

The Reality of Recovery: A Post COVID-19 World

OVID-19 Global Client Survey

As the coronavirus outbreak has turned into a global pandemic, individuals, governments and businesses around the world are striving to figure out the best ways to protect themselves, their families, their citizens and their employees.

With everyone legitimately turning their attention to what matters the most - health and the preservation of life – their responses are drastically changing the way we live, and, as a consequence, impacting our entire economy.

As we are all adapting to the new normal, Dentsu Aegis Network wanted to take a deeper look at how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our clients' business plans, how they have been responding to this unprecedented situation so far, and how they envision the post-COVID-19 future.

This document presents the main findings of our global client survey



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The pandemic acts as transformation catalyst

Balancing short-term business continuity and long-term recovery planning keeps marketers busy

In time of crisis, content is king and agility is queen

The pandemic acts as an e-commerce accelerator

The pressure to get closer to customers has increased

The pandemic could slow the move towards inhousing

Marketers are not yet fully convinced of the business impact of pro bono actions

Balancing short-term business continuity and long-term recovery planning keeps marketers busy

While 95% of respondents have been reviewing their 2020 marketing plan, a third of respondents (31%) report they only changed the plans for the first half of 2020 so far.

Although most industries make do with reduced marketing budgets, some brands push to seize the short-term opportunities amid the crisis. For instance, Technology & Telecommunications respondents report budget increases twice as much as their Finance & Insurance counterparts.

Recovery planning is happening now. As many national governments are progressively announcing timelines to ease confinement restrictions, 73% of marketers have already started planning for recovery.

Implications for brands

It is key for marketers to collect relevant and timely consumer intelligence to identify unaddressed and under-served needs. In a context where all investment decisions are examined even more thoroughly, relevant data prove critical for marketers to secure advertising budgets internally, and, as a result, to maintain or increase their relative share of voice. For instance, a close monitoring of analytics, search, and social data can reveal changing patterns in consumer demand and sentiment that could represent growth opportunities for brands, enabling diversification and leading to stronger resilience.

Robust and up-to-date intelligence on media consumption and the media channels competitive landscape is equally important. From the cancellation of major sports events to working from home, to increasing online shopping and streaming consumption, many factors distort people's typical media consumption. As audiences move, the supply and demand dynamics follow, and new trading opportunities open. Marketers can make the most of these media opportunities to maximise their share of voice or redirect advertising spend to promote their most effective sales channels.

While **budget fluidity** is **essential** to make the most of these immediate opportunities, it is important for marketers to keep an eye on longer-term ambitions (<u>already under pressure before the pandemic</u>) and to work now on a clear recovery plan. To be effective, recovery planning should follow three principles:

- Recovery will be the fruit of a collective effort. As silos drive chaos, recovery planning should not be led separately by each department. Instead, it should be spear-headed by top leadership. Otherwise, individual recovery plans may be, at best, disjointed and, at worst, contradictory.
- Recovery plans must be flexible, not be set in stone. As epidemiologists warn the virus is here to stay and several waves are likely expected, the odds of a V-shaped recovery scenario appear to be getting smaller. Recovery will look more like a marathon than a sprint. An effective recovery plan should be a living document, exploring several scenarios and regularly reassessed in light of the evolving economic outlook, fluctuating regulations and consumer demand. Don't underestimate the local factor, even within a single market, as people's attitudes and behaviours are likely to follow the evolution of the public health situation, not the administrative partition of territories.
- Recovery plans must be realistic. Recovery planning should not simply aim at restoring the pre COVID-19 situation for the company. It should recognise the new operating realities (e.g., reduced workforce) and as such, include the areas where the company will need to invest to transform (e.g., automation), with documented actions and concrete ways to measure progress.

In time of crisis, content is king and agility is queen

When the crisis amplified and lockdown measures spread, many brands made theirs the 'First, do no harm' adage, by adapting their content to not appear out of touch with the current events.

More than half (55%) of respondents have adapted their creatives and content to respond to the consequences of the pandemic. It is by far the measure the most frequently taken by marketers (it ranks #1 across all regions), and 50% declare they will need to invest more in content over the long term.

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Implications for brands

Creativity is essential to connect with consumers through relevant messaging as they are experiencing life-circumstances changes. However, the creative process shouldn't result into a state of semi-paralysis for the other marketing activities.

As we've seen brands stopping all marketing actions while they were preparing their new COVID-19-related hero campaigns, it is important for them to acknowledge that the buck doesn't stop with rolling out an emotional TV commercial. They should not neglect the other types of content that serve consumers from either an emotional, informational or transactional perspective. A successful content strategy encompasses many facets such as delivering accurate information about logistics (e.g., up-to-date store hours in maps), temporary customer practices (e.g., clear return policies), product information (e.g., stock levels in search ads), etc. Making sure the content is consistent from the first interaction to the product page (even when it is not under the direct responsibility of the marketing department) is fundamental.

Although it's impossible to predict the next 'Black Swan' and the exact actions to take as a response, brands can make themselves more **agile** and **resilient** by **anticipating** some key facets of their content strategy:

- **Culture**: How resilient is the creative process in the new ways of working? While working from home can provide more focus to creative teams, how does the organisation compensate for the missing energy of the office?
- Process: Is there a content playbook in place detailing the most critical pieces of content for the brand, the role of each piece of content, the role of each internal and third-party team, how information is shared, etc. A robust playbook can help brands considerably accelerate their response when facing a crisis.
- Content optimisation: How is the existing content optimised for performance? Is the information easily accessible when people go to search engines or land on the brand's website? SEO, UX and CRO should not be afterthoughts.
- **Technology**: Is the business equipped to update content fast while minimising the risk of mistakes? Solutions like Product Information Management platforms can help brands centralise information so that each environment can be updated at once.

The pandemic acts as an e-commerce accelerator

It is clear the current crisis will accelerate the adoption of e-commerce, both in terms of consumer usage and in terms of investment from brands. A third of respondents (33%) have already expanded their e-commerce presence amid the crisis.

As many people still don't feel comfortable leaving home (e.g., 48% in the US according to the <u>Dentsu Crisis Navigator</u>) and are still relying on online channels for their daily purchases (e.g., +74% online demand YOY for fashion collections in the NL according to <u>iProspect</u>), this e-commerce arms race shows no signs of slowing down in the immediate future. It should also continue beyond the pandemic, with six respondents out of ten (59%) declaring they need to invest in their e-commerce capabilities on the long term.

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Implications for brands

Growing online sales to be both profitable on the short term and viable on the long term is no easy feat. What worked for traditional retail isn't guaranteed to work online, and the volume of parameters to consider, from logistics and technical infrastructure to advertising and customer support, can be overwhelming for brands, especially for the ones playing catch up. How can we make the most of marketplaces in a limited time? How can we quickly ramp up our Direct-to-Consumer sales? How can headless commerce provide flexibility to adapt to uncertain situations as we plan for recovery? All these questions are all the more difficult when the company doesn't have e-commerce specialists among its ranks.

In 2019, we introduced the <u>Commerce Success Framework (CSF)</u> to help marketers drive their commerce strategy across four key areas: Availability, Findability, Buyability and Repeatability. In these challenging times, the CSF can provide marketers with a <u>useful lens</u> to <u>prioritise the key actions necessary to build or maintain a robust commerce presence</u>.

The pressure to get closer to customers has increased

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With media budgets under pressure, many marketers have paid particular attention to their existing customers: 32% of respondents increased their CRM activity, and 45% believe they will need to invest in CRM long term.

We can see clear differences between categories with stronger CRM programmes and the ones that don't have access to a lot of customer data due to intermediation: while more than 40% of respondents in the Finance & Insurance, Travel & Tourism and Automotive categories have increased their CRM activity, only around 20% in the FMCG and F&B categories have done so. By shutting down many points of sale, the COVID-19 crisis has exposed remaining disparities in CRM maturity.

Implications for brands

Upgrading CRM capabilities is not an investment that proves useful only in times of crisis, it is a winning strategy in the long term. New depth of customer data can help the product development team adapt the product portfolio to address emerging consumer needs. It can help marketing and creative teams tap into new insights to build messages more aligned with customer priorities. It can be leveraged to build new services (e.g., customer frequent questions can help build a simple support chatbot in a few hours). First-party data can also power media targeting and help customer acquisition (e.g., modelling of similar audiences), and becomes all the more important as browsers are cracking down on third-party cookies and as legislators around the world are promoting more restrictive policies around data practices. All these applications for CRM enable stronger customer experiences, which are critical in a period where big life changes push consumers to reconsider their routines and purchase habits.

It is particularly important for brands to have a **clear strategy according to the engagement levels of their clients**, and to avoid alienating customers and draining their existing customer base. Too many brands fell into the trap of suddenly mass emailing every single person who bought their products once, taking the risk of appearing opportunistic and damaging customer relationship. Additionally, brands need to have the **technical infrastructure in place to support their long-term CRM ambition**, and should avoid panic buying oversized solutions that are not be adaptable to their future growth needs or are inconsistent with their data strategy.

The pandemic could slow the move towards inhousing

Advocates of inhousing champion the idea that cost saving, greater agility, better control and increased efficiency are key benefits of moving marketing activities in house. On paper, all these benefits are perfect for times of crisis.

However, when asked in which capabilities they think they will need to invest long-term in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 9% of respondents select 'Inhousing' (the lowest percentage of all the options proposed to respondents; in comparison, 59% of respondents selected 'E-Commerce').

Implications for brands

There is a fairly direct explanation for brands reconsidering their inhousing ambitions short term: as businesses are looking to cut expenses, the high costs associated with expanding in-house operations (e.g., hiring, onboarding, training) can be prohibitive for organisations. However, and more interestingly, our respondents were specifically asked about their areas of investment for the long term, which means that the reasons for the moderate enthusiasm for increasing investment in inhousing go beyond cost control considerations. We can assume the crisis brought to light strategic and operational challenges, which may make some brands reconsider their inhousing ambitions.

As 35% of the respondents intend to invest more in Ad tech (e.g., analytics, monitoring, innovation) in the future, it is critical they have real clarity about their business goals, the role of digital in the go-to-market model, and the various implications for the organisation. A company must conduct a thorough review encompassing the customer experience, the potential return on investment, the impact on the organisation (e.g., negotiating the right partnerships with platforms, keeping teams abreast of the latest product features, regularly vetting data sources for legal compliance) and change management if it is to avoid joining the ranks of the 40% of marketers who invested in technology to collect customer data but don't know how to turn it into business value.¹

Marketers are not yet fully convinced of the business impact of pro bono actions

According to the <u>Dentsu Crisis Navigator</u>, half of US consumers (46%) want to see brands donating time, money, or products to causes and those in need. Similar studies led by Dentsu Aegis Network show similar expectations from consumers across the globe. For instance, a report by <u>Carat in Spain</u> shows that 77% of consumers declare they will buy more from a brand that takes positive actions, with donations to public bodies and changes in supply chain and products to support COVID-19 response being the most valued actions.

However, despite the host of TV commercials showcasing brands' pro bono initiatives, less than one respondent out of five (17%) actually took pro bono actions according to our survey.

Implications for brands

As the International Monetary Fund predicts the 'worst economic downturn since the Great Depression',¹ with global growth in 2020 to fall to -3%, it is still too early to say whether consumers will be able to follow words with actions by spending more with the brands who took pro bono actions, and thus if pro bono actions can turn into a net increase in new customers. Consequently, marketers looking for a direct ROI pattern may dismiss or de-prioritise pro bono initiatives.

This could reveal to be a risky bet. On the short term, brands could **lose part of their connection with their customers** and be **more exposed to price elasticity**. On the long term, it could leave customers feeling the brand is letting them down in a critical time. Nurturing trust is a constant endeavour, yet one that can be derailed in a fraction of a second. This is especially true in the digital age, where social platforms act as catalysts for spreading information, and search engines are permanent collective memory. The company that demonstrates integrity in its intent and transparency in its actions will be able to build trust with its customers in the long term, and thus **should be better positioned for faster recovery**. Also, while marketers may focus on customers, they should remember that pro bono initiatives also affect their **employer brand**, both in the eyes of future candidates and current employees.



Industry breakdown of survey respondents

Question 1: What is your primary business sector?

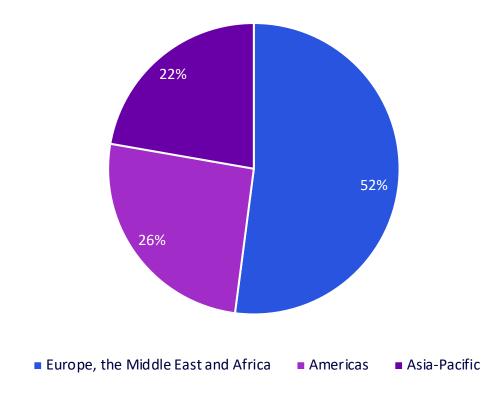
11% (74)	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)	8% (58)	Travel, Tourism & Transportation	3 % (23)	Pharmaceutical & Medicine	1% (7)	Energy & Engineering
10% (70)	Food & Beverage	7 % (52)	Retail	3 % (22)	Luxury Goods	1% (7)	Real Estate
10% (69)	Finance & Insurance	7 % (51)	Media, Entertainment & Leisure	3% (20)	Home & Garden	1% (7)	Restaurant
8% (59)	Technology & Telecommunications	6% (41)	Beauty & Personal Care	1% (10)	Education & Careers	1% (6)	Public sector
8 % (58)	Automotive	4% (26)	Consumer Electronics	1% (9)	Business Services	5% (32)	Other

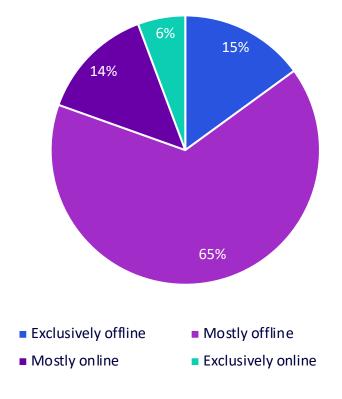
Top 6 of the most represented industries

Additional breakdown of survey respondents

Question 2: Where are you based?

