

Understanding Consumer Commitment to Healthy Lifestyles

It is apparent that the values around us are shifting. Here in the United States and around the world investors, consumers, employees and business partners are demanding their companies strive for social and environmental health. What's interesting is our sense of ownership. We view these companies as "our" companies. More and more, we are expressing our personal identities through the brands we associate with, brands we purchase, hire, display in our bathrooms and wear on our feet. Brands are becoming deeply rooted in the development of our culture.

There is a primal, tribal desire to belong that is important to all human beings. Yet, in our scattered, fast-passed world it has become difficult to satisfy this need. One place we are finding this sense of belonging is in brands that have become meaningful to us. When we, as consumers, engage with a meaningful brand we may discover a sense of shared values, common interests and at times a passionate connection. When this need for belonging is combined with a sense of moral duty to live a healthier lifestyle, the result is a powerful consumer MindShift.

Some say the commitment to healthy lifestyle is beginning to occupy the space of religion in our culture, and we've seen historically what happens when you are on the wrong side of a religious movement. It seems important to take a look at some hard statistics on the matter.

The research company, GlobeScan, annually surveys a thousand top thought leaders as well as the general public in the majority of countries around the world on some extremely pertinent issues. Although this research is often out of reach of many companies due to budget restrictions, we at Pivot Lab have access to some of this data that demonstrates the passion behind this MindShift.

- It's no surprise there is a strong belief that a company should be rewarded for being socially and environmentally responsible. But there is an even stronger sense that a company should be punished for harming social and environmental health. In North America 46% of leaders say they would reward a company for good behavior while 55% say they would punish a company for behavior that may damage social or environmental health.
- Another aspect to consider is a consumer's sense of empowerment. In other words, does the consumer believe they possess the power to influence a company's behavior. Over the last few years there is strong and steady growth in mainstream activism in most countries. The sense of empowerment in the US is exceeded only by Canada and Australia. 45% of Americans polled consider themselves mainstream activists and obviously feel empowered to affect corporate behavior—a statistic that has grown at a rate of 7% in the last two years alone.
- It is also important to understand how current leaders believe our climate change issues will be solved. Although it varies for each country, the belief that climate change will be solved through the use of technology rather than changes in human behavior is growing, 54% of people in the US and Canada and 78% in India.

- When it comes to reporting, leaders worldwide hold two interesting perspectives. While most admit to having purchased something from, or invested in a brand based on a corporate social responsibility report (CSR), 35% strongly agree and 41% somewhat agree that Sustainability Reporting is used to improve a brand's image and is therefore unreliable. Obviously, the type of sustainable effort and how it is presented is crucial. If done poorly, a CSR report can actually have an adverse effect on a company's reputation.
- This brings us to an important question: will the sustainability issue be a passing fad or a lasting value shift? Most experts surveyed believe that CSR will retain its importance and even expand. 62% of those polled believe that adopting new and innovative initiatives will continue to increase while 17% believe the role of CSR will remain the same. Only 15% believe that corporate social responsibility reporting will lose credibility and become increasingly criticized as green washing.

These statistics indicate there will be no end to the growing passion behind these issues. Individuals around the world expect companies to act in socially and environmentally responsible ways and feel they can apply pressure that will force companies to comply. Most companies will need to address the issues in an authentic fashion. It is important to note that many people are genuinely excited about technology and what it will offer.

Getting a glimpse at the passion behind the healthy MindShift won't help us know exactly how to respond, but it certainly should compel us to seek an authentic and meaningful response. And, of course, to choose that response wisely.

Shari Burk, Brand strategist at Pivot Lab, is helping to lead the way for organizations to respond to the shifting mindset of their audience. Let us know if we can be of further assistance. You can contact her at shari@pivotlab.com or e-mail info@pivotlab.com