

CULTURE BITES

by sparks & honey

Our world has shifted in ways that few could have imagined even a week ago. Covid-19 is reverberating in every area of life, from our families to our communities and businesses, challenging the way we work, live, thrive and survive in the age of a global pandemic.

Over the coming days, we will reflect on the vast cultural changes that are in flux as we speak, from the now to the next and the future. This is only the beginning of a great reset in how we think about and prepare for the future in our global community.

Today, we will focus on the Now:

Mental Health: coronanxiety

Mental health deserves a special mention as it is already a growing problem among a few cohorts, including Gen Z, middle-aged white males in underserved communities, immigrants, and others. Social media is already **creating its own issues** as anxiety rises with every post and alert. The **psychological effects of isolation and stress** will become an important topic of discussion over the next few days. **Universities and academic institutions are starting to take action** but the playbook is far from clear.

Healthcare: for all or for none

The crisis will no doubt challenge all healthcare systems in the west, from **Italy to Spain, France, the UK, and most visibly, the US**. Failed states will present a **new global threat** with the absence of basic infrastructure, adding complexity to what is already a very difficult challenge and heightening the awareness of how unprepared we are to face pandemics as a global community.

Society: the social justice epidemic

We are seeing heightened awareness and dialogue around a range of social justice issues: **coronavirus-induced racism, social justice in a time of social distancing, ageism, socio-economic status implications, anti-refugee sentiment and policies**, and much more.

Education: 20 years in 20 days

The crisis is **propelling the Chinese education system** into the future of mass online instruction, accelerating public and private programs at breakneck speed. Higher education is following, with **MBA programs leading the charge**. International academic institutions like **NYU are benefiting from digitization efforts** and sharing best practices on synchronous and asynchronous teaching through a wide range of channels like WeChat in China. In the US, **the student body is in disarray** due to a range of issues unique to the system and culture which could become a barrier for the mass adoption of distance programs in the short term.

Economy: major disruption

The **coronavirus economy** seems to be rapidly becoming the new normal. The US is now expected to be **negatively impacted more than China**, as economic impact moves **beyond supply chain disruption and into other important areas** like consumer behavior, trust in institutions (already at an all-time low), interest rates, and financial markets. The impact to the global economy is now estimated to **reach \$2.7 trillion in lost output**.

Governments: East versus West, left versus right

We are at the beginning of reexamining the roles of culture, systems of government, and attitudes towards data and privacy in coordinating collective action towards the common good. This dialogue is so far focused on comparing **East versus West** approaches as well as challenging conventions around left versus right in terms of the **need for a broader safety net** and the **impact of filter bubbles**.

Big business: working to adapt

The crisis is accelerating the adoption of practices like **remote work**, virtual meetings and consultations, online training, and more. Businesses **are looking east for guidance**, and in many cases struggling to **define a coherent playbook**. Most importantly, we see rising consumer calls for businesses **to step up in the fight against the virus**, especially where governments are perceived as slow and ineffective in their response.

Consumers: shifting values

While long-term effects are unclear at the moment, we know is that **massive consumer shifts are taking place** by the day. **The CPG category is already experiencing dramatic swings** across many areas with the expectation that some behaviors will become part of a new normal. As **consumer sentiment sinks**, we can expect sectors like luxury and retail **to follow the Chinese path** of decline and stagnation. Perhaps there is no better paradox to illustrate changing consumer values than **loneliness** becoming an epidemic on its own right. This last shift can present **even more challenges to public officials** and **perhaps opportunities** for organizations willing to innovate solutions.

Technology: contactless, connected and predictive

Social distance and public health recommendations are becoming powerful accelerators for a range of technologies from **contactless payments** to **contactless delivery**, any type of **cashless method**, **robotic assistance**, **voice technologies**, and more. At the same time, there are legitimate fears of what new stay-at-home behaviors **could do to the internet** as the need for connectivity rises dramatically. Technology is also an important part of the arsenal against the virus with **AI leading the way**. Both **big data** and **personal data** will play a role in preventing more cases and helping us get back to work.

Elections: please vote — by mail

In the US, Covid-19 has already **changed the presidential race in dramatic ways**. From the campaign standpoint, we are about to witness **unprecedented changes** in everything from **media and disinformation** to experiences, **messaging** and more. We anticipate that we will see a dramatic spike in early voting and a concerted effort to **ramping up public education on voting by mail**. London will offer a case study in how to contend (nor not) with the risk of **holding an election during a pandemic**.

In addition to our Now, Next, Future outlook, sparks & honey will host remote briefings on Covid-19 related topics in the **coming days**. Please **let us know** what's on your mind and we can try to include your questions, comments and thoughts as we go.

We are all in this together.

The sparks & honey team

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