

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Unique challenges of marketing to moms amid COVID-19

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Pivoting to the changing state of mom-life is not new to brand marketers. Image credit: Influence Central

By **Stacy DeBroff**

The scream of "Mom!" bellows across the house all day, every day. Kids of all ages are no longer going to school or daycare, engaging in extracurricular activities, or being occupied by babysitters.

While the family time and chance to grow alongside their children is appreciated, for many mothers, it is a 24-hour, seven days-a-week job that has moms everywhere feeling the emotional and physical fatigue.

Pivoting to the changing state of mom-life is not new to brand marketers.

From the 1950s image of perfection, to the movement of more women entering the workforce and in turn, the current-day scenario where women are choosing to stay home if feasible understanding the collective minds of moms is a winding road with multiple routes, stop signs and proceed with caution warnings.

Mothers share a sense of unity with each other right now that is refreshing, and a welcome reprieve from the mom-shame wars that have been prevalent in recent years.

Word-of-mouth recommendations, and turning to one another for tips, vent sessions and virtual companionship influences the way that mothers cope with and perceive their situations.

But if marketers thought they understood the modern mother, COVID-19 should deflate that optimism.

While bonding in shared exhaustion, many moms profoundly diverge in how the pandemic has impacted their consumer behavior: some have ramped up, cooking more intricate family dinners, others scramble for frozen food substitutes.

Some send bored kids to raid the snack pantry, while others have more time to focus on healthy snacking, and upping their intake of fruits and vegetables.

Moreover, job losses have cut across and impacted all economic demographics.

As eating habits change within households, so to do the generalizations many brands use as the tent-poles of their targeted mom consumer profiles and marketing strategy.

A family that once focused on well-rounded meals may find itself sneaking snacks from the cupboard.

While a family that once relied on quick meals on the go may be experimenting with new, home-cooked recipes.

Marketing will be in constant evolution throughout the upcoming year as consumers decide which habits to keep, and which return to normal in the coming months.

Influence Central surveyed 630 consumers in May. Of those consumers, 95 percent were females and 66 percent had kids under age 18 living at home with them. The results amplify the known fact that COVID-19 will impact consumer behavior now and going forward.

It is crucial that brand marketers offer moms help and speak up during this crisis so that moms feel that their favorite brands have got their back.

Moms' SOS to brands

Here are a handful of unique scenarios where moms need brand help:

Deals and discounts rule the day. Eighty-eight percent of moms most want brand discounts, deals, freebies and cost-saving promotions from brands.

Across the board, financial concerns play into marketing today. Whether she is the breadwinner or not, most moms often maintain household purchase budgets and ultimate decisions.

Some families may have both parents furloughed or could be paying a daycare they cannot currently use, while losing hours at work at the same time. This is a chance for brands to market accordingly, whether it is in the form of buy-one/get-one free promotions, generic brands stepping up, or money matters, especially during times of financial uncertainty.

Home-cooked meals on the rise. Eighty-eight percent have been cooking more meals at home since stay-at-home orders went into effect. Forty-nine percent are now cooking meals from scratch.

Trying to find the time to make dinner for one's family is much less of a hassle when you are not facing the delays of rush hour. Not to mention, if you are not going to be leaving the house anyway, drumming up that motivation to go pick up some takeout is not as easy as it once sounded.

Baking soda, flour and sugar have not had a moment like this since the turn of the new millennium. Rice and beans are the hot commodity, because as the old adage that sports fans so often use goes, the best ability is availability.

Right now, consumers want to cut down on their trips to the grocery store, so anything that they can store outside of jam-packed freezers has instant appeal, the likes of which these brands have not known in the past couple decades.

Calling all kitchen gadgets. Kitchen devices have seen a resurgence during this stay-at-home period.

While the microwave may be deemed the most valuable according to the consumers we surveyed, not far behind it are similar low-effort options including toasters, coffeemakers and slow-cookers.

For the newly born bakers and baristas among us, cake pans, blenders and hand mixers are experiencing a similar renaissance.

With consumers spending more time cooking and baking, many have already purchased or plan on purchasing new small kitchen appliances.

Leading the purchase wish list: cake pans, multi-cookers/Instant Pot, stand or hand mixers and a new coffee maker. Valuable kitchen assets that moms turn to during this time include microwaves (96 percent), toasters (83 percent), coffeemakers (81 percent), slow-cookers (79 percent), cake pans (74 percent), blenders (68 percent) and stand or hand mixers (62 percent).

Appeasing picky eaters. Children are notoriously selective when it comes to food and product choices. They are a brands' greatest critic and most phenomenal promoter, simultaneously.

While it is frustrating for adult consumers not to find their favorite ice cream or for home-bakers to now have to scavenge for yeast, when it comes to an empty shelf of a kids' favorite food, the challenge is amplified.

Not being able to find the exact chicken nugget brand their kid likes, results in a dinner-time battle that leaves both mom and kid in tears.

According to the survey, more than half of consumers have experienced anxiety over forgetting or not being able to find a specific product at the store.

It is unclear whether a mom who finds a suitable substitute brand for her picky eater will return to the original brand post-pandemic.

Kids not welcome in stores. Rewind two months, the mom or any guardian seen pushing a cart full of groceries and kids through the aisles was considered Super Woman-like.

Now, women receive dirty looks and even commentary when they run out for a necessary grocery trip with child in tow.

Moms thus need brands to be readily available both in-store and online. Seventy-one percent of women consumers now shop for groceries less frequently than prior to the pandemic. They need to find what they want at the very moment they can shop.

Little kitchen-helpers. Kids are home all the time. More families are turning toward incorporating their children in the kitchen, whether out of necessity to get food on the table or as a form of instructional entertainment.

Whether it is themed kits or safe kitchen tools for children to use, brands need to think about the little chefs of a household.

According to the survey, 87 percent of consumers are cooking more meals at home since stay-at-home orders went into effect. Moms do this with their children constantly underfoot.

Influencer content sought out by moms. Moms have tuned in to influencers more than before: 20 percent have increased their time spent seeking out content from influencers and 21 percent increased their time spent finding new influencers to follow.

The rest have kept apace of their typical influencer content viewing, staying true to the influencers they trust and have followed for a while.

Food and recipes. Food content is particularly important to consumers during COVID-19 because they have so much extra time to cook and are eating at home.

With that said, new and interesting recipes and healthy snack content are high priorities as people try to keep things exciting and balanced.

- 57 percent of consumers crave new recipes that include just a few ingredients.
- 49 percent of consumers want content that will teach them how to use pantry staples to cook
- 43 percent want new and interesting recipes.
- 43 percent want healthy snacking ideas.

Keeping busy, fit and entertained at home. Consumers are looking to keep themselves busy at home, whether it be physical, hands-on activities or mental stimulation.

What to do at home activity content is highly sought after:

- 47 percent of consumers want home organizing and cleaning projects
- 45 percent seek arts and crafts ideas
- 44 percent want to see educational content and virtual learning ideas.
- On the health trend, 42 percent crave at home fitness content.

MANYMARKETERS have gone silent during COVID-19, hitting a huge pause button on all their marketing efforts.

I believe that is a huge mistake as moms want, and need, brands to make themselves visible during and after the pandemic.

The call of duty has been sounded for marketers to release the big pause button on marketing and serve up some great inspiration, whether it is recipes, age-appropriate activities for kids, online learning, or entertainment.

We are in a time of disruption and find ourselves adapting to this normal.

Moms are constantly adapting, and brands have a chance to leave a lasting impression by providing solutions to their everyday struggles of today's mom-life.





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