



MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT 2023



Welcome to the 2023

MOST CONTAGIOUS REPORT

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WELCOME

It's hard to imagine that a mere year ago Kid Rock hadn't yet taken a semiautomatic rifle to America's (then) most popular beer and everyone was chuckling at how bad generative AI was at drawing hands.

Twelve months on, Bud Light's fortunes have been dramatically reversed and AI may now be digitally sniggering at how badly you do your job. If the speed of AI's improvement surprised you this year, it's worth noting the advice of Nvidia founder and CEO, Jensen Huang. Giving a speech in May at National Taiwan University, he told students they were at the starting line of AI: 'Run, don't walk. Either you're running for food or you're running from being food.'

2023 saw similarly alarming news on the climate front. After July was confirmed as the hottest month in the past 120,000 years, UN secretary general Antonio Guterres declared the era of global warming over. 'The era of global boiling has arrived.' Fortunately, this year wasn't exclusively about go-woke-go-broke marketing, tech doom and an overheating planet. Taylor Swift's Eras tour generated c.\$5bn in consumer spending in the US alone, bringing such an economic boost to the cities it played in that political leaders including the presidents of Canada and Chile personally invited Swift to tour in their countries.

The *Barbie* movie was a similar ray of glittery light, rollerblading past *Oppenheimer's* complex morality to rake in a cool \$1.4bn and delivering a 9% sales increase to Mattel in Q3. 2024 may not prove to be as sunny as Barbieland but, if you're facing it with trepidation, it's worth remembering that while some of the most conspicuous successes of this year were led by women, they were also driven by creativity, humanity and joy. If you want to take aim at anything in the next 12 months, shoot for those.

Alex Jenkins, managing partner

Fake new world

AI and CGI tools mean that if you can imagine it, you can bring it to life, says Contagious editor Chloe Markowicz, but brands must engage with the ethical implications of this tech



In the 17th century, the French philosopher René Descartes warned about trusting what we see and hear. ‘Whatever I have accepted until now as most true has come to me through my senses,’ he wrote. ‘But occasionally I have found that they have deceived me, and it is unwise to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.’ In the age of AI our senses deceive us again and again. The mantra for the Instagram era was ‘Pics or it didn’t happen,’ but today a photograph no longer provides proof.

Jeffrey McGregor, CEO of Truepic, a company that aims to authenticate imagery, explains the scale of the problem. ‘When anything can be faked, everything can be fake,’ he told CNN in June. ‘Knowing that generative AI has reached this tipping point in quality and accessibility, we no longer know what reality is when we’re online.’



The fear and fantasy of *Black Mirror* is not that far off

Make it or fake it

Fake news and misinformation is not a new problem, but the tools for deception are now better, more plentiful and more accessible. It’s become easier than ever, for example, to create a believable fake video putting words in a celebrity’s mouth. ‘What’s different is that everybody can do it now,’ Britt Paris, an assistant professor of library and information science at Rutgers University who has researched so-called ‘cheapfakes’, told the *New York Times*. ‘It’s not just people with sophisticated computational technology and fairly sophisticated computational know-how. Instead, it’s a free app.’

Owners of Google’s latest smartphones, the Pixel 8 and Pixel 8 Pro, won’t even have to download any new software to manipulate the photos they take with AI. The Pixel’s Best Take feature uses machine learning to take the expression that a person has in one photo and edit it into another. And the Magic Editor functionality lets people delete unwanted people or objects from an image and then fill in the space so it looks like they were never there. People don’t even need to have taken the images on the device itself to be able to edit them, but can apply the tech to any photos stored in their phone’s library. This gives anyone the ability to become a revisionist historian.

There are extensive ethical and legal issues that arise when someone can take a person’s likeness and voice, and do whatever they want with it. This topic is explored in the *Black Mirror* episode *Joan Is Awful*, where a woman’s real life is recreated for a Netflix-style show without her consent. Salma Hayek plays the titular Joan in the show within the show, except it’s eventually revealed that

Hayek isn't acting at all; it's an AI-generated version of the actress and the real Hayek has no control over what she says or does. The plot represents an actor's worst nightmare, where they will be replaced by AI — just one of the issues that Screen Actors' Guild members sought protection against when they went on strike this year. As a union member told Deadline in July, 'Actors see *Black Mirror's Joan Is Awful* as a documentary of the future, with their likenesses sold off and used any way producers and studios want.'

Some stars, however, seem all too happy to let companies use their image, albeit for a price. In September, Meta announced it was launching AI bots played by athletes, influencers and cultural icons. Each of these characters looks like a celebrity but has a different name and backstory, and when people interact with these bots they'll display their unique personalities and expertise.

The world of music has been similarly tested by the advances of AI. In April, a track called 'Heart on My Sleeve' that appeared to feature Drake and the Weeknd went viral. But neither artist was involved, instead it featured AI mimicry of their voices. Universal Music Group pulled the track off streaming services and, in a statement, asked, 'which side of history all stakeholders in the music ecosystem want to be on: the side of artists, fans and human creative expression, or on the side of deep fakes, fraud and denying artists their due compensation? Think of your favourite singer and there's probably an AI-version of them singing online.'

But AI can be a creative opportunity as well as a threat for musicians, which is why Grimes, in April, invited fans to make new music using AI versions of her voice. 'Creatively, I think

AI can replace humans,' she told NPR. 'And so I think at some point, we will want to, as a species, have a discussion about how involved AI will be in art.' Google, meanwhile, has launched a tool that allows YouTube creators to create soundtracks for their short videos using the AI-generated voices of real artists including Sia and John Legend.

