



What people think,
feel and do

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Brand marketing in a crisis:

Why now is not the time for silence



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As marketers, we tend to get wrapped up in what we, the experts, believe, rather than what the public think, feel and do. We love to proffer opinions about how brands and businesses should act. What they should say? Why they should say it?

And never more so than during a crisis.

The past few weeks has been a tumultuous and untested time for us all and so whilst it's easy for us to voice our views, we also need to listen to the people we claim to be talking to and speaking for. And listen hard.

If we want to know whether brands should be advertising, selling or even talking about Coronavirus we just need to ask.

And so, at [Opinium](#) we did just that. Here's what the public said.

A tightrope to walk or football field to play in?

Currently as a brand, it might appear that you're damned if you do or damned if you don't: engage with the crisis and you risk being seen as disingenuous or continue with commercial activity and be designated tactless.

So, should companies be scrapping their marketing plans a la John Lewis and Coke, begin pulling content and 'go dark'?

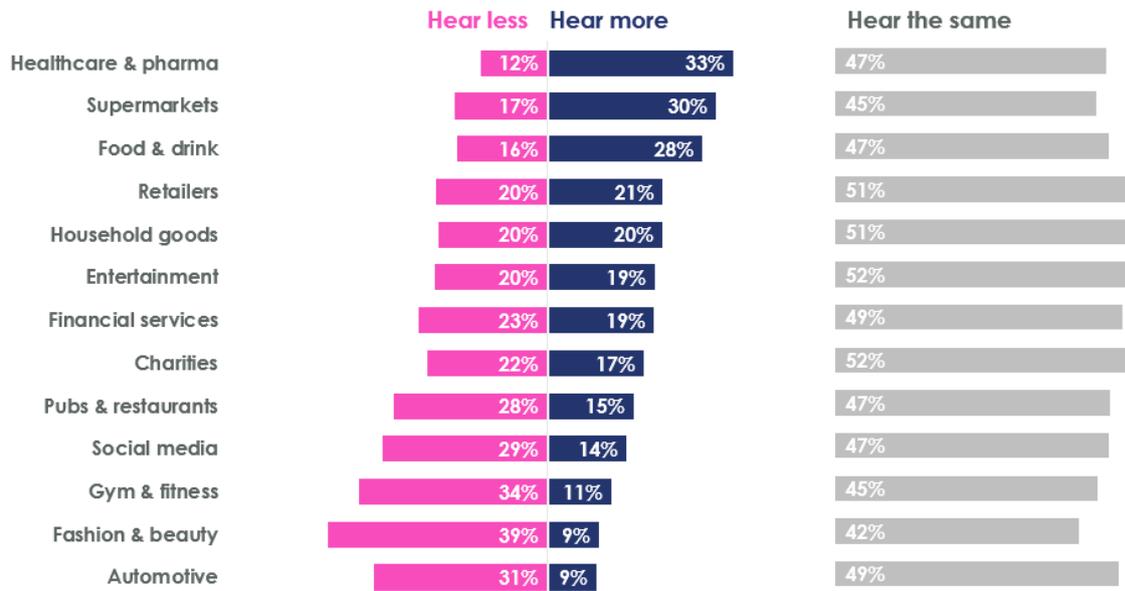
Well, no.

Because when you actually ask the people who make these judgements, you find that brands have a lot more space to play in than the popular tightrope analogy gives them credit for.

In fact, a very large majority of people in the UK would like to hear either the same amount, or even more, from brands across categories ranging from healthcare to fashion and beauty to entertainment.

Consumers expect to hear from brands, regardless of the category

Would you like to hear more or less from these types of company?



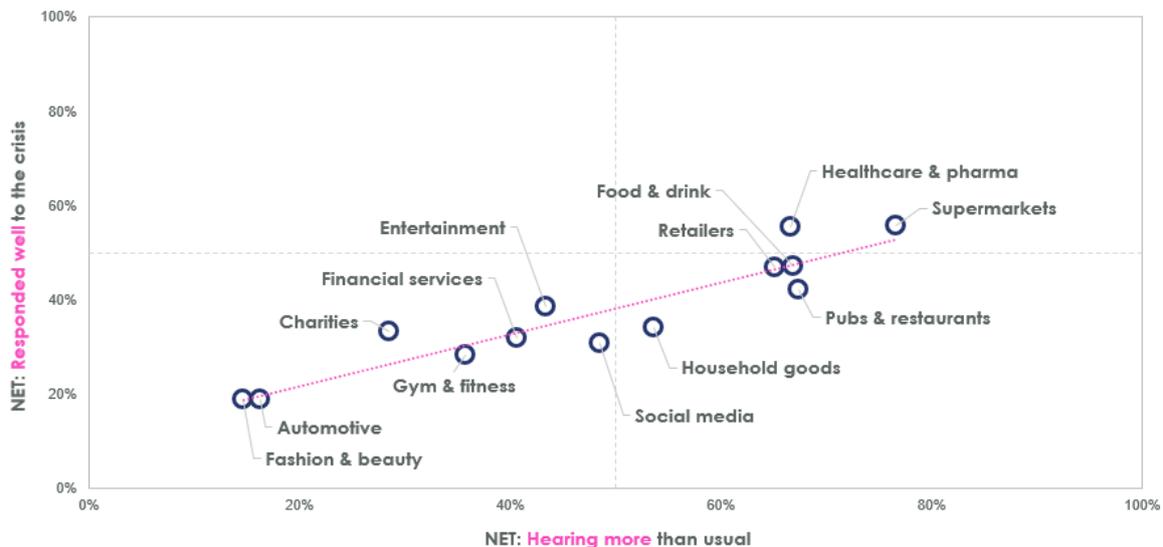
Unsurprisingly the types of companies that consumers particularly want to hear more from at this time are those that provide the essentials: healthcare and pharmaceuticals, supermarkets, food and drink and household goods.