Question 3: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, your sales were:





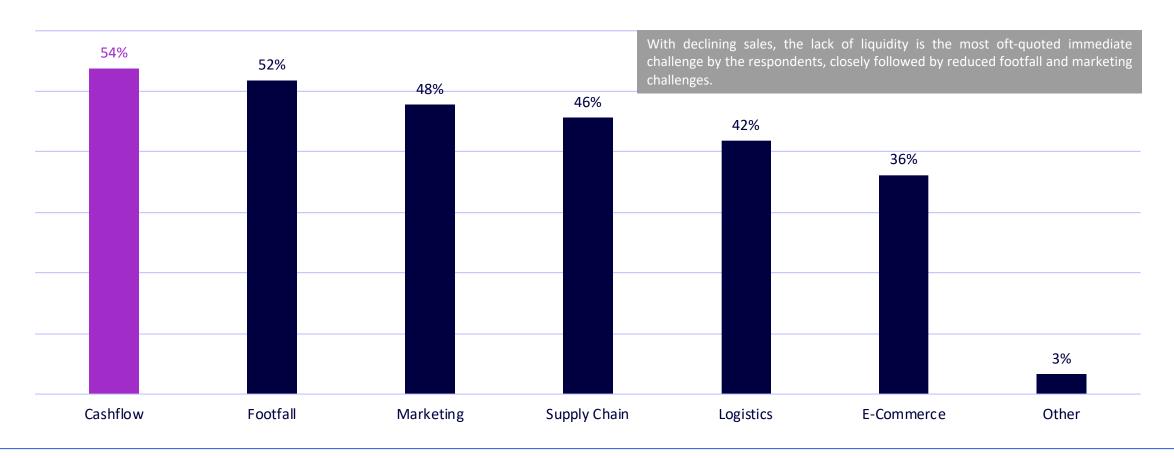
COVID-19 has a major impact on sales

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 10, how large is the impact on your sales since the beginning of the outbreak in your market?



Cashflow is the most pressing challenge for businesses

Question 5: What challenges are you facing as a business due to the immediate impact of COVID-19?

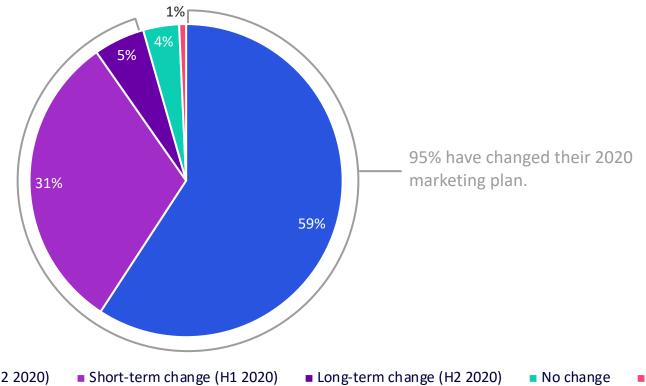


Most marketers have changed their 2020 marketing plan

Question 6: Have you changed your 2020 marketing plan?

respondents (<5%) declare that their annual marketing plan has not evolved in light of the

One third reports they have only changed their plans for the first half of 2020 so far.



■ Both short-term and long-term change (H1 and H2 2020)

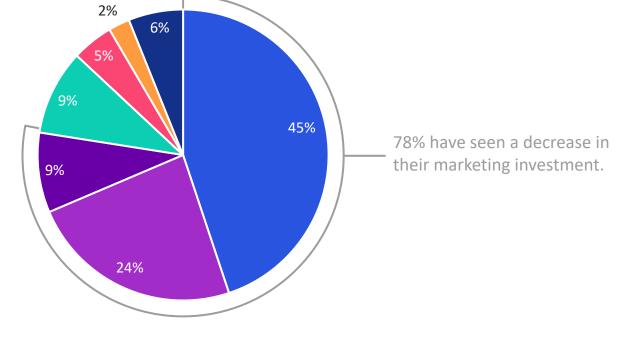
■ I don't know

Marketing budgets are revised downward

Question 7: How has the evolving global situation impacted your marketing investment in your market?

Three respondents out of four declare decreased their marketing investment because of the pandemic, among which the majority cut their budgets by more than 15%.

One out of ten took the opposite direction by increasing their marketing activity amid the crisis.



- Major decrease (>15%)
- Slight increase (1-5%)

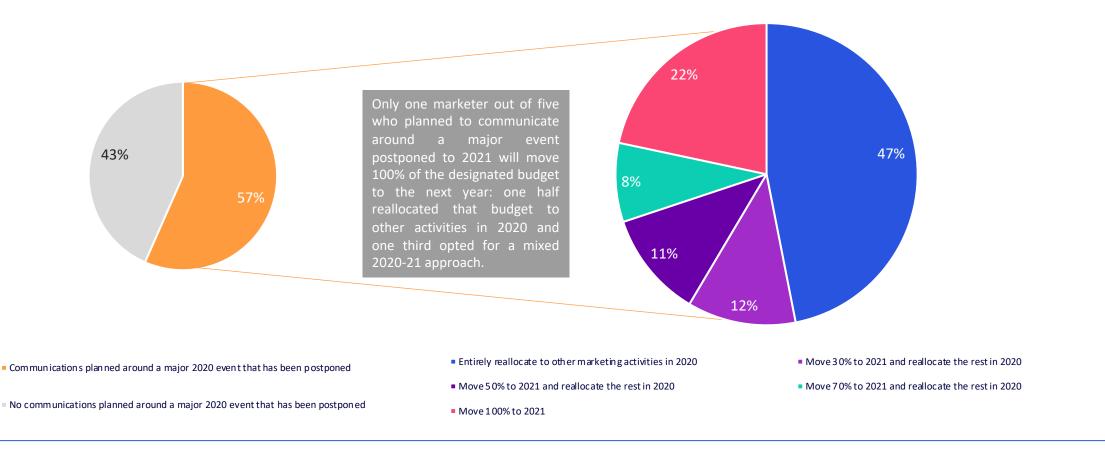
- Significant decrease (6-15%)
- Significant increase (6-15%)

- Slight decrease (1-5%)
- Major increase (>15%)

No impact (0%)

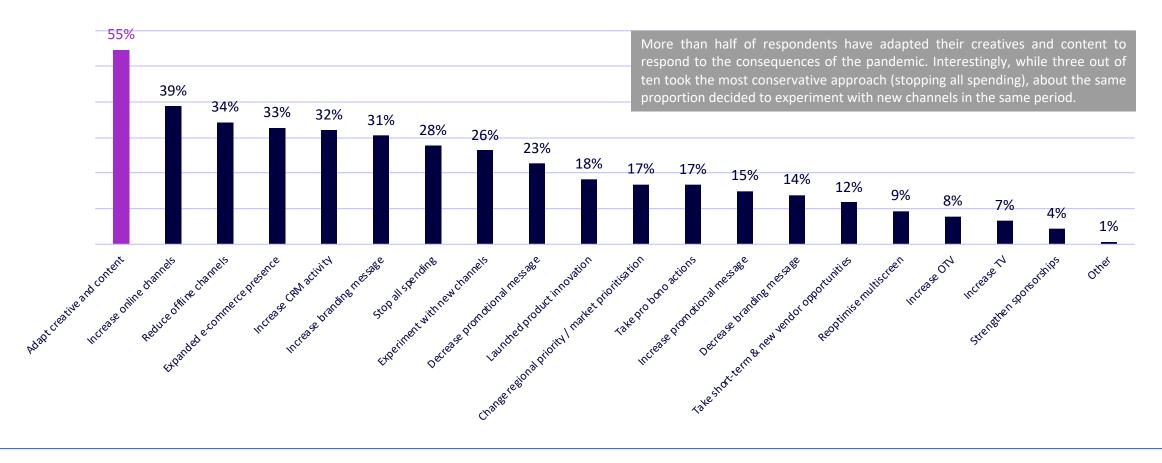
A majority of budgets originally planned for events are reallocated to other 2020 projects

Question 8: If you had planned to communicate around a major 2020 event that has been postponed to 2021, how do you intend to reallocate the budget designated for that campaign? (e.g., Summer Olympic Games, UEFA European Championship)



Adapting the message to the pandemic context has been the priority measure of marketers so far

Question 9: What actions have you taken to respond to the consequences of the pandemic on your customers and your business?

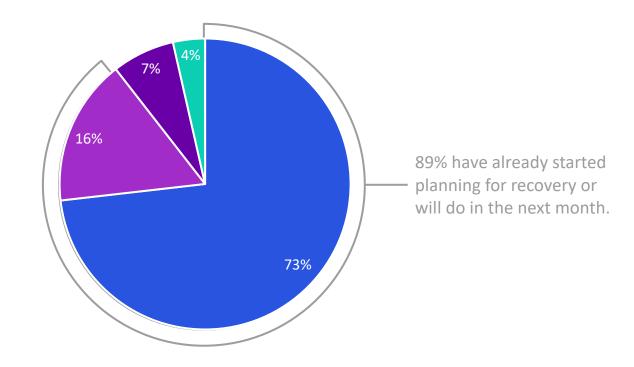


Recovery planning is happening now

Question 10: Have you started planning for post-COVID-19 recovery?

As many national governments are progressively announcing timelines to ease confinement restrictions, three quarters of marketers have already started planning for recovery.

Less than one marketer out of ten declares recovery is not yet on the company's agenda.

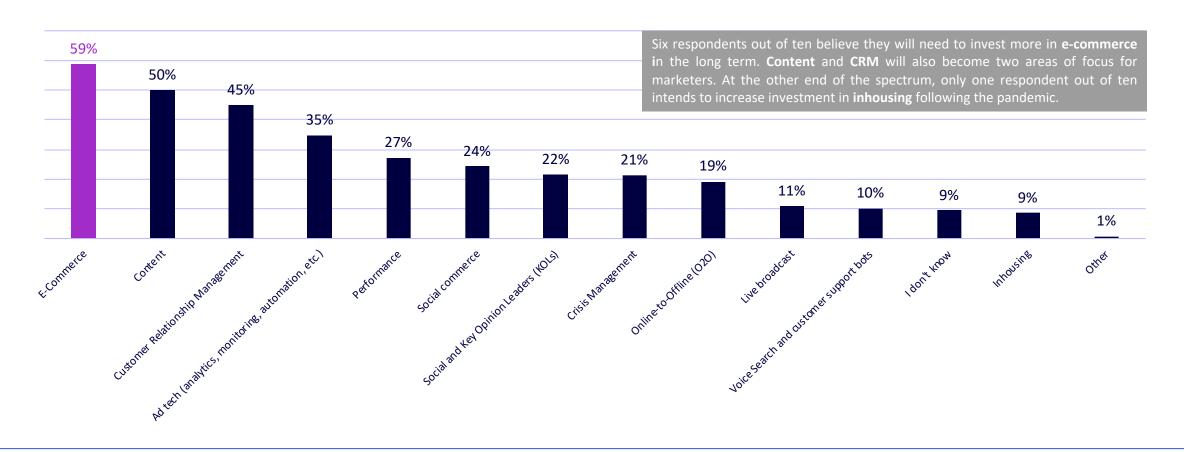


- Yes, we have already started planning for recovery.
- No, and this will not be our priority for the next month.

- No, but we will start planning for recovery in the next month.
- I don't know

COVID-19 pushes marketers to reconsider their long-term ecommerce capabilities

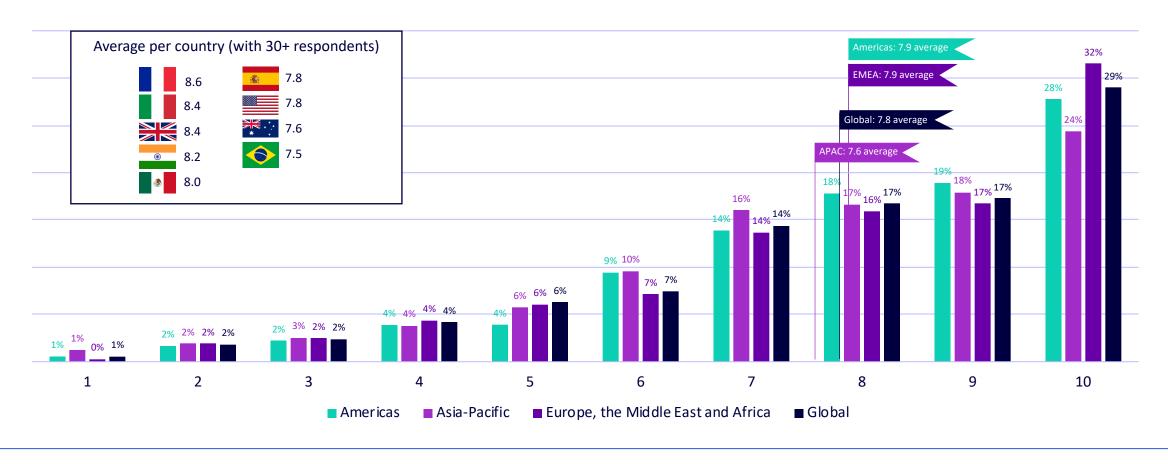
Question 11: In which capabilities do you think you will need to invest long-term in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic?