The only way is ethics

It's obvious that artists have a vested interest in protecting their likeness from being used, but the company behind the Tom Cruise deepfakes that went viral in 2021, is helping even ordinary citizens protect themselves against authorised deepfakes. Metaphysic has launched a tool that will allow people to create and store their personal biometric data and protect how it is used by third parties and generative AI. The idea is that after creating their own AI likeness and voice models, the user will be able to register their copyright with the US Copyright Office. 'The dangers are serious and we need to help protect everyone,' Thomas Graham, co-founder and CEO, told *Fast Company*. 'Especially the most vulnerable people in society.'

Nina Schick, author of *Deep Fakes and the Infocalypse*, predicts that by 2025, 90% of online content will be created using AI. Already, the surge in AI fakes is making people more sceptical of genuine content, which can have disastrous consequences when it comes to how people view current events like wars. 'The spectre of deepfakes is much, much more significant now,' Hany Farid, an expert in digital forensics, AI and misinformation, told the *New York Times*. 'It doesn't take tens of thousands, it just takes a few, and then you poison the well and everything becomes suspect.'



The challenge is whether regulation can keep up with the pace of technology. The EU's AI ACT has been in the works for four years and final negotiations only wrapped up in November. For tech companies and platforms, the big question is whether it's enough to simply flag that an image has been created using AI, as TikTok requires users to do. Do users need to be able to see the provenance of each image? There's little consensus about the best way to stop people using AI-generated content for nefarious purposes.

So, should we be apprehensive about what the future holds when it comes to synthetic media? Yes, says Tom Graham of Metaphysic. 'We build this stuff and I'm worried,' he said in a TED Talk earlier this year. 'Worried is the right instinct for everyone to have.'

But if tech companies can build better processes to help verify authentic media, perhaps the worry can fade and marketers can unequivocally embrace the creative opportunities this fake new world offers. 🌈

Brand partnerships and the big screen /

Movie and brand partnerships, especially with toy and video game adaptations, are on an upward trend. This is evident in hits like *Barbie* and *Super Mario Bros*, and signal substantial co-marketing opportunities ahead

Brand and movie partnerships are on an upward trend. This type of marketing is one of the fastest growing marketing tactics, and it's one that has exploded alongside the movie industry this year. This is especially true in the case of movie adaptations of popular toys and video games.

Case in point, *Barbie* was the highest grossing movie of the year, and in second place was

the *Super Mario Bros* movie. Both movies were adaptations of toys/video games, and both brought in over \$1bn each.

Barbie partnered with over 100 brands before the movie was even released, and the success these brands saw should not be ignored. One example of this was Béis, the luggage brand by Shay Mitchell, who released a timely collection of Barbie pink suitcases that sold out within the first five days.



Super Mario Bros Movie Partnerships



Built-in fan bases

These types of movies (and in-turn the brands they partner with), are doing so well, because they come with a massive built-in fan base, comparable to major sporting events. To put things in perspective, 113 million people tuned into the Super Bowl this year, and half as many people (41 million), saw the *Barbie* movie.

So, just like the Super Bowl, the brand partners involved experienced similar levels of audience exposure.

That's how these upcoming, big-named movie adaptations should be looked at by brands in the next coming years – that they are the ‘Super Bowls’ of the big-screen, and they present a massive marketing opportunity to reach some of the largest audience groups world-wide.

Brands, find your next Barbie movie

Brands must prepare themselves for what's ahead, like the 40+ films Mattel plans to release in the coming years.

Now do all movie and brand partnerships make sense? No. Some brand collaborations like Johnnie Walker Whisky and *Blade Runner 2049* were seen as forced, and didn't make much sense in terms of their relative audiences. That's why the key thing to consider, before any collaboration, is audience synergy.

Movie and brand synergy

Audience synergy, or audience affinity as some call it, helps define if a brand resonates with the audience of any movie, show, actor, artist, influencer, etc. It is a key data point that can separate successful brand partnerships from the unsuccessful ones.

Audience intelligence tools can fill that gap, and can tell brands how much more likely a movie's audience is already interested in their own brand. For example, using audience intelligence one can assess two upcoming Mattel movies, and the brand with the highest synergy with each audience:

- The HotWheels audience has the highest affinity to the brand Doritos
- The American Doll audience has the highest affinity to the Crayola brand

These data points signal profitable brand partnerships.

It's game-on for video game adaptations

Gamers now make up 57% of the US population, and video-game adaptations are seeing huge box office turnouts to prove it.

And just like Mattel, which hopes to roll out over 40+ movies, the gaming industry is taking notice and is set to release a long list of adaptations in the next couple of years, including *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, coming out December 2024.

‘The key thing to consider, before any collaboration, is audience synergy’

Brand's considering partnerships can look at the audiences these games already attract, to predict the type of audience their movies will get.

Some partnerships within this space might not be as obvious, but even if there doesn't seem to be a correlation between a brand and a gaming audience at first, it doesn't mean it's off the table — it just means further audience analysis must be done.

Lush, Truff, Shake Shack and Red Wing, all seemingly unrelated brands, saw successful partnership deals with the Super Mario Bros movie, because the audience synergy and exposure was there.

Don't sleep on book adaptations

Book adaptations are also bringing gaming-sized audiences together, and while we are not seeing them garner as many partnerships as the *Barbie* movie per say, we are seeing brands get really creative with them.

Spotify, for example, has partnered with the newest *Hunger Games* movie, to explore

the musical history of the film, and to feature new soundtracks of the ‘Sounds of Panem’ on the Spotify app.

Although this brand partnership might not seem obvious, brands are getting more and more creative in inserting themselves into the buzz around an upcoming film.

Spotify chose to focus on one element of the film (the music), that would relate to their own audience and it has generated a lot of positive promotion thus far.

