

# Despite the disruption to our lives, could Covid-19 make us more kind?

ADVERTISING EDINBURGH PEOPLE

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As I'm sure most people are aware, a few weeks ago TV presenter Caroline Flack passed away after taking her own life, in her flat in East London. While this came as a terrible shock and is deeply upsetting particularly to her family and friends and those close to her, what I want to write about is how this affects our industry and how you could argue the wider media industry had a part to play in her death. I'm not writing this to bash the media industry or lay all of the blame at 'media and the advertising worlds' door, I'm simply arguing it had a role to play, and I'd like to talk about the 'responsibility of

## advertising’.

As a fan of Caroline, I couldn't believe that this bubbly smiley person who seemed to have such an enthusiasm for life, could feel so low to have done what she did. How could a person who had a full life with family & friends around her, a great job (albeit she'd stepped down from her role on Love Island due to the assault charge) and beautiful flat feel like she had no other option? Or, was it really that surprising, we all know someone who has suffered from depression and/or anxiety and these conditions don't stereotype, they don't care what a person's circumstances are, however good they seem to the outside world.

For me, the most ironic thing around the whole *incident is that* the importance of mental health has never been so prevalent with companies and brands all realising the importance of a person's mental state, while at the same time many advertising platforms continue to do the complete opposite. It's not lost on anyone that the same media outlets who were hounding Caroline, publishing details in the papers and on social media, were the very same outlets who profited from her death.

It became a witch hunt and they made an exhibition out of her which you could argue was because she was a woman who was facing an assault charge. The CPS played their role in pushing forward the domestic violence case against her, something which they have been criticised for, whereas critics of the tabloid newspapers blamed them for hounding a vulnerable woman. The Guardian published an analysis of all the articles within The Sun newspaper that mentioned Flack in the 6 months before her death and found that a quarter of them took a negative tone, while 18% were positive. In the month she was charged with assault Flack received twice as many negative headlines as positive. On one hand, the media are all over social media channels spreading positivity around mental health but then fail to take any accountability when they impact people's health.

Paid media added 'fuel to the fire' for social media with many people pointing the finger at the trolls hiding behind keyboards. As an avid fan of Instagram, I am always shocked at the things people will comment on pictures within the social media platform. Things I'm sure no one would say to another person's face.

I myself have found since Caroline's death I've made a conscious effort not to look at a certain tabloids celebrity gossip page (a previous guilty pleasure) and I've read many posts on social media where hairdressers, dental surgeries and GP practises are not offering celeb gossip mags to read in their waiting rooms and will instead provide other less hateful reading. All small measures of course but if it's a fewer people contributing to negative media coverage then I think that's a win for the world of advertising and the responsibility it has.

After Caroline's death, a wave of celebrities all took to social media to support Caroline and criticise the tabloids and online media troll's treatment of her which is all very well but I'm not sure this will really address the issue. Movements such as 'be kind' are great and I'm sure most would support these but what do they actually achieve in reality? Tragic events like this have happened in the past when the tabloids faced back-lash but all is forgotten once a new wave of celebrities are front-page news. I'm not sure exactly what the answer is and if there even is an answer, but if we can each individually be more aware of the effects that negative advertising can have, maybe we'll choose to do less of it.

As I write this article, I'm currently working from home, which I'm sure will be the same situation for many of you. We are faced with some slightly odd times ahead and this got me thinking around how the 'be kind' movement could never be more relevant. We've all witnessed the empty shelves and watched people buying reams of toilet roll, pasta and paracetamol, out of fear, and without thinking about those who aren't in a position to be able to do that. It would be nice for us to follow through with the 'be kind' movement that little bit more over the next few weeks and months. Think about those who can't afford to do that, or don't have a car to be able to carry lots of food and household items home. Think about those elderly people on their own who only go out to the shops once a week when a relative or carer can take them. Be kind to your neighbours, offer to get them things when you're heading to the shops and check in on the older generation who may be struggling after having been told to limit their social interactions.

In a slightly upside-down world at the moment.....where you can be anything, be kind.

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