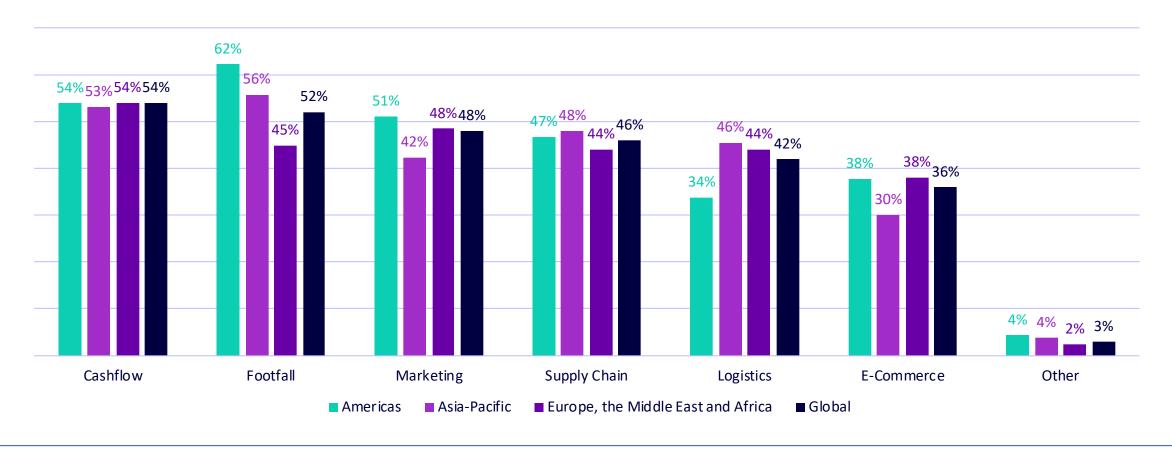
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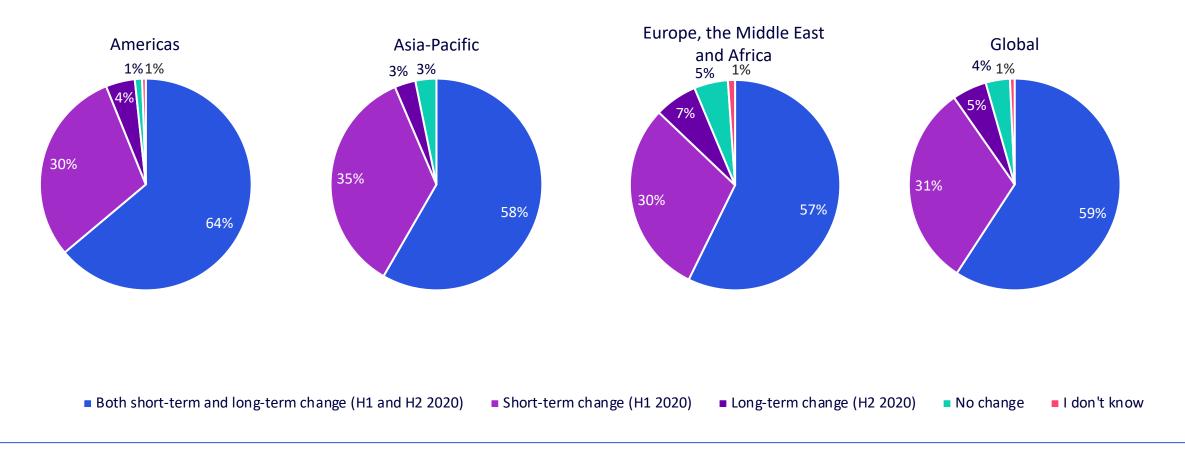
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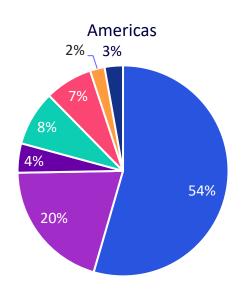
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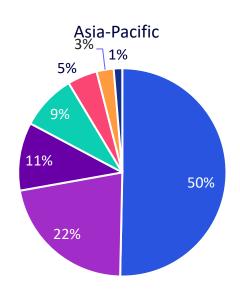
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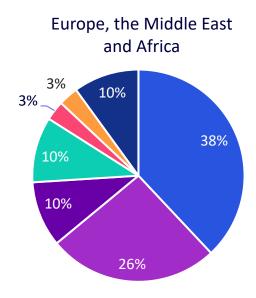


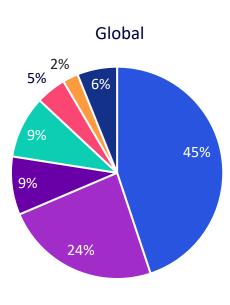
Marketing budgets are revised downward

Question 7: How has the evolving global situation impacted your marketing investment in your market?









- Major decrease (>15%)
- Slight increase (1-5%)

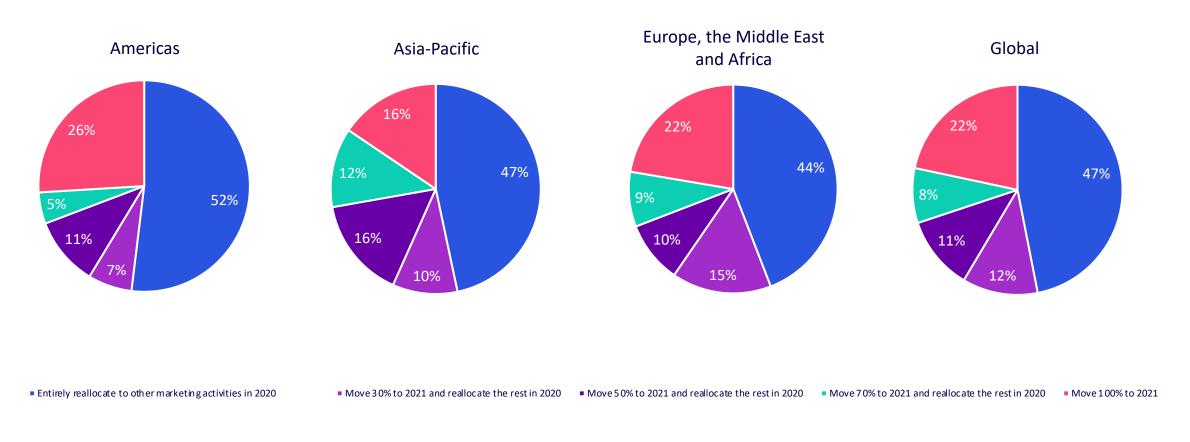
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No impact (0%)

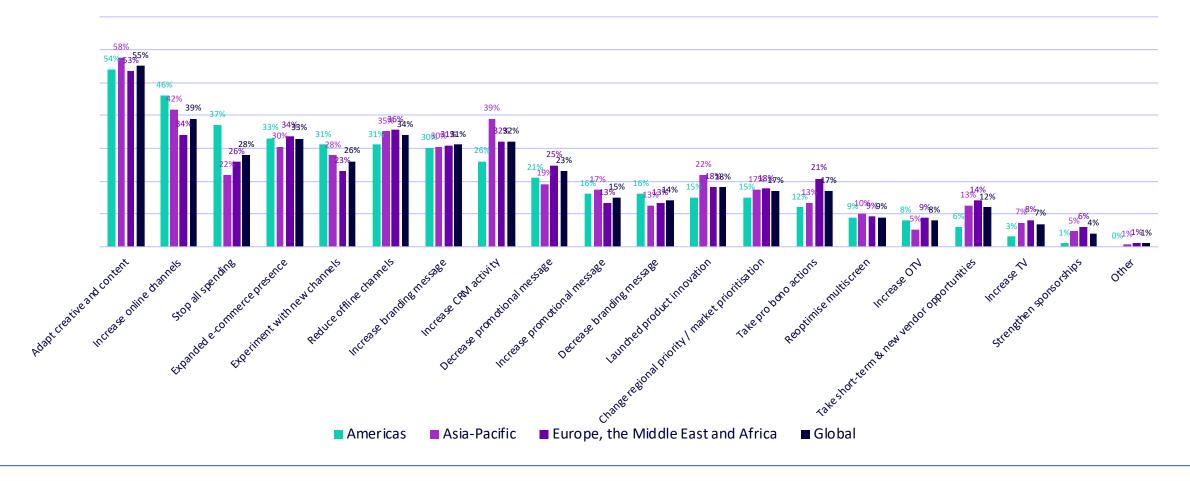
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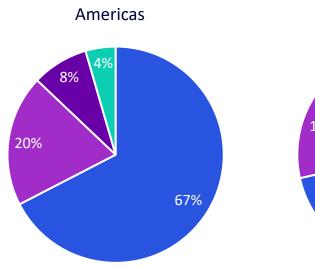
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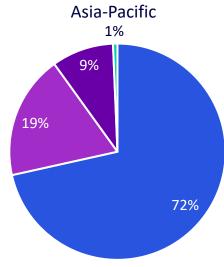
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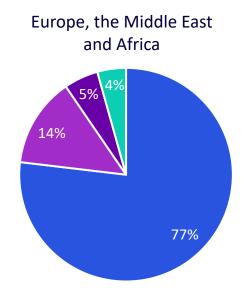


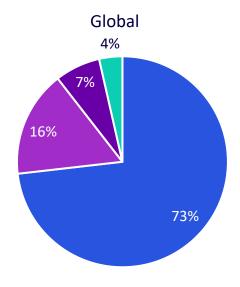
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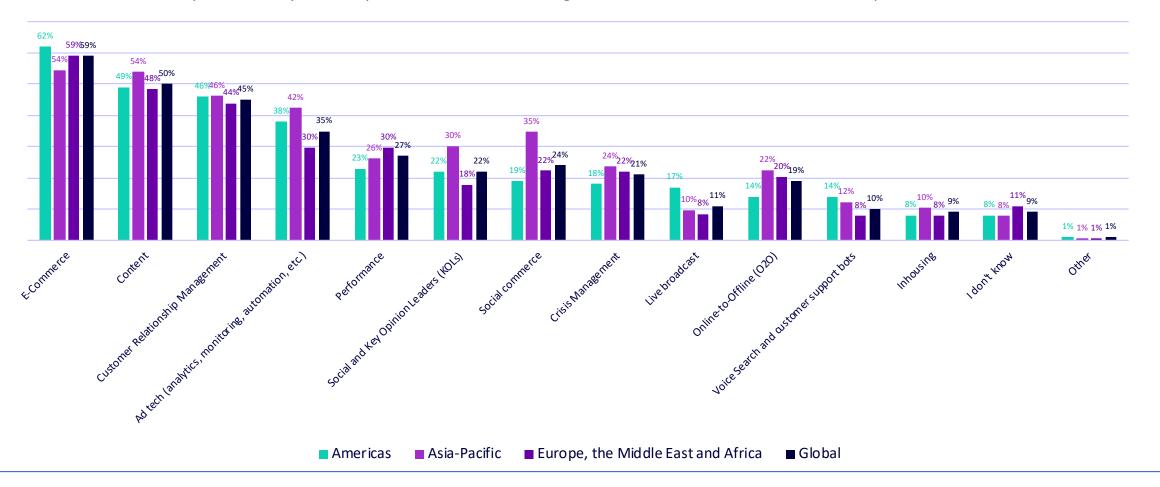


- Yes, we have already started planning for recovery.
- No, and this will not be our priority for the next month.

