

Why now is the time to innovate

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Three factors make this period the ideal time to try something new says MediaCom's Sue Unerman.

Now is the time to innovate.

Three factors that make *this* the moment: inability to rely on modelling as a decision-making tool; changes in society and media behaviours; and new tech.

First, modelling.

The IPA Effectiveness [Awards](#) – a UK-run global awards show – judging is ongoing. As convenor this year, I am all too aware of how tough the process is and what a huge amount of work that goes into the most rigorous awards standards in the industry worldwide.

This year, for the first time, all papers were read by technical judges, not only those with technical appendices. A new and valuable adjustment to the process of proving, beyond reasonable doubt, the effectiveness of advertising (in the broadest sense) on business outcomes.

Many papers use econometrics to help with this proof. Yet, as my colleague Greg Newman has pointed out to me, we are currently in interesting times as far as econometrics is concerned. There has been much disruption to normal advertising practices and this will be both very valuable (econometricians like dark periods for contrast) and also very useless (in that so much in the supply and retail chain has changed that the models will need a reset).

Fans of [*The Black Swan*](#) book will remember that Nassim Nicholas Taleb was critical of econometrics in times of change. He cited turkeys and Thanksgiving. If a turkey commissioned a lifetime model of what was going to happen in late November based on the previous months of its life, the prediction would be that it would get slightly more food every day, not that it would be cooked for Thanksgiving dinner.

Where there is great emphasis on modelling, there can be less appetite for experimentation.

Factor one, then, is that when there is less to base predictions on, it can be easier to persuade stakeholders to try something new. This is already happening in some sectors – for example, live music.

The Economist [predicts](#) that the current crisis will prove to be “the biggest jolt to live music in decades”. The market value of Live Nation, the world’s largest live-entertainment company, has dropped from \$15bn to about \$10bn as concerts have been postponed.

The writer argues that the current situation, however, might be a boon in terms of creativity and innovation (while acknowledging that a virtual gig will never replace a live event). *Rolling Stone* reported that K-pop band BTS made \$20m from a virtual gig staged on 14 June; Travis Scott famously reached 27 million on Fortnite; and Laura Marling sold many more

seats for a live-streamed gig than she could have sold at the venue.

So, this brings us to the second factor, which is that many more people have learned digital skills and new digital habits. Covid-19 has done more to get people to adopt online shopping, entertainment and interaction than any planned campaign or strategy. Ecommerce has become normal for all ages and on-demand viewing has grown by 70% year on year.

Factor three is changing technology: 5G will enable more creativity in terms of virtual experience.

These three factors – the fact that we can't rely on the past to model what is to come; the change in society in attitudes, digital habits and media behaviours; the impact of 5G – make for a powerful Venn diagram. In the centre is a moment in time, a moment to innovate for brands, for comms, for media.

Now is the time to think of ideas that haven't been tried before and about appetite for risk, and design a plan with elements that look like nothing that has gone before.

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OPINION