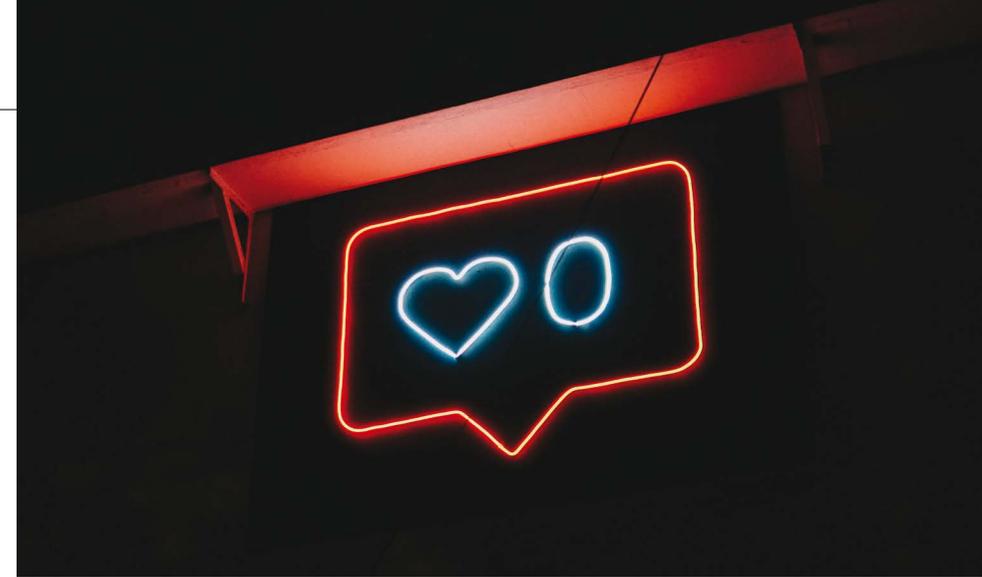
Find the synergy and join the buzz

Some brand partnerships make more sense than others, but the opportunities to find the right brand partnership fit within the movie industry is only growing. With box office turnouts now being just as big as some of the largest world-wide sporting events, brands have endless opportunities to assess the audience synergy and jump on the bandwagon of some of the hottest movie adaptations of the year.

Interested in uncovering potential partnerships of your own? Check our [Audiense!](#)

The end of 'social' media?

It's been a turbulent year for social media. Contagious online editor James Swift takes stock of what is happening to everyone's favourite way to kill time



The state of Western social media was one of the most-discussed topics in tech in 2023, and writer Cory Doctorow set the tone early in January with his blog post about 'enshittification'.

Enshittification, he wrote, is how platforms die. 'First, they are good to their users; then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves.'

Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok have all succumbed to enshittification to one degree or another, argued Doctorow, and now rely on network effects to keep users coming back to a diminished experience.

Doctorow is one of the more militant critics of big tech, but his post evidently captured how a lot of people had come to feel about social media — that it was clogged with ads and influencer posts and devoid of any real social interaction. And that was before X really began to decline under Elon Musk. By the end of the summer, the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, and

Bloomberg had all published articles about whether social media had peaked.

A new subs standard

To some extent, Doctorow is right. Companies that operate two-sided markets where users cannot leave without incurring some social or financial cost will eventually exploit that dynamic for their own gain. That's just capitalism. But rapaciousness only gets you part of the way to explaining why social media now seems like such a different place.

Some of what is happening is the result of simple economics. Social media platforms were built and funded on the premise of unfettered growth, and that may no longer be possible.

According to Insider Intelligence, the growth of new social media users will slow to 2.4% in 2023. And while the pandemic may have briefly fooled us into thinking otherwise, there is only so much time that users want to spend on the platforms.

Research company GWI reported that the average amount of time people spent on social

media in 2023 was two hours and 26 minutes per day — lower than what it was in 2019, before the pandemic. There were still pockets of growth in certain countries (most notably, the US), among specific demographics (baby boomers) and for individual platforms (chiefly TikTok), but GWI concludes that, overall, 'time spent on social media has reached a ceiling'.

When social media platforms can no longer commandeer more of their users' time, they must instead make the time that they have more profitable by showing them more ads, and Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have all done that. But there's a snag here, too. Apple's App Tracking Transparency protocol has hampered the platforms' ability to track people, dragging down the effectiveness and value of their ads.

To close that shortfall, social media apps need new ways to make money. An across-the-board paywall isn't an option because the platforms still need scale to make sense. So instead, they're experimenting with subscription services for users that need them the most.

Meta's new Meta Verified service, for

example, offers users a verified account and perhaps [Meta was cagey about it when we asked] the ability to reach more people with their posts. X has also introduced a membership tier that promises 'prioritised rankings in conversations and search'. Snap introduced something similar with Snapchat+ in 2022.

Only a relatively small number of social media users will likely cough up for these perks. Snap reported in September that 5 million people had subscribed to Snapchat+, less than 1% of its total monthly user base. Nonetheless, the introduction of subscriptions that stratify users is significant.

The 'grand bargain' of social media, says analyst Eric Seufert, has always been that users got, in return for being shown personalised ads, free and equal access to the platforms. For better or worse, this gave everyone the same voice and opportunity to build an audience, and distinguished social platforms from legacy media. By giving more and better access to those willing to pay, platforms are undoing that bargain, essentially inviting influencers and brands to take over their feeds.

Back chat

Not that casual users seem all that desperate to reclaim the feed for themselves. Lots of people say they miss the anarchic charm of early social media but few seem to want to recreate it. After two decades of social media, the thrill of posting has worn thin. For the average user, there are now just too few incentives to share their thoughts with the world, and quite a lot of reasons not to.

We can't find any data that proves people are posting less, but Adam Mosseri, head of Instagram, confirmed it was the case for his platform when he told Harry Stebbings in an interview for the 20VC podcast in July that, 'your friends don't post that much to feed'.

Young people especially seem to prefer to chat in message apps, and platforms recognise that. 'Most of the new features being developed by these platforms tend to revolve around private sharing,' Matt Navarra, a social media consultant, told us earlier this year.