- No, but we will start planning for recovery in the next month.
- I don't know

COVID-19 pushes marketers to reconsider their long-term ecommerce capabilities

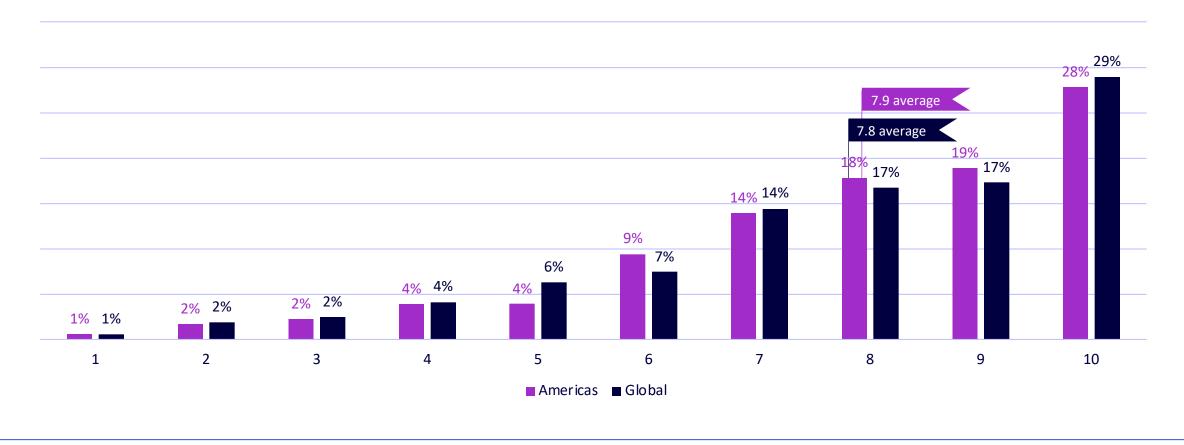
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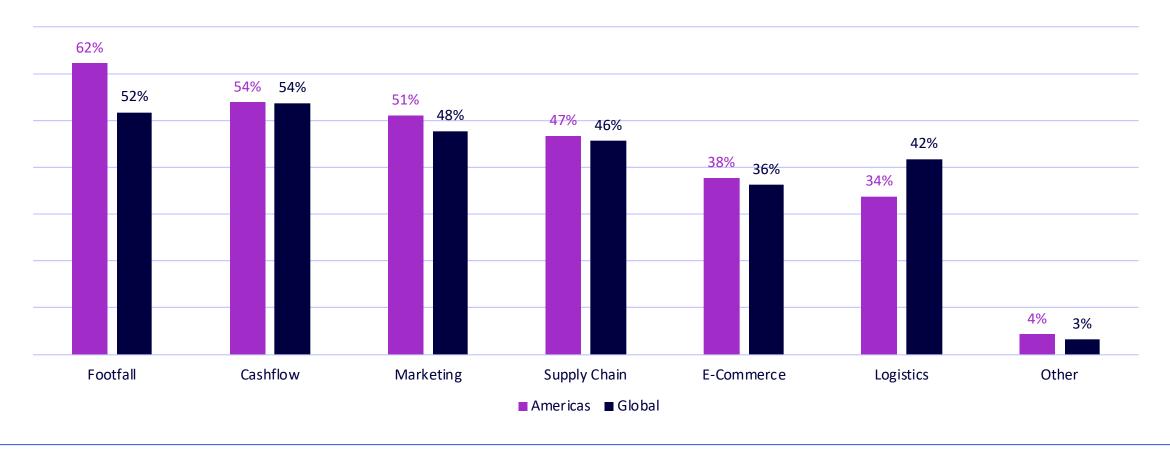
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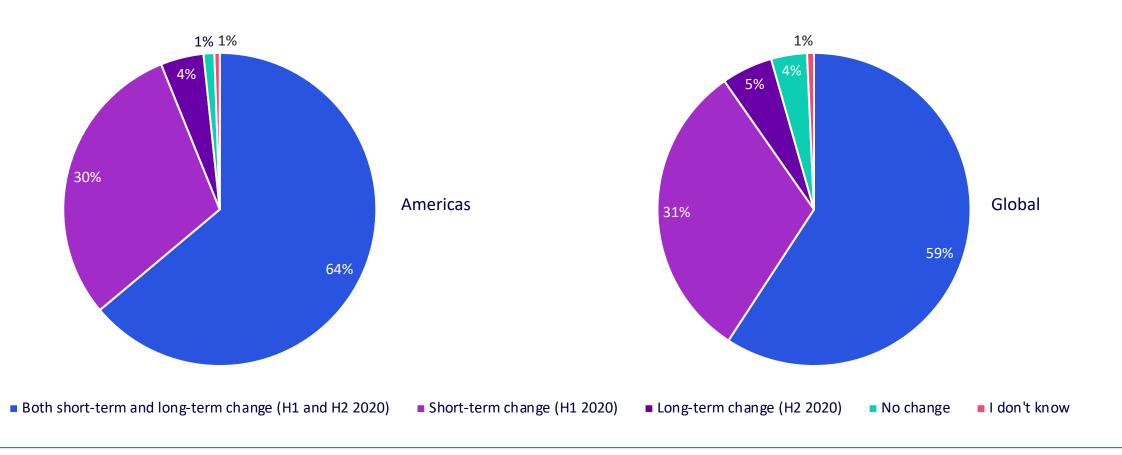
Footfall is the most pressing challenge for businesses in Americas

Question 5: What challenges are you facing as a business due to the immediate impact of COVID-19?