Yet even brands that may feel alienated from the current crisis, such as automotive, fitness/gyms and fashion and beauty, aren't alienated from the public: the majority of whom say they are perfectly happy to continue hearing the same or more from the brands brave enough to step out.

We say brave enough, because despite the handwringing in some sectors, those that are being heard about more are perceived to be handling the crisis better than sectors which are less vocal.

More vocal brands are perceived to have responded better

How vocal are brands and how well have they responded to the crisis?



Now of course, this correlation could also work the other way around, with those sectors which are responding best to the crisis being publicised the most, however, this shouldn't be a deterrent. It is in fact the exact opposite. Consumers have markedly positive perceptions of all sector's responses to Coronavirus, meaning there is little risk in getting back in the saddle.

The essential advice for all brands then, is to not bury heads and marketing plans in the sand, consumers still want to hear from you, especially those not seen to have done anything so far.

Top 5 sectors that consumers think currently haven't done anything in response to the crisis:

- Automotive (27%)
- Fashion and beauty (26%)
- Gym and fitness (17%)
- Financial services (15%)
- Charities (14%)

How to talk about Coronavirus: Authenticity is king

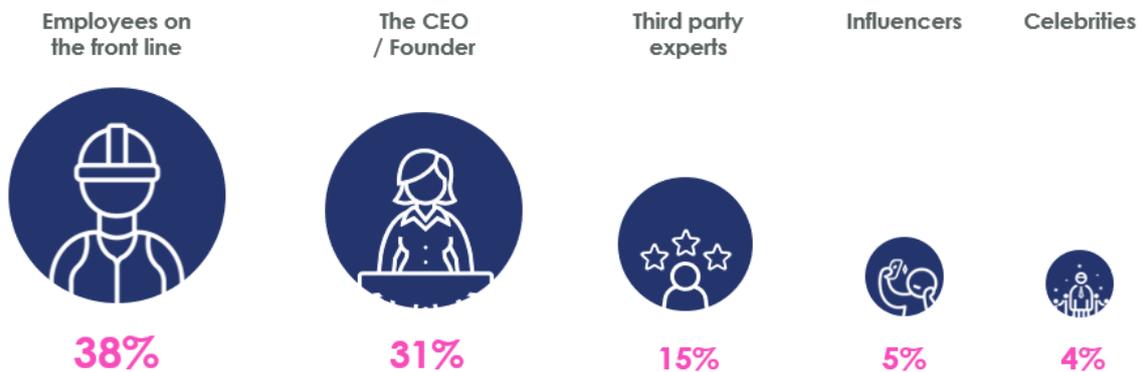
We may be entering an unprecedented time, but the old rules of marketing still apply. When half of the UK population believe that brands are 'jumping on the bandwagon' with their messaging around coronavirus it is clear that audiences aren't convinced by the sincerity of their communications.

Doubting the authenticity of brands messaging is of course nothing new, but as greater numbers of us than ever before work from home, we are seeking communications which convey the day-to-day experiences of employees implementing their company's plan to deal with the coronavirus.

Yes, consumers are still interested in hearing from the CEO, but as we become ever physically distant, we are seeking digital content which brings us closer to real people.

Consumers want to hear from the front lines

Thinking about communications from brands, who would you like to hear from?



Help consumers become the hero

Despite the majority of brands and businesses proactively communicating with consumers and customers alike, 48% of the UK population don't know which are the best brands or organisations to support in order to help with coronavirus. And that makes sense. The majority of communication so far has been top-down. Brands and businesses have told consumers what they are doing but **failed to tell consumers how they can help.**

We just need to look at the response to the call for volunteers for the NHS to see that people want to be involved, not simply told what others are doing on their behalf. Consumers are looking for brands to act as a facilitator, to allow them, not the organisation, to make a difference and be the hero of the narrative.

Bored of talking about Coronavirus?

You're not the only one: over a third of the UK would prefer for brands to talk about something other than the pandemic.

This desire for something different is symptomatic of a consumer who is struggling to find their place in a drastically different world.