The other thing people like to do is scroll short-form videos. The format pioneered by TikTok has now colonised most of social media — even Spotify introduced a lookalike feed in March. In some ways, the vertical video feed

is inferior to the static feed. Videos are harder to make, for one thing, which raises the bar for participation for both users and advertisers.

'Watching video also seems to put consumers in a more passive mood than scrolling a feed of friends' updates,' reports *The Economist*. Not only does this make users less likely to click on an ad, it makes them less likely to interact at all on the platform.

Who needs friends anyway

The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is an imperfect gauge of the state of a media channel, but the impression we got from this year's festival was that brands had all but given up trying to use social media as channels for sharing or discussion. By our count, the only big winner that met this criteria was #TurnYourBack for Dove, and that was a protest against the harm that social media does to young women.

It's also telling that so far no company has been able to capitalise on the widespread dissatisfaction with X under Elon Musk. Meta has come the closest with Instagram Threads, but it still doesn't have anything like the cultural clout that X had.

Bringing a social media platform up to scale on a more mature internet is no doubt more difficult. In addition, regulation is catching up with the sector. Europe's Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act came into effect in 2023, creating new obligations for how platforms treat their users and competitors, and in both the US and Europe there seems to be more resolve to take social media platforms to task over the risk they pose to young users' mental health. Under these conditions, it may be that no new app can bring the world together in one big room in the same way that X did, or encourage everyone to build a following, like Instagram.

People will always use the internet to socialise, though. One prediction is that social media will Balkanise into smaller, more heavily moderated communities, like on Reddit and Discord. That would alleviate disinformation and abuse, and it could also head off the problems we'll bump into if AI makes it impossible to spot the bots.

In the meantime, social media is still in decent financial health. According to Magna group, global social media advertising spend will increase 9.4% in 2023, to \$172bn. Meta seems to have recovered from its post pandemic slump: The company demolished analysts expectations in the third quarter by managing to both cut costs and boost revenues, increasing net income 164%. And TikTok still has youth culture in a chokehold.

For all the complaints about ads and subscriptions and influencers, the platforms that defined the social era of the internet will likely continue to dominate online media for a while yet. They just might not be very social anymore.

Things to bear in mind in the new era of social media

- The vertical video feed revolution plays into the hands of creative agencies. It's essentially just video advertising, and they already know that game. Also every platform has copied TikTok so faithfully that one size does fit all, in terms of aspect ratio, at least.
- Brands are unlikely to be accepted into private messaging channels to the same extent that they were into feeds, but there are still opportunities. Social media consultant Matt Navarra notes that savvy brands are making it as easy as possible to share their content (product shots, etc) in private channels, and experimenting with click-to-message ads.
- Social media isn't the only kind of online platform to suffer from enshittification. Google has also apparently driven away users, who are using platforms like TikTok and Reddit to find product information because the quality of information they host is relatively high. Ensure your brand can be found easily, and for the right things.
- Brands 'significantly benefit from using a creator or an influencer, either as an individual to deliver the message or working with them to create content that's going to resonate with their audiences', according to Navarra.
- Experiment with brand personalities on social media. Threads was a cacophony of brand activity in its early days, and it was frankly painful to watch so many companies all making the same jokes and using identikit internet slang. It was also a waste of effort. 🗑️

'After two decades of social media, the thrill of posting has worn thin. For the average user, there are now just too few incentives to share their thoughts with the world, and quite a lot of reasons not to'

**‘I think AI allows
us to dream. There
are no boundaries’**

Gabriel França, creative director, AKQA / Contagious IQ, July 2023



Resisting the imitation game /

Can the incredible rate of innovation in generative AI be sustained, asks Contagious strategist David Beresford, or will it be stuck in a creative rut of our own making?

It was only 12 months ago that OpenAI took the seismic decision to release ChatGPT into the wild. Since then, a number of brands have embraced the potential of large language models with varying degrees of success.

New Zealand supermarket chain Pak 'n'

Save suffered one of the more spectacular malfunctions, when its meal-planning chatbot started recommending culinary delights such as 'bleach-infused rice surprise' and 'poison bread sandwiches'. But rogue incidents have largely been the exception in a year of relentless advancement.

AI image generators such as Midjourney and DALL-E have improved at a rate of knots, with every update further blurring the boundaries of what constitutes human creativity — even prestigious competitions such as the Sony World Photography Awards are being hoodwinked by AI entrants.

The art of filmmaking is also firmly in the sights of those at the vanguard of this technological revolution. While Hollywood's actors and writers went on strike this year in a bid to future-proof their careers, the generative video startup Runway ML was hosting a competition for aspiring directors. Although

the production value of the AI-generated vignettes wasn't quite Barbenhemier level, the submissions offered a tantalising glimpse into the potential of on-demand filmmaking.

When you add these developments to the recent introduction of multimodal perception — AI models that can hear and see, as well as read — it's conceivable that we are in the final throes of the imitation game. By allowing AI systems to better simulate how humans communicate and perceive their

surroundings, we dramatically increase their chances of passing a Turing test — a threshold that many argue has already been crossed. Indeed, AI luminary Mustafa Suleyman has proposed that the benchmark for determining true AI requires a significant update. Instead of evaluating linguistic prowess through text conversations, he argues that we should now be testing AI's ability to plan and execute complex tasks with minimal human oversight.



‘We’re approaching an inflection point in the development of this technology where our limited cognitive ability may actually start to hinder its progress’

Human hindrance

That loaded phrase — minimal human oversight — looks set to become a defining feature of the next wave of artificial intelligence. We’re rapidly approaching an inflection point in the development of this technology where our limited cognitive ability may actually start to hinder its progress. While any move towards affording AI systems more autonomy might sound deranged, a substantial coterie of thought leaders, such as Meta’s chief AI scientist, Yann LeCun, argue that the existential risk posed by these models has been overstated.

