

# Invisible effects

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**Brands are predominantly public constructs built on a foundation of knowledge, reinforcement and consistency**

Andy Warhol put it best: “America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.”

The big questions I would be asking right now as a brand owner are, what happens when that foundation of knowledge, reinforcement and consistency gets taken away? What are

the lasting effects? What can I do about it? What should I worry about?

Two things spring to mind:

### 1) Rebooting Brands: Frequency – The 35 billion impression problem

Let's say you are a mass brand. Let's say you are in the hands of consumers, or on their feet, or their chests daily. On the commute, in the office, at lunchtime in the park, in the gym. Let's say you have penetration of 20-30% of the population of any country.

COVID-19 has taken care of billions of impressions for you. No-one has seen 20 other people drinking a Coke, no-one has seen 35 other people all wearing adidas shoes or shirts in a gym session, no-one has seen half the population using an iPhone.

In 2012 Kantar Millward Brown produced a paper entitled "What Happens When Brands Go Dark". To give a clue, it isn't good news. This was squarely aimed at advertising *but* in a world of systems effects, if we take billions of impressions out of the game for months on end, what effect does it have?

Do you need more frequency in your advertising to compensate? Do you need to find ways of cutting through the same media plan that every brand in your category is deploying right now? Do you need to think differently about your plans versus how you thought before? In short, yes.

If you lost billions of impressions from your media plan, you would think differently about how to reboot it. Apply the same thinking here.

### 2) Rebooting Experience: Serendipity, Surprise & Delight

It isn't only impression volume that has been lost. Notions of quality have shifted. Algorithms have had significantly more control over brand choice and experience over the last few months than ever before. So, they are increasingly defining what good looks like. Now at first glance, if we can work out how to game the algorithms better than the

competition, then you win...surely?

The mathematicians everywhere will probably choke on their tea, but algorithms are just geometry, boxes to be ticked. Gaming them is just (very important) foundational thinking, brilliant basics, it isn't a game-changer because everyone can do it. It just ensures average.

It also ensures a complete lack of serendipity, of genuine discovery, of surprise and delight. Algorithmic influence in marketing communications needs to be balanced with a healthy focus on difference – one of BrandZ's key drivers of growth in most categories.

Difference can come in all sorts of ways. Serendipity can (and should) strike in surprising places, but with footfall through the temples of consumerism considerably decreased around the world, maybe now is a time for difference to emerge more clearly in your media plan. Now is a time to fall back in love with the art of execution rather than just the science.

So, as we reboot communications plans, we need to think very hard about what we have lost, from frequency to high touch experiences, we need to think about the gaps those losses leave and what we can do