour to [order](#).



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