That said, it’s also important to note that the brains at the forefront of AI development already don’t understand how their current models actually work. While this apparent lack of control will alarm any sci-fi fan, LeCun believes that the probability of an AI-initiated armageddon is extremely remote. In his view, ‘Intelligence has nothing to do with a desire to dominate’, if it did ‘then Albert Einstein and other scientists would have been both rich and powerful, and they were neither’. Silicon Valley grandee Marc Andreessen shares this techno-optimist perspective, arguing that the capacity of AI to enhance the health and

wealth of humanity significantly outweighs any potential for dystopian destruction.

So, how might we one day reach those sunlit uplands of universal abundance? Well, part of the journey will likely lie in our readiness to stop forcing these models into playing an imitation game. In practice, this will mean encouraging researchers to further explore the potential of ‘unsupervised learning’ — which boils down to allowing constitutional AI models to categorise elements as they see fit as opposed to adhering to our predefined labels. This approach has the advantage of sidestepping most of the unconscious bias that afflicts us mere mortals. In addition, it may also help us to strike upon solutions previously obscured by our frustratingly limited view of the universe.

As we increasingly consider our relationship with AI, it’s worth reflecting on the words of the physicist Werner Heisenberg: ‘Not only is the universe stranger than we think, it is stranger than we can think.’ A creative crossroads lies ahead. Will we insist that AI strictly follows humanity’s brand guidelines? Or will we be ready and willing to give it the freedom of a tight brief? ❧

‘Marketers have their heads buried in the sand. Liquid Death is trying to make things as cheaply and as quickly as possible because that’s how the internet is making things’

Andy Pearson, creative VP, Liquid Death / Contagious IQ, January 2023



The futures less travelled /

'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
— I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference'

ROBERT FROST, THE ROAD NOT TAKEN /

One of the world's favourite poems, *The Road not Taken*, is often read as a hymn to individuality. In truth, it's more a wry reflection on the power of storytelling.

Nevertheless, it's a poignant thought for us.

As we look to 2024 and beyond, we see a world where multiple possible futures coexist. Where it is up to each of us — brands, businesses and individuals — to design, innovate and strive for the future we want to see.

It's often said that hope is not a strategy. Perhaps not; and perhaps it is hard as we look at the world around us to remain optimistic.

Nevertheless, our report for 2024 embraces hope as a conscious and deliberate choice in a world where we can no longer afford the luxury of cynicism.

'The Futures Less Travelled' is about the ways in which consumers exert control in an uncertain world. It is about the surprising power of small acts of joy, care and optimism as acts of faith, rebellion and resistance.

It is about soft power, and about creativity as a superpower. About what happens when a generation who have grown up versed in the art of world-building meet a suite of technologies that make it easier than ever to visualise, even rehearse, extraordinary possible futures.

Most of all, it is a call to design for the future we want to see. To realise that it is not written and that we are the ones holding the pen.

The report unpacks five key trends helping customers and creators shape new futures and new possibilities, each with three important sub trends and themes housed within.

1. Ode to joy

In a world where joy can seem in short supply, it becomes more important than ever. We see joy, softness and play emerging in resistance to an uncertain and volatile world. Moments of playful surrealism emerge in response to a world in chaos. Meanwhile Self-Care emerges as an act of subversion; from the refuge of an ‘Everything Shower’ to the rise of the ‘soft life’ or ‘lazy girl jobs’, a quiet rebellion against hustle culture is underway. As adult milestones feel unattainable for many, we see the power of play in the boom in ‘Kidult’ toys and a wave of experiences merging art galleries and soft play.

2. The memes of production

We see creators reclaiming genres and formats easily underestimated as trivial or superficial as forces for change. A generation raised on world-building are taking those skills and expectations with them into adulthood, with heightened expectations of agency and autonomy. Purpose and humour are no longer seen as mutually exclusive. Like parables, fables or cartoons before them, memes and reels have emerged as a way of distilling complex ideas or into bite-sized, shareable, and endlessly repeatable formats. Be it #Fintok, #Cleantok or social justice, no topic is too complex to go viral.

3. Here we are now

Perhaps in response to a world that can feel overwhelming, perhaps in response to the cost-of-living crisis, we see a powerful engagement with all things local and home-grown, with an increased appreciation for local traditions and iconography. Personal truth is a new imperative, seen in the rising popularity of neighbourhood media and the growing importance of indigenous populations in shaping a new and more equitable travel industry. Online, the desire for a more grounded sense of our place in the world is giving rise to the idea of ‘the cosy web’ replacing vast social platforms as a safe space for more intimate online conversations.

4. The magic in the machine

As AI impresses and perturbs in equal measure, technology becomes more human and more extraordinary, unlocking unlimited potential for creative experimentation and shaping new experiences that bridge physical and virtual worlds. With ChatGPT emerging as the fastest-growing app in history, we will see not only unfettered imagination, but more practical and scalable use cases designed to enhance the customer experience. Yet despite exponential leaps forward in artificial intelligence, we see enduring power in experiences that connect technology and humanity through touch,

‘A generation raised on world-building are taking those skills and expectations with them into adulthood, with heightened expectations of agency and autonomy’

haptics, voice, gesture and beyond. Meanwhile, technologies such as Augmented Reality, Image Recognition and virtual worlds are blurring the boundaries between online and offline commerce beyond all recognition.

5. Me, myself and us

Changing demographics prompt us to reevaluate our relationship with the communities and collectives that define us. Traditionally individualist Western culture is opening up to a more collective existence, while in contrast, traditionally more collective cultures

are exploring new spaces for individuality. An increase in intergenerational living prompts a reappraisal of older generations, with fashion brands engaging mature ambassadors and the enduring popularity of #grandmillennial chic. The rise of AI also prompts us to explore the nature of our own identity, as artists, gamers and time poor individuals explore the potential of digital doppelgangers to act on their behalf.