We've identified four key trends which we believe highlight why brands can, and should, be looking to move past the Rona:

1. Business as usual, except it isn't

With the recent announcements that everyone should work from home if possible and schools shutting down, many are adapting to their new way of life. For the public, this is a strange mix of the familiar and downright weird, exemplified by 42% of people agreeing that apart from staying at home more, nothing has really changed. In a strange way this is surely the case, with many working the same jobs and having to do the same daily tasks of cooking, cleaning and catching up with children or loved ones.

Yet on the other hand 6-in-10 say their lives have been significantly disrupted, rising to 7-in-10 for those aged 35-44, which is something we all can relate to in terms of our liberty and the now delayed access to things, we previously got in an instant.

Therefore, it makes sense that an incredibly high 70% are looking for ways to keep some normality in their life.

2. Other things still matter

Tied to a desire for normality, 59% say they miss having conversations that don't involve the current pandemic, and whilst a third believe that tackling Coronavirus is the only thing that matters right now, a similar proportion disagree. This, perhaps shocking, finding highlights how important it is to not just focus on the virus, but also give attention to the other issues that still matter to consumers.

3. A little less conversation a little more escapism please

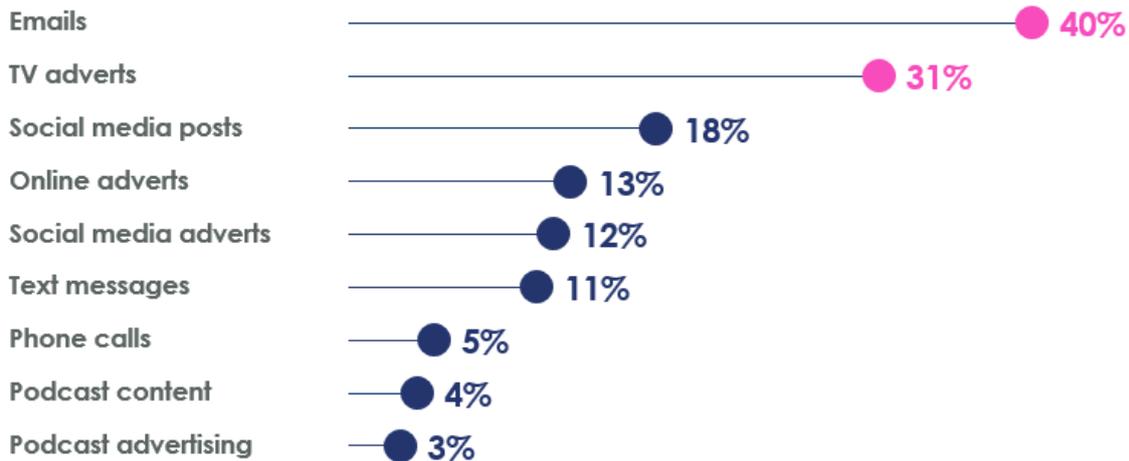
People are beginning to get bored of being at home already, and this is especially true of younger generation (47% vs. 36% for UK), but currently the overwhelming offering on live TV and social to distract them is, you guessed it, things related to Coronavirus. Incredibly almost a third have actively begun to avoid the news, again higher for younger generations, as the public try to focus on something positive: 85% say we could all use a bit more good news, rising to a whopping 94% for over 65s. To help get themselves there, around 4-in-10 are turning to entertainment to avoid what's going on in the world.

4. A vastly different media landscape

People are devouring more TV as they are stuck at home, with 43% of the population saying they are watching more live shows than they usually do. When it comes to adverts on TV, just under a third (31%) say it would be their preferred form of communication from brands, alongside email. Ah yes, those [much-derided emails](#) from the CEO's. Well it's still the top channel for consumers, just, as discussed, it's probably time to start moving the content towards new pastures. Finally, over half (54%) of the UK say they are using messaging and social media more than usual, which is true across all age groups, but especially the young and young families.

Email and TV advertising are key communication channels

How would you like to hear from brands?



Time to step up

Brands clearly have a role to play; they populate and add colour to people's lives through their products, services and marketing, creating Zoom call moments where people can talk about that new ad, or get excited about a new product that, shock, horror, they might actually have to wait to get delivered. Through these they also are able to address a myriad of different issues that are still important to consumers and help them to indulge in a little escapism as well while they're there. And for brands themselves? Well the new media landscape illuminates an audience that potentially had never been as attentive.

So, what are you waiting for?

Health warning!

Although consumers are open to content beyond Corona, the degree to which brands can play into this depends on their proximity to the crisis.

Consumers expect to hear more practical, helpful content from companies that provide essential goods in this time of need. If you are a supermarket brand, or healthcare/pharma brand, consumers are more interested in business updates, advice on how to deal with the crisis, new products and services that may be useful during this time, etc. Meanwhile, consumers are naturally more receptive to light-hearted content on how to entertain themselves and their families coming from companies that are less immediately implicated in the crisis, like entertainment or fitness brands.

Remember authenticity, everyone's favourite buzzword.

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About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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