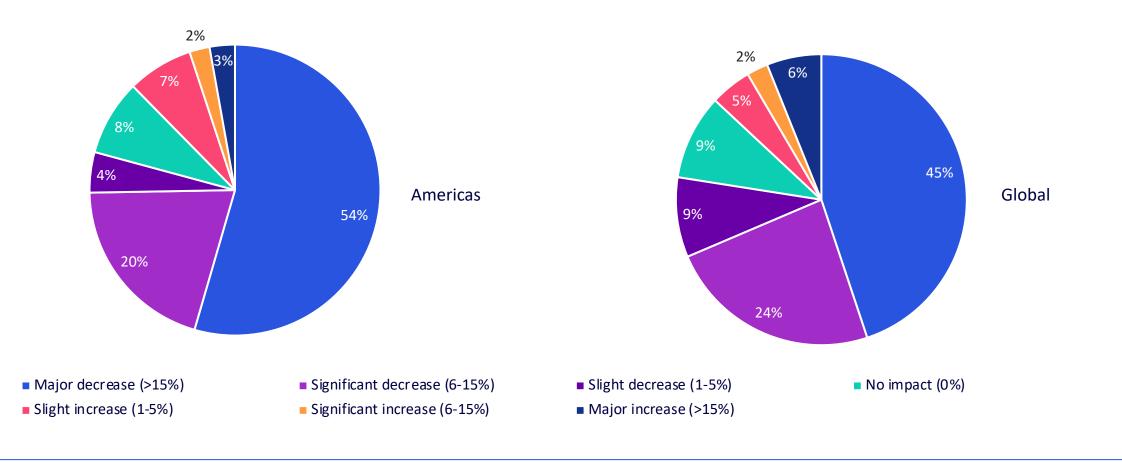
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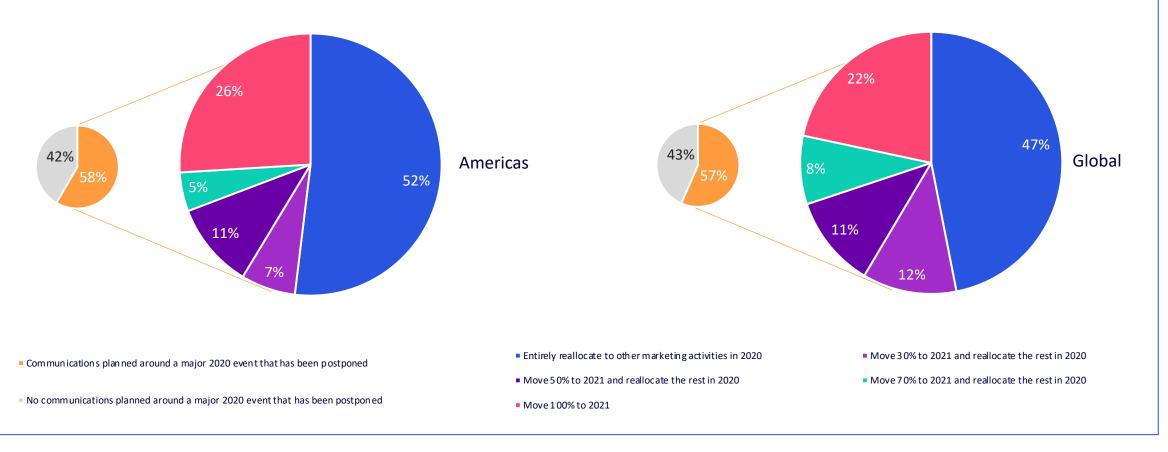
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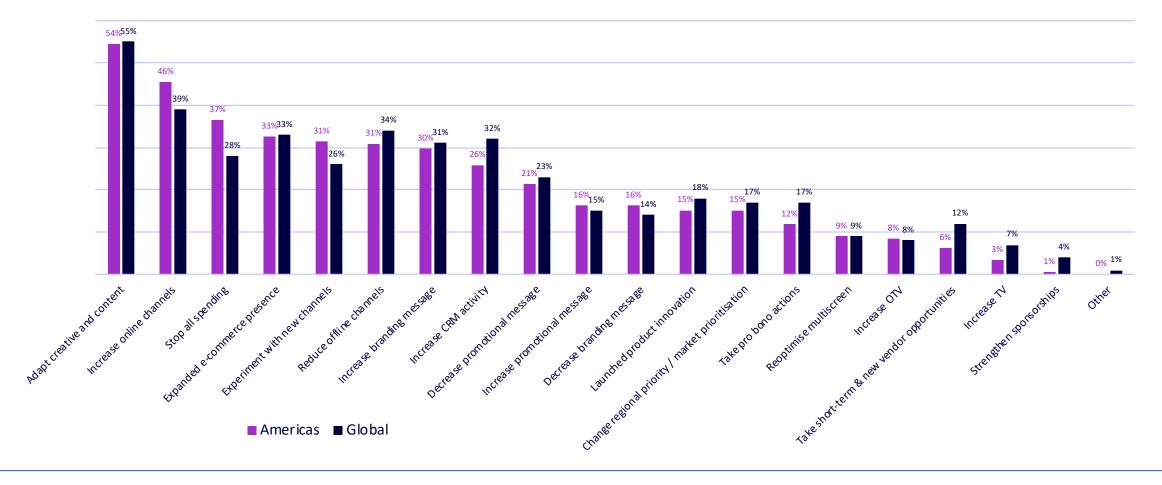
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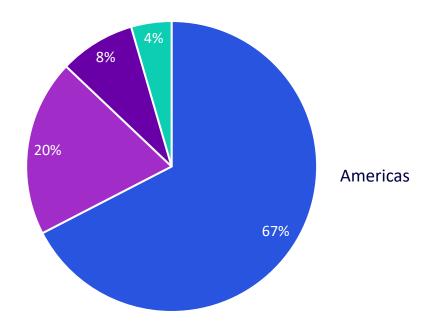
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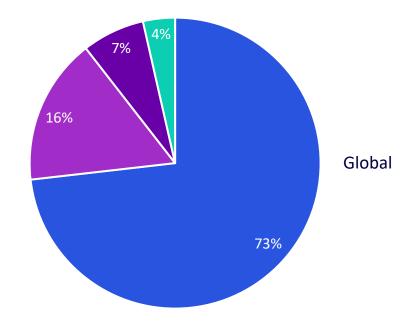
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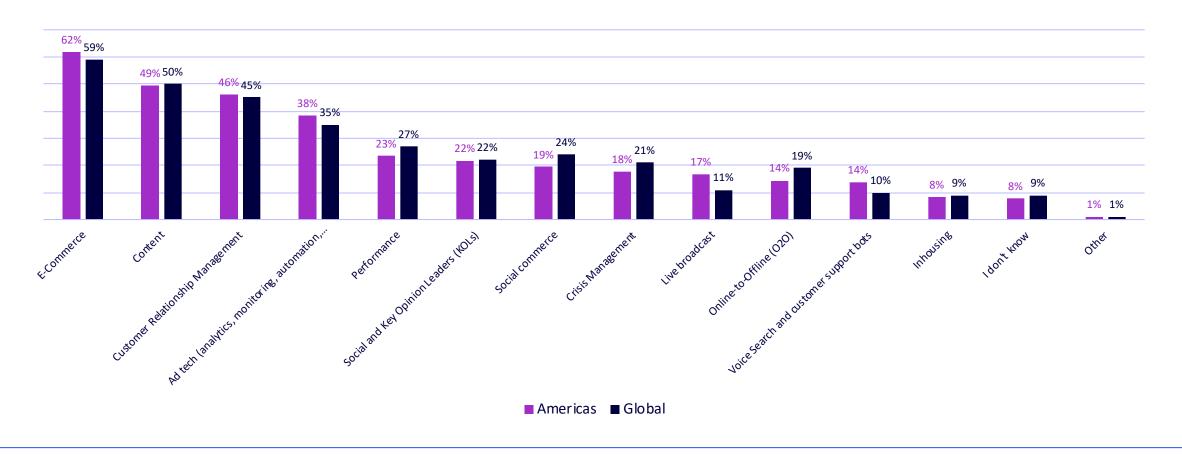
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- No, but we will start planning for recovery in the next month.
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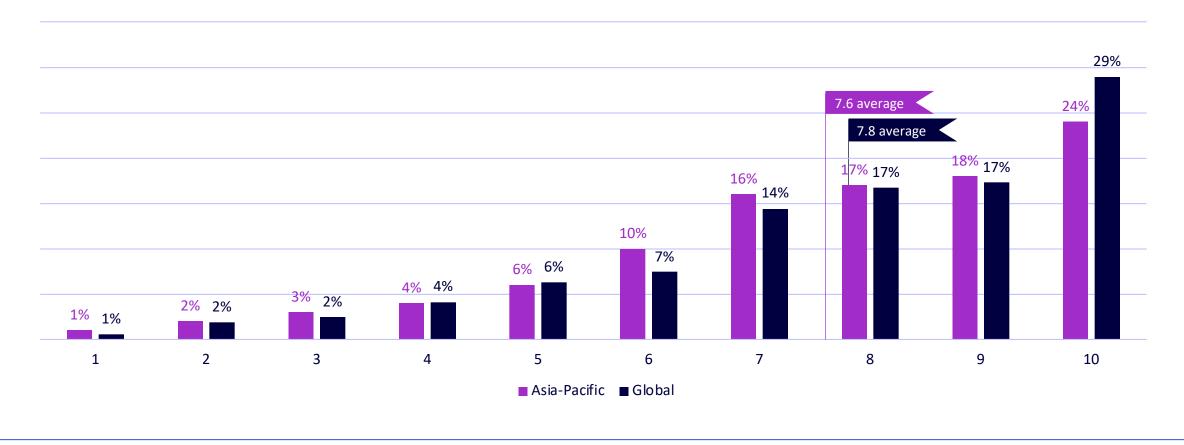
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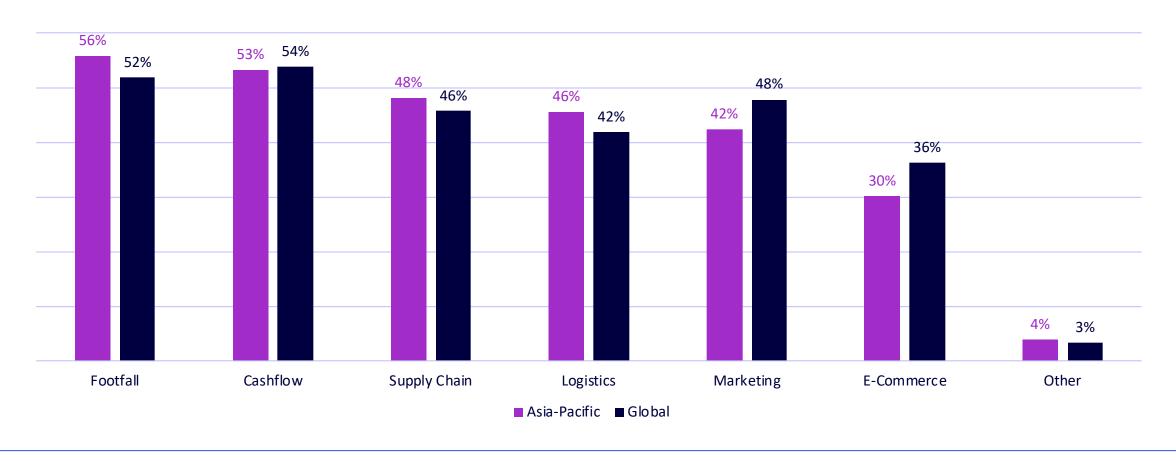
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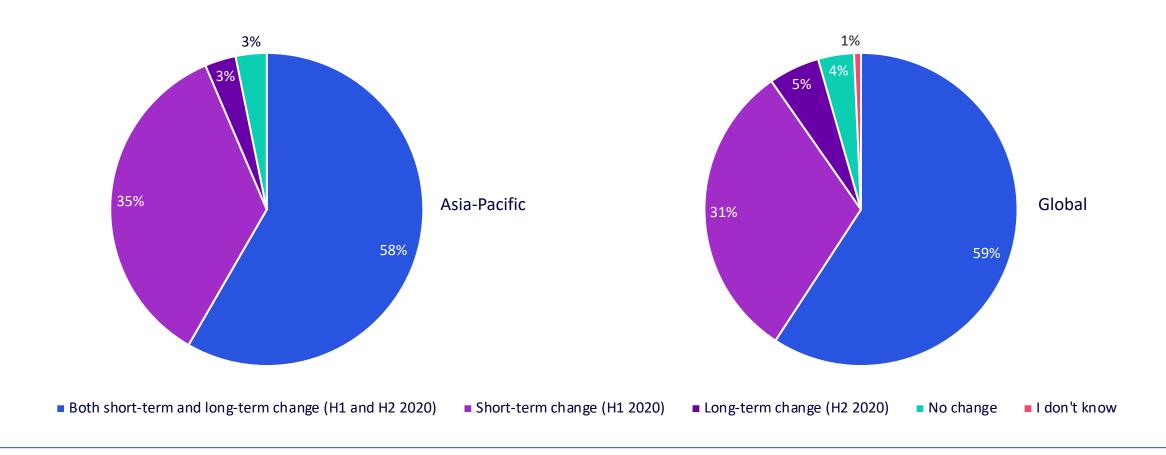
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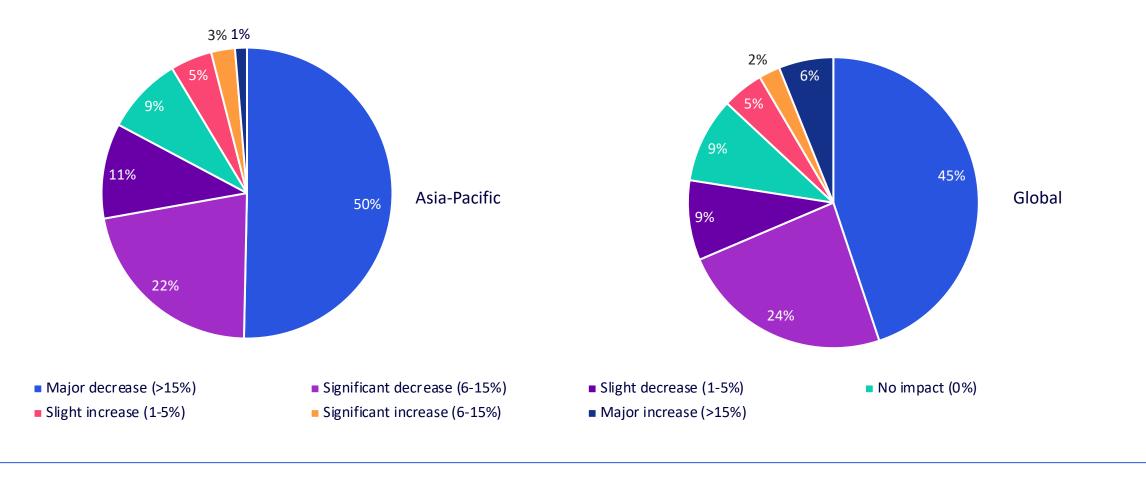
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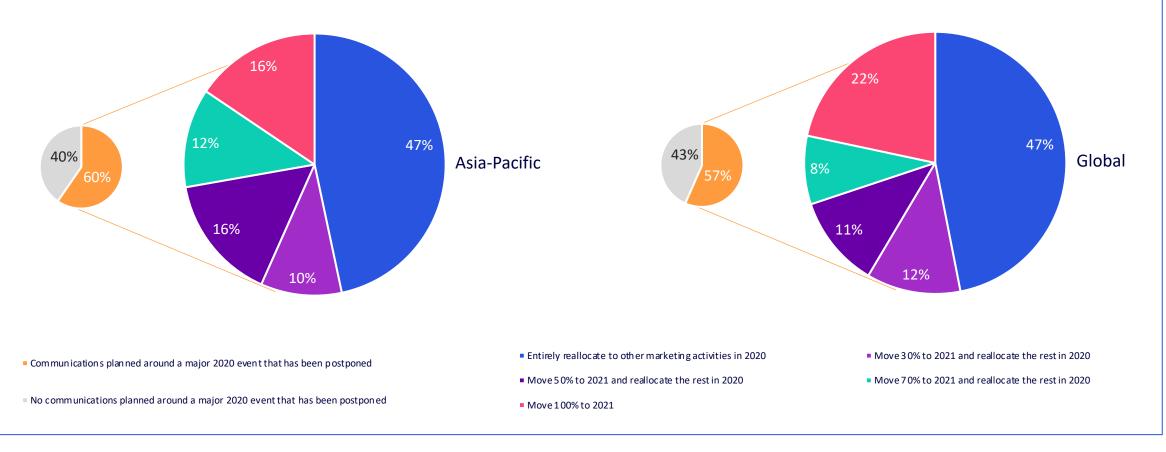
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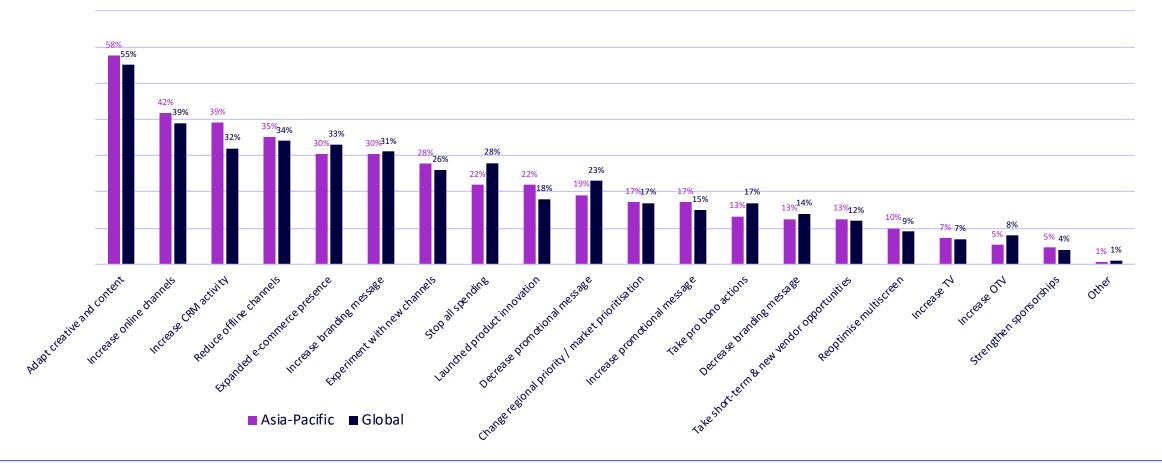
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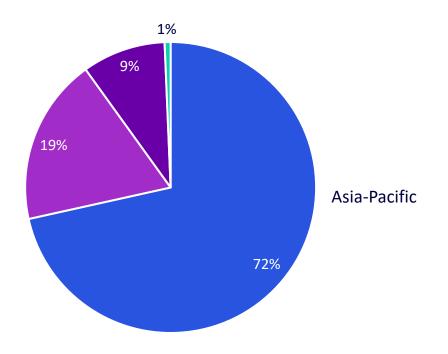
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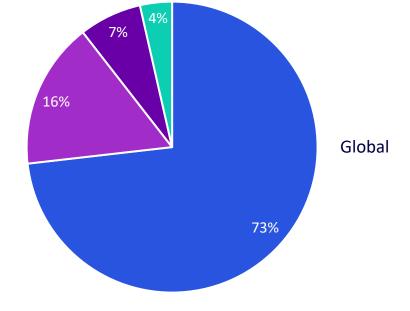
Question 9: What actions have you taken to respond to the consequences of the pandemic on your customers and your business?



Recovery planning is happening now

Question 10: Have you started planning for post-COVID-19 recovery?



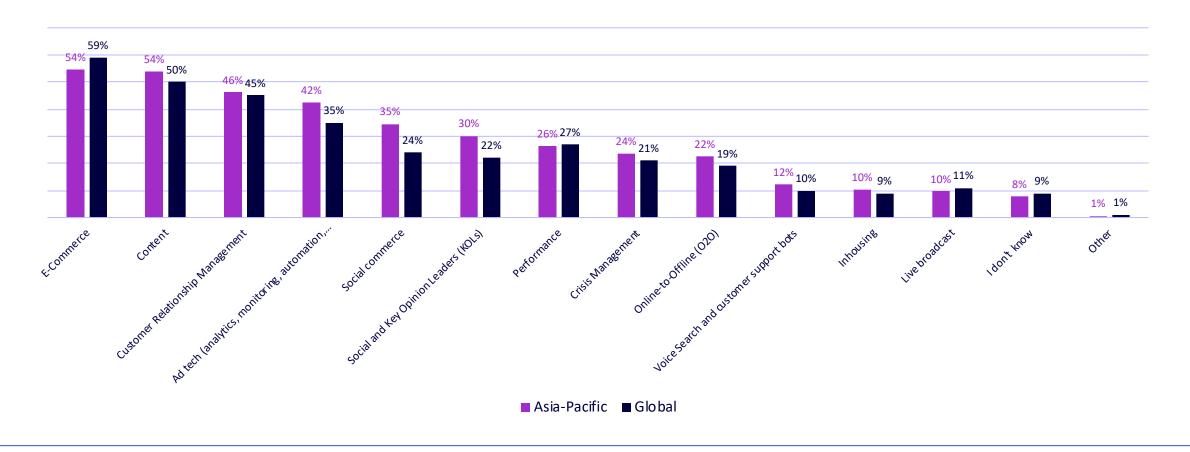


- Yes, we have already started planning for recovery.
- No, and this will not be our priority for the next month.