Read the full Dentsu Creative Trends 2024 Report [HERE](#). 🎨

THE MOST CONTAGIOUS CAMPAIGNS OF THE YEAR

We've made a list, and it's got nothing to do with being naughty or nice. These are the 15 most innovative and effective campaigns of the year, according to the Contagious team



Warner Bros & Mattel / Barbie

The *Barbie* movie marketing campaign was so extensive that it transcended the film it was promoting, unleashing a Barbie movement months before it hit cinemas.

Using a breadcrumbing strategy, Warner Bros teased the film with set photos and trailers, each of which went viral. One clip, in which Margot Robbie remained tip-toed as she stepped out of her high heels, even inspired a TikTok trend.

The campaign spawned more than 100 brand deals. Pink billboards appeared in major cities, Barbie showed up at Pride events, and partnerships with brands across numerous categories resulted in Barbie-themed toothbrushes, burgers, and even a real-life Barbie Malibu DreamHouse listed on Airbnb.

The film earned more than \$1.4bn at the global box office (the most commercially successful film by a female director), and Mattel reportedly has another 45 toy-based films in development. It now has a pretty good idea about how to market them, too.



Ikea / Proudly Second Best / David Madrid & INGO Hamburg

Ikea in the Middle East took a creative gamble with a campaign that showed its baby products being neglected — and it paid off handsomely.

In a series of ads, Ikea presented heartwarming parenting situations, like a baby snoozing on its mother's chest instead of in its fully kitted Ikea cot, where the brand was happy for its furniture to be 'second best'.

The campaign demonstrated Ikea's humility in understanding the role that the brand plays — or sometimes doesn't play — in parents' lives. Not only did this strategic self-deprecation make Ikea seem more relatable, it also built emotion into Ikea's brand, by focusing on the bond between parents and their children instead of the mundane utility of its products. This exemplary use of the pratfall effect saw the campaign rewarded with Gold in the Film category at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in June.



Apple / Relax, It's iPhone / In house

In two 40-second spots, Apple's Relax It's iPhone campaign showed that product demos don't have to be stale.

The ads captured relatable moments of interaction between humans and their iPhones, like sending a text you immediately regret or shakily recording a video of your kid playing sports, to promote features like 'Unsend iMessage' and the motion-smoothing Action Mode.

Using humour to convey products' usefulness and reliability proved a winning strategy for Apple — the RIP Leon spot (the one about sending a text you regret) won a Film Grand Prix at Cannes this year. Apple has used the same strategy of emotive product demos to address topics like disability, too: The Greatest, a delightful celebratory ad that showcases Apple's accessibility features, earned a Grand Prix in Entertainment Lions for Music at Cannes this year.



M&M's / Spokescandies on Pause / BBDO, New York

When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. And when life gives you right-wing outrage, you milk it for all the publicity that it's worth.

In 2022 the then Fox News pundit Tucker Carlson took up a crusade against M&M's after the candy brand redesigned its spokescandies to be more inclusive, decrying the change as evidence of woke hegemony.

Seemingly capitulating to the media storm, M&M's announced in January that it was putting its spokescandies 'on pause' and replacing them with comedian Maya Rudolph. The spokescandies had existed for 70 years and the brand's statement became a big news item — even the BBC covered it.

But it was all a feint. The spokescandies returned (along with Rudolph) in the brand's Super Bowl ad just weeks later. It wasn't exactly innovative, but it was brilliantly opportunistic and brilliantly effective.

MOST CONTAGIOUS CAMPAIGNS 2023



Fiat / Operation No Grey / Leo Burnett, Turin

You've seen one car ad, you've seen them all. At least, that's what we were starting to think until Fiat dunked its CEO into a giant vat of orange paint. The epic stunt was shot for real at a suitably vibrant Italian piazza and symbolised the manufacturer's promise to live up to its dolce vita values by no longer selling its cars in grey — despite it being the most popular colour in many markets.

Rather than compete on the fine margins of specs, Fiat is splurging out on a distinctive point of view and backing it up with action. As Leo Burnett Italy's ECD, Francesco Martini, told us, it's vital to 'remind everybody why you are there, the meaning of your brand, the values of your brand, and why you are important for people'.



Heinz / Ketchup Fraud / Rethink, Toronto

Rethink's Ketchup Fraud campaign for Heinz was both unorthodox and textbook. It was unorthodox because the posters of restaurateurs sneakily filling Heinz ketchup containers with cheaper alternatives showed the brand's product looking kind of sad and grubby, and being misused rather than enjoyed. But it was textbook because it grabbed people's attention and told a vivid story about the desirability of the brand in an instant. And even though the images were staged, the campaign was true to life — not long before it came out, a photo had circulated on social media of a Nando's worker apparently putting an off-brand sauce in a Heinz bottle. The idea was strategic, to boot, aligning with Heinz's long-term goal to reinforce its product's iconic status in culture. There's no question, Ketchup Fraud was the real deal.



Mastercard / Where to Settle / McCann, Warsaw

Mastercard has previously demonstrated that it's a master of financial inclusion with campaigns such as True Name, Touch Card and Roadside Market. And the financial services company buttressed this reputation further in 2023 by creating the Where to Settle app, which helped the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Poland find places to live and work in smaller towns, easing the strain on already overcrowded cities, and showing individuals and families where they're most likely to thrive.

Where to Settle was a potent expression of Mastercard's commitment to 'data for good', leveraging its vast network to help a vulnerable community, and it also provided a positive news story amid the dread of war. As an example of brands acting as NGOs, it doesn't get much better than this.



