



THE LIQUID CUSTOMER

"There is, then, the feeling that we live in a time of unusual insecurity. In the past hundred years so many long-established traditions have broken down – traditions of family and social life, of government, of economic order and of religious belief. As the years go by, there seem to be fewer and fewer rocks to which we can hold, fewer things which we can regard as absolutely right and true, and fixed for all time." (The wisdom of insecurity: A message for an age of anxiety - A.Watts - 1951).

Liquid life changes the way of thinking, feeling and acting of people. Each industry is different, but we can focus on some "liquid" traits, that characterize with different degrees many post-modern customers. This will increase the ability to launch successful new products and services in the liquid market.

Ever-changing

In the past decades, jobs, families, homes, friends and ethical values were almost stable for the lifetime of grown-up people. Today everything evolves faster and we need to constantly adapt ourselves to ever-changing external conditions. For this reason, flexibility is often becoming more important than stability and duration.

Inability to imagine the future

Watts wrote: *"Human beings appear to be happy just so long as they have a future to which they can look forward."* Future has always been unpredictable, but today it seems to be much more uncertain and difficult to imagine than

in the past. This (perceived) increased uncertainty, generates (real) increased anxiety and greater focus on present. The liquid customers then try to relieve anxiety, rewarding themselves with products and services with high emotional value.

Uncertainty also makes purchasing decisions more difficult to make and delays them, until they become urgent and pretend the immediate availability of the new product or service.

Searching for identity

Because society and culture are changing so fast, existing roles and behaviors are often inadequate to inspire the liquid customers. Everyone is then exploring the world in order to find a way to realize his own identity. Market segments become therefore fragmented and often inadequate to represent the customers' needs.

Plenty of products and services

Today Western customers may satisfy their desires with a wide variety of products and services, often available at very different prices. When the desired functionalities are available, products are selected for their emotional and ethical value, which sometimes are the true differentiators. Subtle differences and attention to details are therefore very important in the liquid world.

Value co-creation

Liquid customers are often willing to participate in the process of value creation, both to reduce their costs and to obtain products perfectly suited to their needs. The wall between producers and consumers is sometimes melting and a new category of "prosumers" (as they are defined by Jeremy Rifkin) is rising.

Increasing importance of ethical choices

Liquid customers are normally aware of the global consequences of their decisions. They know that unsustainable decisions are threatening our own survival and that our choices may contribute to encourage or discourage certain behaviors (e.g. child labour). For this reason, the coherence with some ethical principles is often evaluated in the purchasing decisions.

Always connected

Smartphones and tablets have accustomed us to be always in touch with everything. For this reason, liquid customers want to be able to connect and interact with their products and services at everytime and from everywhere. Products should then have an internet life.

These emerging characteristics are true opportunities for those companies, who are able to understand the new liquid needs and provide the right answers to the customers.



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