- No, but we will start planning for recovery in the next month.
- I don't know

COVID-19 pushes marketers to reconsider their long-term ecommerce and content capabilities

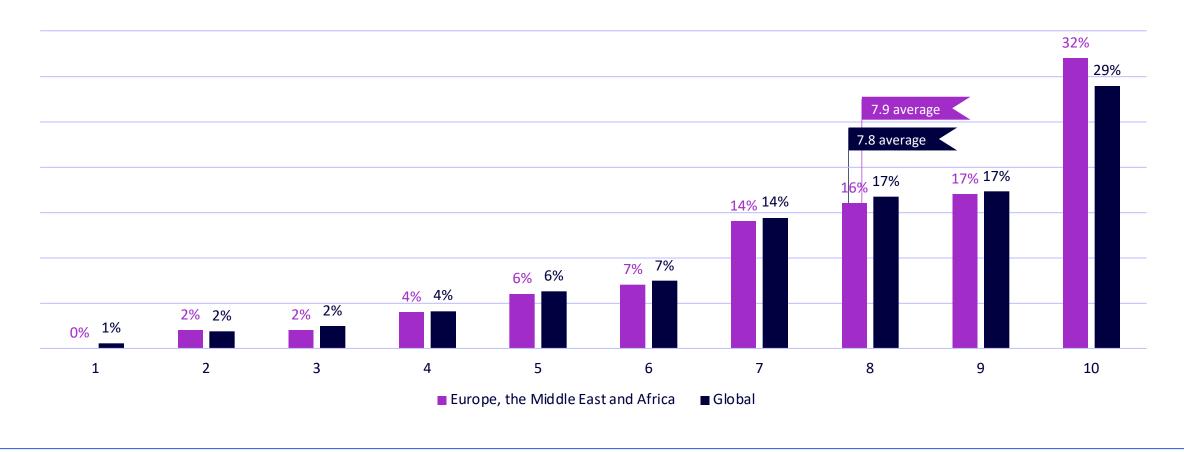
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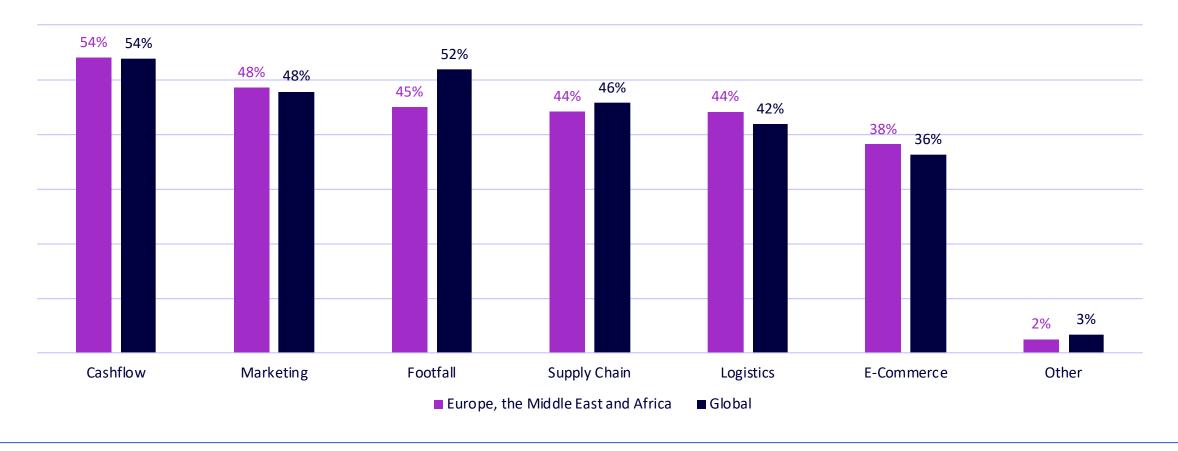
COVID-19 has a major impact on sales

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 10, how large is the impact on your sales since the beginning of the outbreak in your market?



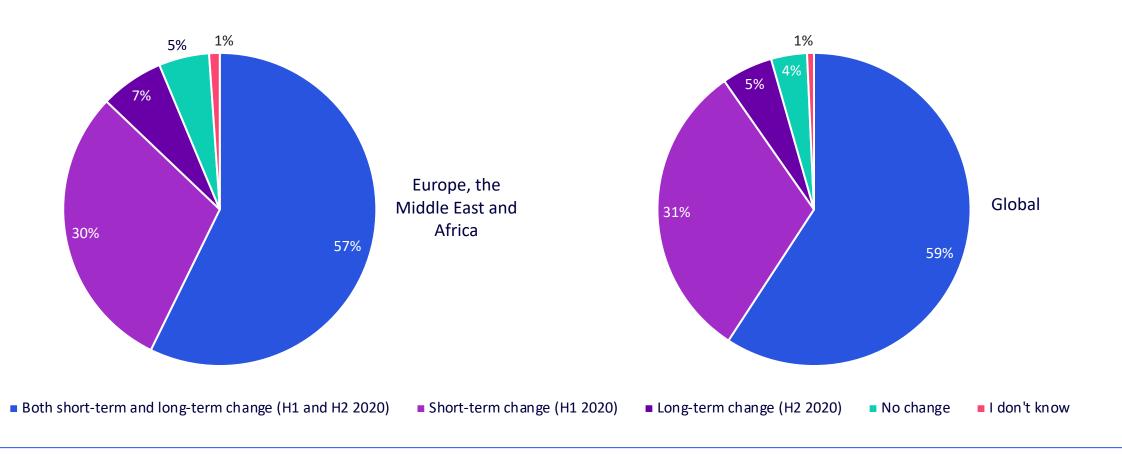
Cashflow is the most pressing challenge for businesses in Europe, the Middle East and Africa

Question 5: What challenges are you facing as a business due to the immediate impact of COVID-19?



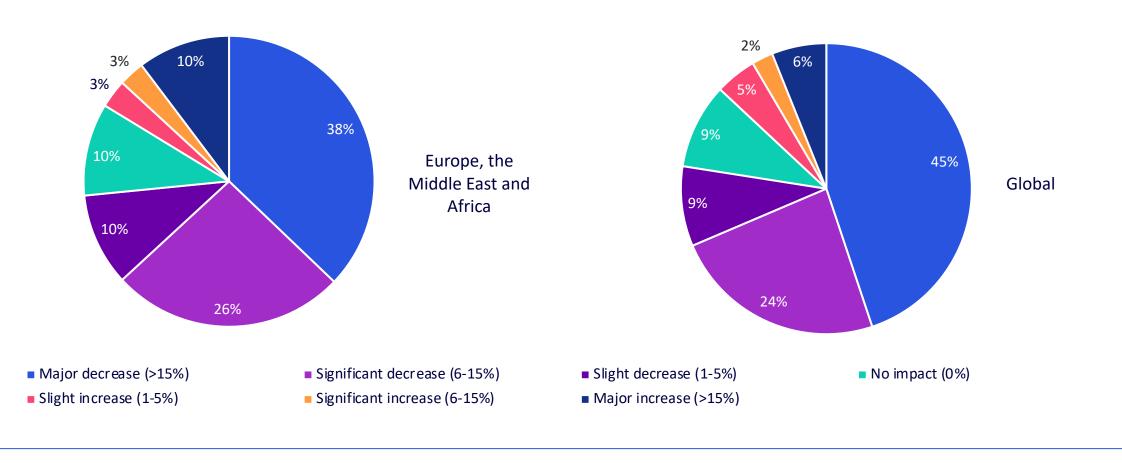
Most marketers have changed their 2020 marketing plan

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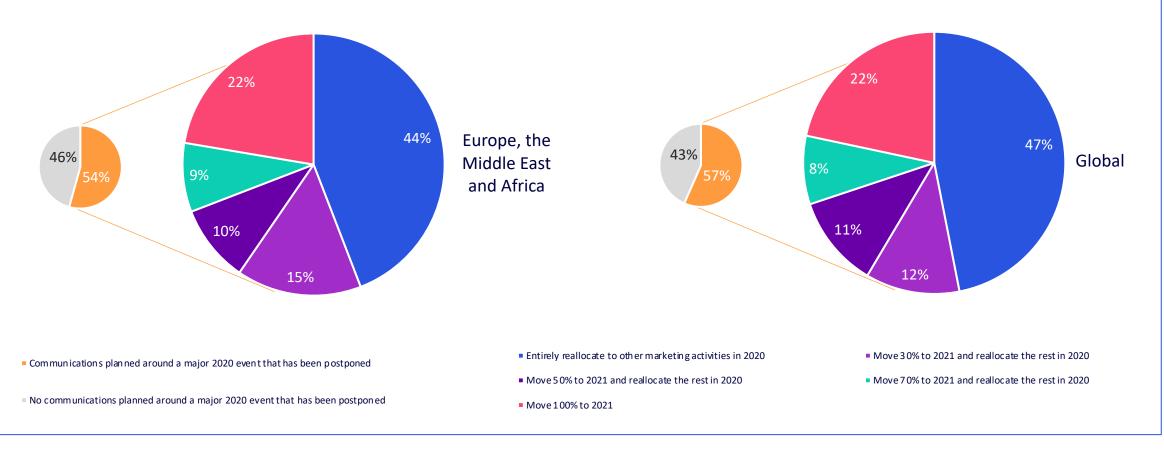
Marketing budgets are revised downward

Question 7: How has the evolving global situation impacted your marketing investment in your market?



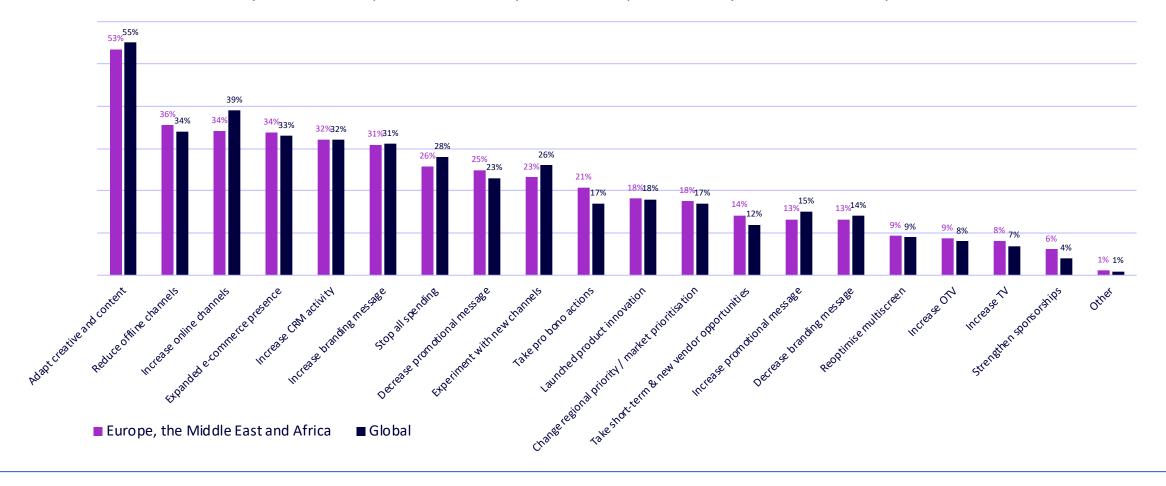
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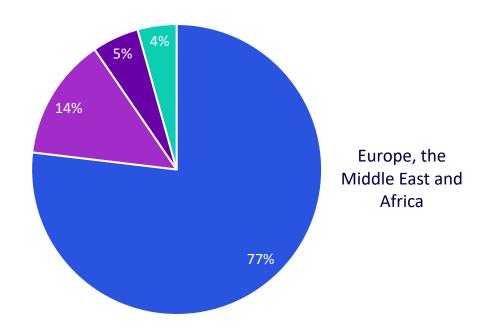
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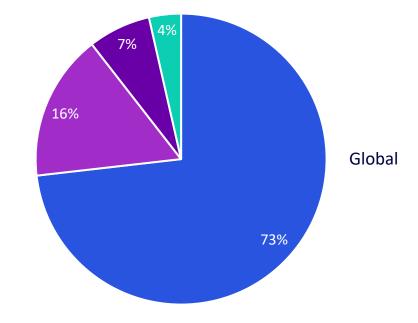
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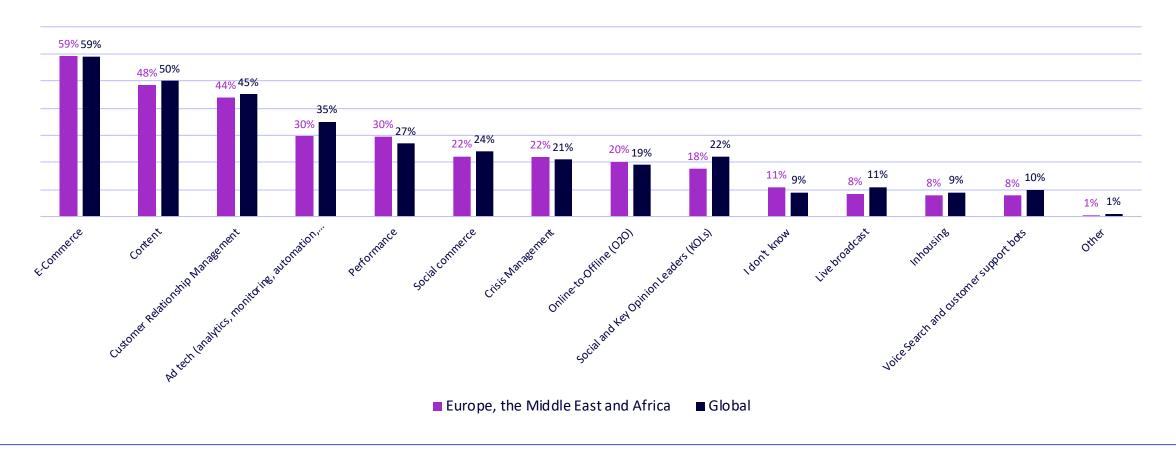


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COVID-19 pushes marketers to reconsider their long-term ecommerce capabilities

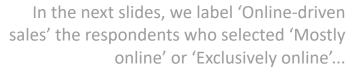
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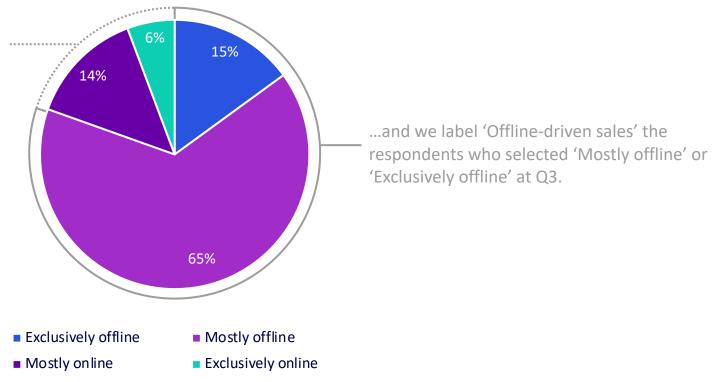