Romanian National Association of Travel Agents, The Society of Esthetic Dentistry in Romania / Romania, the Most Beautiful Dental Clinic in the World / McCann, Romania

The Romanian National Association of Travel Agents and the Society of Esthetic Dentistry in Romania teamed up to make hay with the fact that people in the UK were seeking dental treatment in the country due to the post-pandemic NHS dentist shortage. The organisations offered packages that combined excursions to Romania's cultural sites with a trip to the dentist, giving tourists a reason to extend their trip when they're considering visiting Romania for dental care. The customisable packages also provided Romania's tourism industry with a unique way to promote the country, which stood out and helped garner attention, all the while helping to alleviate NHS waiting lists in the UK. A win for everyone.



Dove / Cost of Beauty / Ogilvy, London & Toronto

One striking thing about the Cost of Beauty is that it uses real footage of Mary, a teenage girl who survived an eating disorder triggered by what she saw on social media.

Everything is documented now, explains Ogilvy's Daniel Fisher, which meant the agency had access to intimate moments throughout Mary's adolescence — from unwrapping her first smartphone to recovering at an eating disorder clinic.

From a human perspective, Cost of Beauty is a shocking reminder of how damaging social media can be for children's self-esteem.

From a marketing perspective, the campaign is a model for how to evolve and build upon a long-term cause or positioning. From the Campaign for Real Beauty to now, Dove has been in this game for over 20 years, yet continues to find relevant ways to act out its brand purpose.

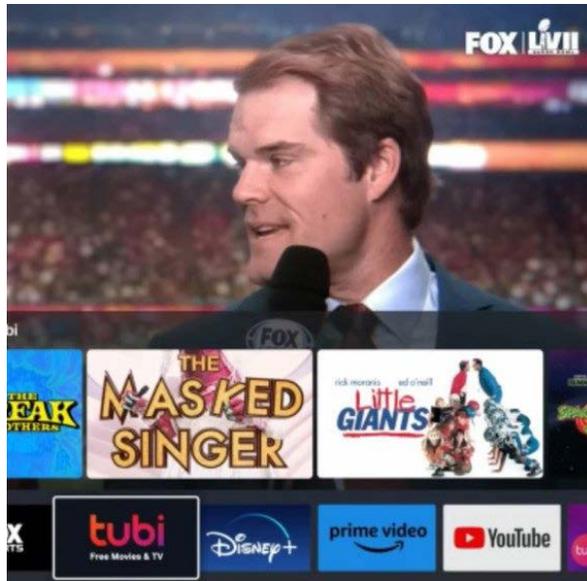


Carrefour / #Shrinkflation / In house

By affixing labels on products that had shrunk in size but increased in price, French supermarket Carrefour provided shoppers with useful information and showed it was on their side during a difficult economic time.

The initiative was noteworthy first and foremost because it was a practically unheard of step for a supermarket to take against its suppliers. But it also empowered consumers to make better decisions, and encouraged transparency and fair pricing in the industry. At the same time, the absence of shrinkflation labels on Carrefour's own-brand products deftly communicates that the retailer offers customers good value.

Overall, the campaign's simplicity is its strength, effectively conveying the message that, in times of inflation, Carrefour has picked its side, and it's with the people.



Tubi / Interface Interruption / Mischief@NoFixedAddress

Streaming platform Tubi ensured that it left its mark on this year's Super Bowl by pulling the ultimate disruptive stunt.

The score was tied and there were five minutes left in the game as an ad break appeared to end and coverage returned to two Fox News sportscasters. But then, TV's across America suddenly started to scroll through the menu tab, select Tubi and start playing the movie *Mr & Mrs Smith*. People panicked, thinking someone had sat on the remote, when in reality they were just watching the last spot of the ad break.

The stunt led to a 1,196% increase in social conversation around Tubi and became the #4 trending topic on X (then Twitter). Interface Interruption not only increased Tubi's brand recognition, it stood out as fresh and attention-grabbing among a packed crowd of streaming services in the market.



Dat Bike / Charging Billboards / Happiness Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City

Creative media placements can be incredibly effective. Using everyday objects to carry marketing messages is especially good for strengthening brand associations and encouraging people to share ads online, according to a meta analysis published in April.

One of our favourite examples of a creative media placement this year came from a Vietnamese e-motorbike manufacturer. Keen to shift misconceptions about the lack of charging stations, Dat Bike created little ads and stuck them next to regular electrical outlets in businesses around Ho Chi Minh City, to let people know that they could use any old socket to charge their bike. One of the weaknesses with creative media advertising, according to the meta analysis, is that people are more likely to connect them with the product category than the brand. But since Dat Bike was addressing a category issue, that wasn't a problem here — a textbook example for any researchers studying creative media placements.



Orange / Bleues' Highlights / Marcel, Paris

Brands must tread a line finer than frog fur if they want to successfully pull off any sort of prank or act of deception. Strike the wrong tone or fail to deliver a satisfying payoff and people will turn on you faster than you can tweet 'unfortunately we missed the mark on this occasion'. Advertising just doesn't carry enough social utility to get away with wasting people's time or gratuitously toying with their emotions.

All of which made Orange's Bleues' Highlights campaign so impressive. Not only was the ruse of digitally overlaying male football players bodies onto highlights from the women's game skillfully done, it delivered a point about people's prejudices that was worth making.

‘Brands have to sell their products, but if even just once a year, you remind everybody why you are there, the meaning of your brand, the values of your brand, and why you are important for people — that is valuable’

Francesco Martini, executive creative director, Leo Burnett Italy / Contagious IQ, August 2023



The Next Five Years /

Omnicom Media Group's global head of strategic engagement, Chris Stephenson, shares his lessons for today from the future of media

At Most Contagious, Omnicom Media Group's global head of strategic engagement, Chris Stephenson, presented the company's exclusive research — created in partnership with WARC — that showcased projections for how much time people around the world will spend with different media over the next five years.

He told the crowd, who had gathered in London on 7 December to learn about the most important brands and marketing trends of the year: 'We live in changing times, we live in complicated times. Prediction is hard, projection is hard. We have no map for where we're going in the future. But we can hone our compass, and we're going to hone a compass to navigate, not just where we're going, but how we get there, as well.'

