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A Retrospective View of Trends For 2017

NEW YORK, NY November 28, 2016 – If the title for this 2017 brand trends forecast seems a bit contradictory, think about the two biggest questions being raised as we enter the New Year: “How did we get here and how did researchers get it so very wrong?” As market researchers and the media argue about it, the answer is actually pretty simple.

First, you shouldn’t use mid-20th century style surveys (digital or otherwise) to measure 21st century consumer values and behaviors. Those metrics don’t work the way they did 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago. Second, today’s consumers don’t behave the way they ‘say they will’ and traditional techniques are more likely to measure what consumers *say*, rather than what they really *think*. And third, because consumers’ decision-making process is far more emotional than rational, consumers don’t think what they feel.

The reality is more effort has been expended figuring out how to better target consumers than to actually understand them, which explains how we got to where we are and why almost everyone else is anguishing because they failed to predict the outcome of the 2016 U.S. election. This is not the first time researchers have gotten things wrong, and it won’t be the last, it’s just never been on such a grand scale!

Happily, Brand Keys got it right. Back in September 2015. Take a look at what we [said](#). So, as researchers who only have eyes for emotionally-based, accurate, and predictive research, we appreciate having a solid foundation for insights, particularly when it comes to trends.

Trends ultimately reveal themselves when consumers’ emotional expectations surge and Brand Keys has been measuring those expectations for over 30 years. Our research is based on leading-indicator metrics and annual interviews with nearly 100,000 consumers. And, because consumers and their actions in the marketplace are a product of their values, we have been able to identify trends well ahead of the “global” research shops and “hip” trend watchers, well before they show up on traditional research radar screens and before consumers even articulate them.

That said, because everyone is asking how they got *it* so very, very wrong, we decided to take a retrospective look at some key trend themes that we identified years ago, that *will* make themselves felt in 2017.

Brands will get more emotionally in tune with consumers:

Values that drive the decision-making process for virtually everything will be more emotionally based. Rational is price-of-entry. Accurately measuring consumers' emotions will be critical for precision and success. (2008)

Expectations will increase and brands will need to predictively measure them: Over the past five years customer expectations have increased on average by 25%. Brands manage to keep up by only 6%. That's a big gap that a new brand can cash in on. (2007)

Consumers will talk to (and about) themselves about bespoke products and services: Consumers' heightened awareness of their actual control and their ever-increasing access to information will result in intensified cravings for customized and personalized products and services. (2012)

Unfulfilled expectations = consumer rebellion:

Consumer engagement has been inaccurately associated with consumer attention levels, time-spent, and personal entertainment. Marketers need to measure how well the brand is perceived versus the Category Ideal if they want a real measure of brand engagement. (2009)

Brands will need to prove themselves:

Veracity, accuracy, and trust will become more critical than "inspiration," and "entertainment." Social media's democratization of content creation will require brands to actually prove themselves. Stephen Colbert's "truthiness" is something consumers will need to be on the lookout for, so brands beware. (2006)

It's not going to get any easier being just green:

Ethics – beyond fair trade, sustainability, and corporate responsibility are going to be expected – and questioned – more and more. CSR will be an expectation *not* a differentiator. Climate change will still be a catalyst for change, but given the ease of consumers' abilities to pull back the brand curtain, watch for ethical standards to have a greater influence in the consumer decision process. (2010)

Naked truth will be more important than well-dressed lies:

It's going to be *showing* versus *talking*. Storytelling is well and good as long as it is fact-based and believable versus just being an entertaining fairytale. Consumers will become more wary of brands that betray their trust. (2015)

Brand will matter more:

Outreach and consumer accessibility will become more laser-focused but brand will still matter. Being known will not be the same thing as being known for something meaningful. Campaigns and metrics will need to move beyond the transactional or marketers will just end up selling commodities. **(2006)**

Consumers will not wait:

Instant connectivity and a culture-of-now will result in consumers frustrated with red-tape processes and bureaucracy. Brands will have to react faster and faster if they want to keep (and keep up with) consumers. Real-time and real answers will become real important to consumers. **(2011)**

We've said this before - but in light of the research and media industries' self-doubt and self-examination - it bears repeating. When it comes to truly predictive measures and trends there are three kinds of marketers: those who let it happen, those who make it happen, and those who wonder what happened.

We hope our view of what's coming down the road next year provides marketers the opportunity to embrace new methods of brand and consumer engagement and insight, build new business and consumer measurement models, and create new opportunities - so they find themselves in the group that makes it happen.

We wish you all an accurate, engaging, and profitable 2017.

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