Offline-driven businesses vs Online-driven businesses

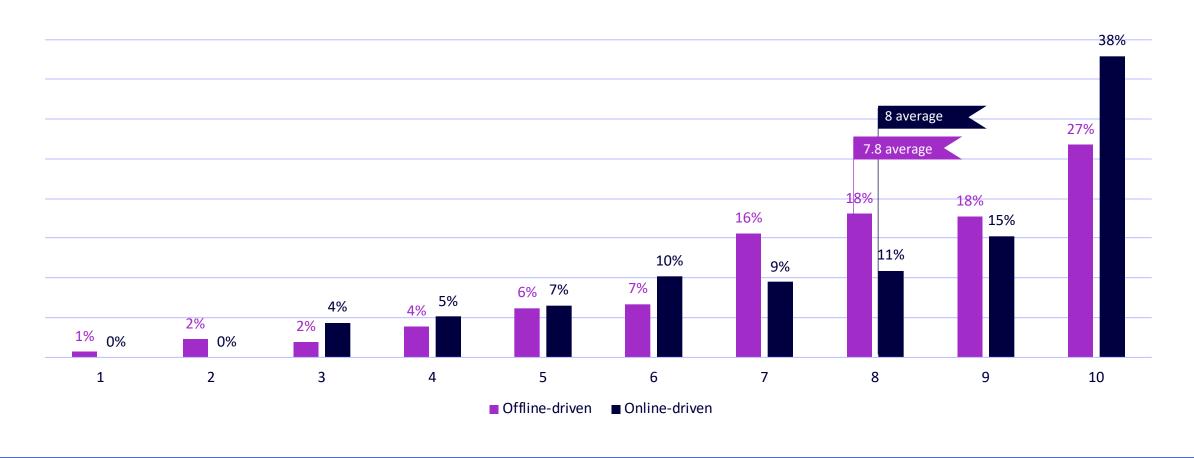
Question 3: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, your sales were:





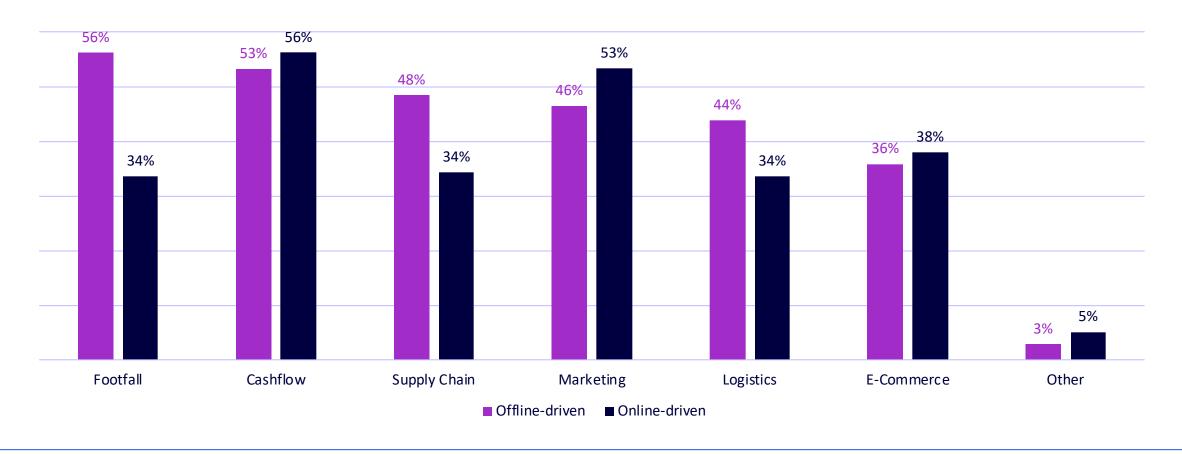
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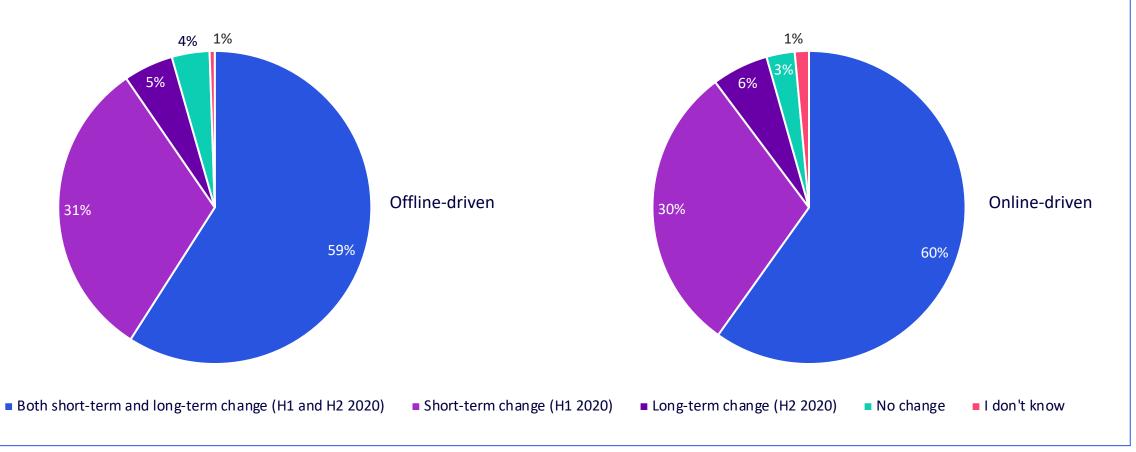
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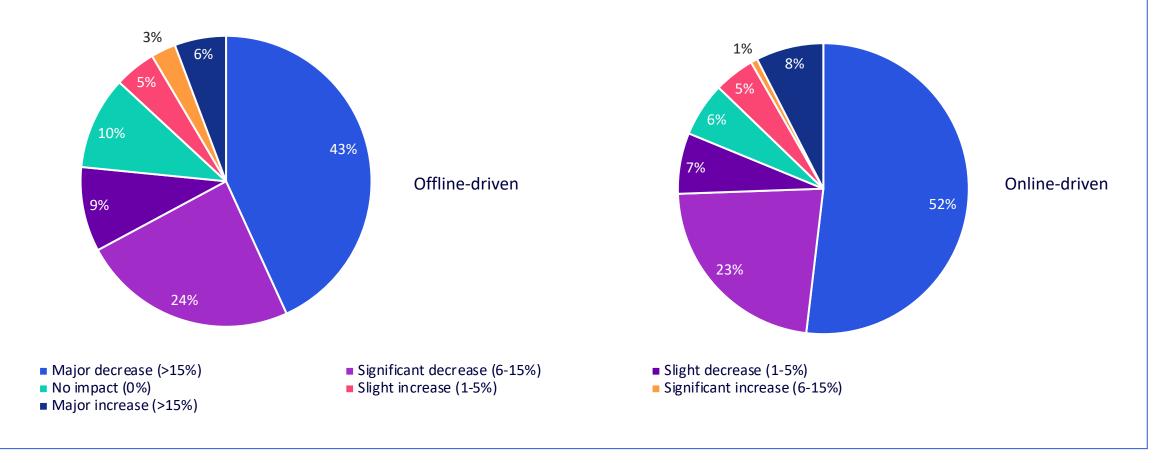
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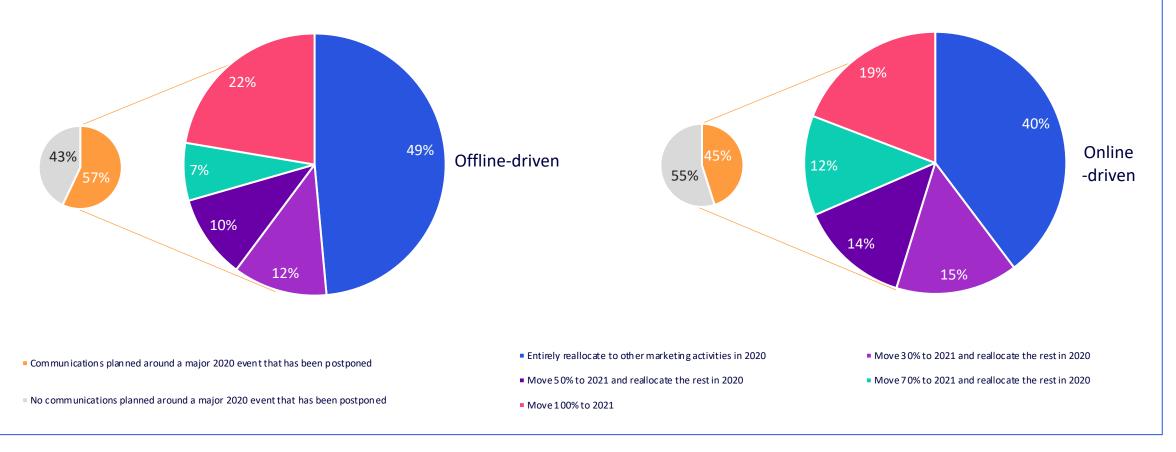
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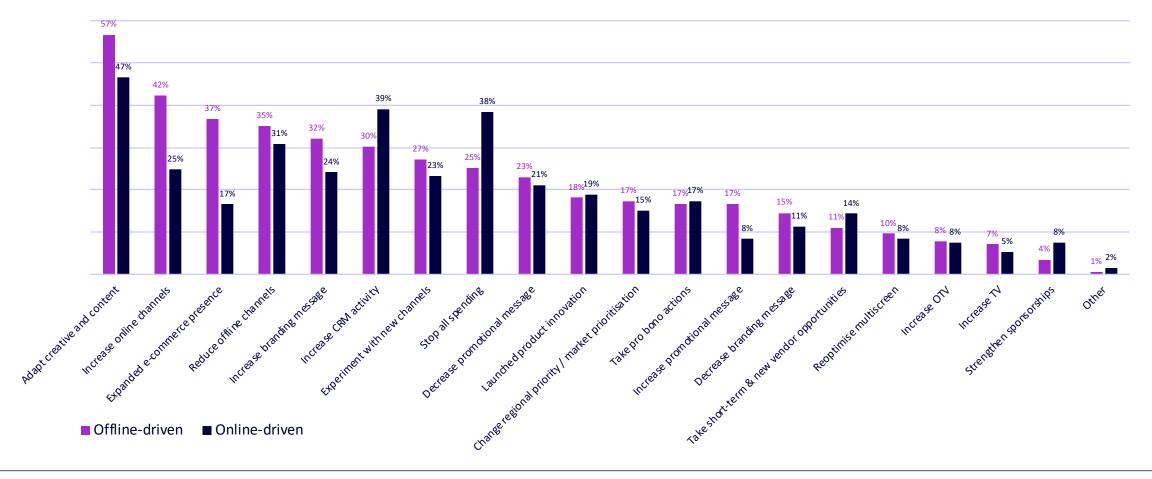
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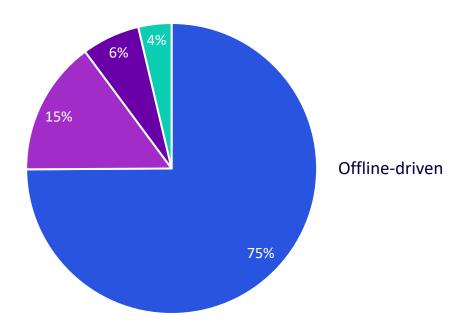
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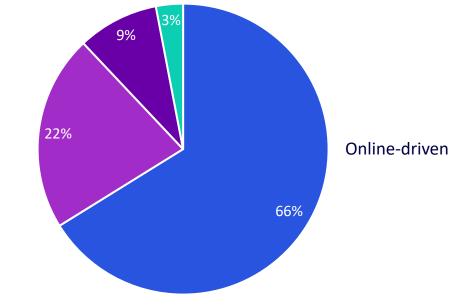
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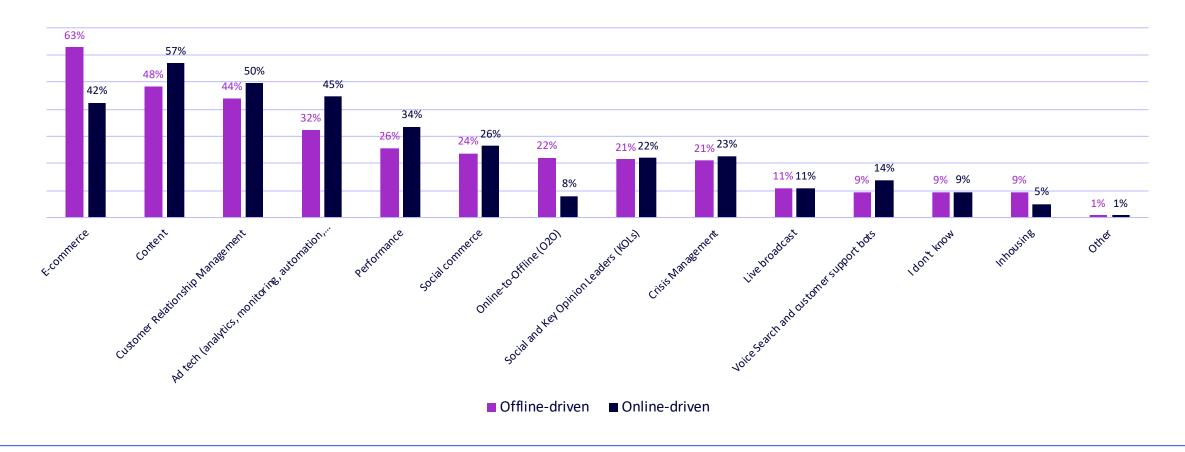


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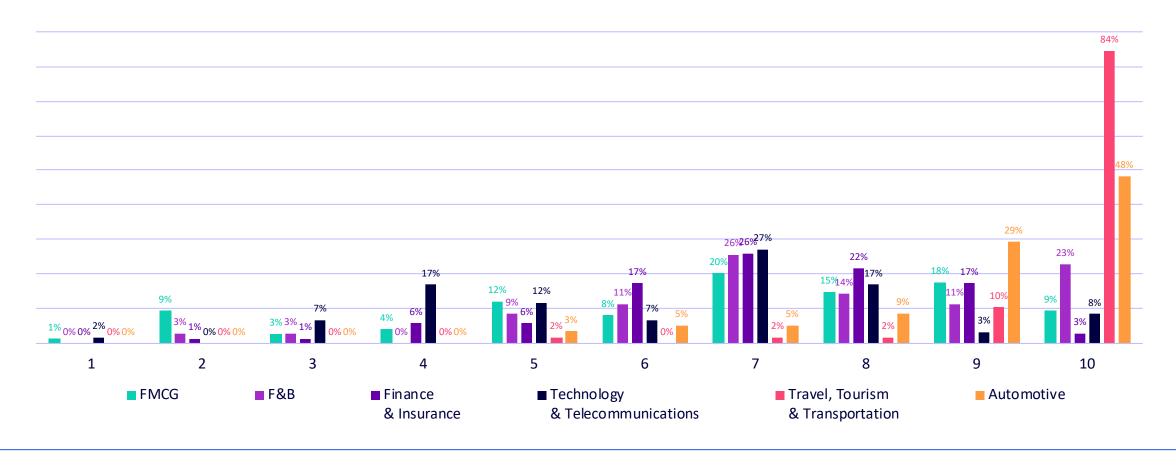
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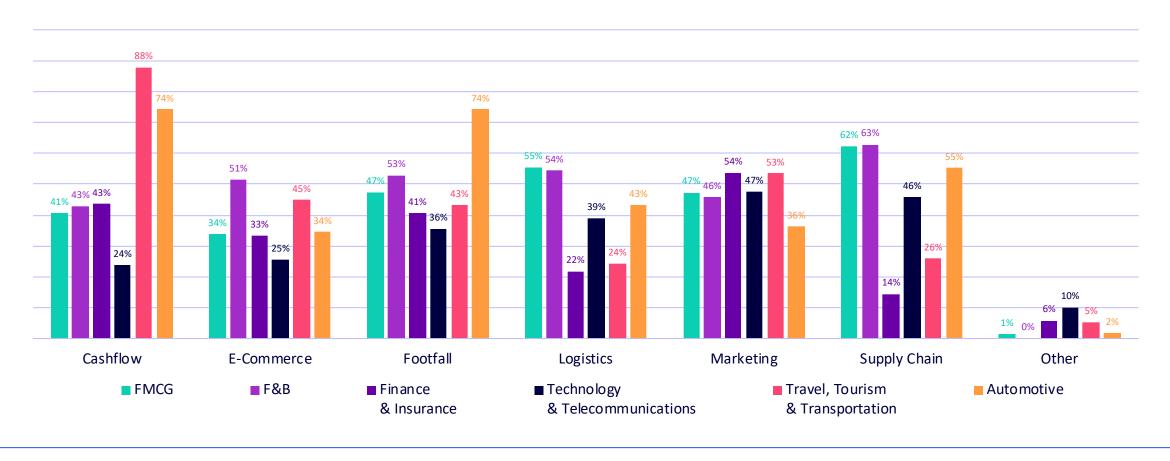
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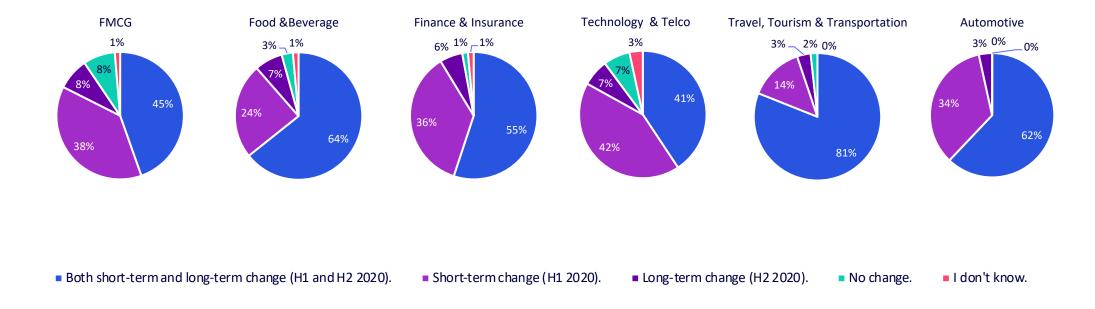
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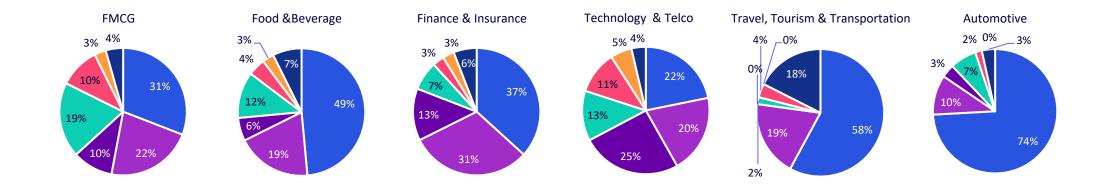
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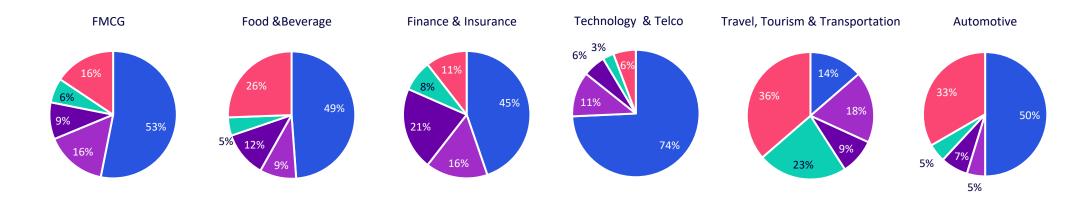
Question 7: How has the evolving global situation impacted your marketing investment in your market?



■ Major decrease (>15%) ■ Significant decrease (6-15%) ■ Slight decrease (1-5%) ■ No impact (0%) ■ Slight increase (1-5%) ■ Significant increase (6-15%) ■ Major increase (>15%)

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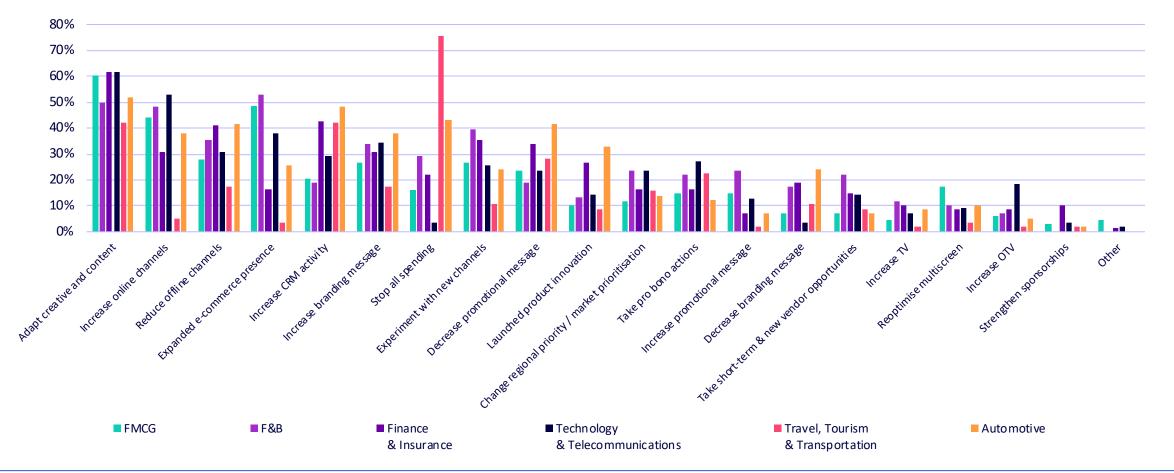


- Entirely reallocate to other marketing activities in 2020.
- Move 50% to 2021 and reallocate the rest in 2020.
- Move 100% to 2021.

- Move 30% to 2021 and reallocate the rest in 2020.
- Move 70% to 2021 and reallocate the rest in 2020.

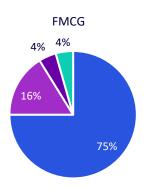
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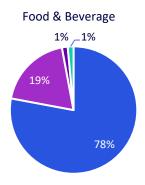
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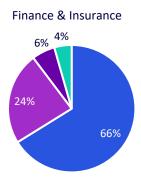


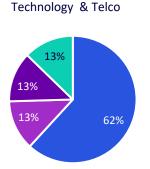
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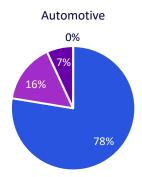










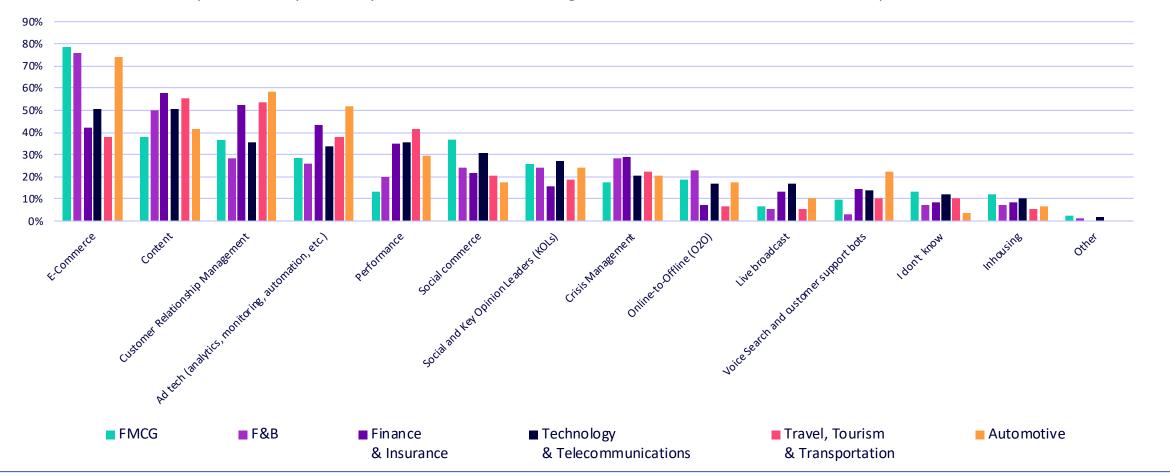


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8 quick take-aways

#1 – COVID-19 has a major impact on sales

The impact of the pandemic on sales is massive: three respondents out of four evaluate the impact on their sales with a 7+ score on a 1 to 10 scale. The average score across all respondents stands at 7.8/10.

#2 – Cashflow is the most pressing challenge for businesses

With declining sales, the lack of liquidity is the most oft-quoted immediate challenge by the respondents, closely followed by reduced footfall and marketing challenges.

#3 – Most marketers have changed their 2020 marketing plan

Only a very small fraction of respondents (<5%) declare their annual marketing plan has not evolved in light of the pandemic. One third reports they have only changed their plans for the first half of 2020 so far.

#4 – Marketing budgets are revised downward

Three respondents out of four declare they decreased their marketing investment because of the pandemic, among which the majority cut their budgets by more than 15%. One out of ten took the opposite direction by increasing their marketing activity amid the crisis.

#5 – A majority of budgets originally planned for events are reallocated to other 2020 projects

Only one marketer out of five who planned to communicate around a major event postponed to 2021 will move 100% of the designated budget to the next year. One half reallocated that budget to other activities in 2020 and one third opted for a mixed 2020-21 approach.

#6 – Adapting the message to the pandemic context has been the priority measure of marketers so far

More than half of respondents have adapted their creatives and content. Interestingly, while three out of ten took the most conservative approach (stopping all spending), about the same proportion decided to experiment with new channels in the same period.

#7 – Recovery planning is happening now

As many national governments are progressively announcing timelines to ease confinement restrictions, three quarters of marketers have already started planning for recovery. Less than one marketer out of ten declares recovery is not yet on the company's agenda.

#8 – COVID-19 pushes marketers to reconsider their long-term ecommerce capabilities

Six respondents out of ten believe they will need to invest more in e-commerce in the long term. Content and CRM will also become two areas of focus for marketers. Only one respondent out of ten intends to increase investment in inhousing following the pandemic.

DENTSU AEGIS NETWORK

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About Dentsu Aegis Network

The report has been prepared by Aurélien Loyer, Global Strategy Manager.

For all inquiries, contact us at globalpress@dentsuaegis.com.

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