The research, said Stephenson, was 'based on audiences, channels, behaviours, commercial investment and effectiveness', and OMG and WARC took a deliberately broad and macro view, limited by the available tracked data over time. The data that Stephenson presented began in 2013 and included pro-

jections all the way up to 2028, and took in social media, linear video (TV), broadcast radio, printed news and magazines, online print, gaming (consoles) and streaming video. (It's worth noting that console gaming only accounts for roughly a third of all gaming time-spent.)

In 2016, social media overtook linear video, with projections showing that linear video will be overtaken by streamed video in 2025 and by music streaming in 2026. 'By 2028, digitally served media will account for 78% of all time-spent globally,' said Stephenson.

After providing a view on the media landscape, Stephenson moved on to outline the parallel story concerning the online tools that the marketing industry uses to track where people are spending their time. The headlines on the topic so far have all been about the deprecation of certain signals, like cookies and the device identifiers used by Apple and Alphabet, but these were wrong, contended Stephenson. The story is not so much one of deprecation as it is one of the diversification, he elaborated.



The expectation is that these new signals are going to be based increasingly around people's interests and affinities. He added: 'Those signals are going to exist in a much more evolved, mature digital ecosystem. That's going to give us a whole lot more flexibility in terms of how we identify and think about audiences.'

Stephenson picked out Reddit, Discord and Twitch as the kinds of platforms that are already connecting with these affinity audiences.

Over the next five years, the digitally-led

media landscape will also open up new opportunities around the kinds of assets brands use. For example, said Stephenson, Amazon debuted a new American football event on Black Friday (24 November), exclusively on its Prime subscription service. 'We saw the creation of a new shopping moment, a retail moment and the human moment. And this idea that, once we reach digital maturity — and we're rapidly approaching digital maturity — you get converged assets, layered assets and streaming media.'

To underscore the point of the creative

opportunities of 'media crashing together', he highlighted the Phone it In campaign from Skinny, whereby the New Zealand telco used cheeky OOH ads to encourage people to call a number and record a voiceover for a radio ad for the brand. 'The bigger and broader media is getting, the more converged, the more concentrated, the more layered our assets can be.'

He finished on the topic elevated experiences and the importance of focusing on journey architecture. While there's a lot of focus in terms of investing in things that can

automate and speed up and scale marketing, such as generative AI origination, decision science and creative engineering), marketers really need to 'understand in this digitally mature experience ecosystem exactly where we want to be, who we want to engage, and how we want to engage with a huge precision focus in the next five years'.

Stephenson concluded: 'I haven't got a map, but I hope we've been able to hone our compass just a little bit. I'm excited about where we're going to go, and I'm excited about what we could do together.' 🍷

Insight & Strategy

McDonald's, Raise Your Arches /

The brains behind McDonald's eminently rewatchable 'eyebrows' ad explain how it was designed to build back brand love with UK consumers

The Golden Arches are instantly recognisable the world over, and this gives McDonald's a unique opportunity to playfully flex its distinctive assets in a way few other brands can. For its Raise Your Arches ad in the UK, the fast food giant found fresh fun in its iconic logo, with a white-collar worker mobilising her entire office building into charging out for lunch by simply raising her eyebrows in a gesture suggestive of the Golden Arches. Shot with humorous verve by acclaimed British director Edgar Wright, the ad is bouncily backed by the beat of Yello's 'Oh Yeah'.

The integrated campaign, created by agency Leo Burnett, London, was led by social and teased on 10 January with an Instagram post of McDonald's Golden Arches logo animated to appear as eyebrows. The QSR chain also created a Snapchat filter and Instagram lens that automatically raised users' eyebrow to the soundtrack of the ad.

To find out more about the insights behind this campaign, Contagious spoke with Leo Burnett's head of planning, Tom Sussman, and strategy director Joe Beveridge.



What is the agency's history with McDonald's UK?

Tom Sussman: The relationship is 35 years old, which is pretty extraordinary and rare in British advertising. We renewed our vows with McDonald's about 15 years ago, this was in the mid-noughties when there was a massive catastrophe in terms of McDonald's marketing and business performance — basically what a PR professional might call a complete and utter shitstorm.

What was the shitstorm?

Sussman: There was a sea change happening in the way that people and culture looked at the healthiness and provenance of their food. All that was typified for McDonald's by the documentary Super Size Me and the book Fast Food Nation, which was adapted into a movie. For the first time ever since McDonald's arrived in the UK in 1974, sales and customer visits started plateauing. The reason why McDonald's wasn't very well insulated when Super Size Me blew up is that largely its ad spend was between two buckets of work — limited offers and then price and value. All of which helps sell the food, but there wasn't a lot of brand building activity. So suddenly there was a problem and we all needed to come together. From that day, Leo Burnett and McDonald's bonded together around a new strategy and our 'Increasingly Famous' pillar model that made the case for a proper brand building.' strategy.

Who is the target audience of McDonald's in the UK?

Sussman: McDonald's UK has a very different approach to the US in terms of audience. The US's business problem was that the brand wasn't appealing to young people. What we need is for everybody to love us. Our problem was pangenerational, and therefore our solution has to be too — so we're going after everybody and trying to show an equitable representation of

the British public rather than just one demographic.

How has McDonald's approach to building affinity changed and how did that influence this creative brief?

Joe Beveridge: The platform that we'd been using for a decade, 'Everyone has a McDonald's in common,' was starting to lose its punch over time and was out of step with the mood of the nation. In the past three years we've created two pieces of work under 'Fancy a McDonald's' that came out before Raise Your Arches, one called Laughter and the other Me Time. Both of those were fine, but we were still trying to find magic in that old platform insight.

What was the brief for this campaign?

Beveridge: Every year until now our brief was to reimagine that platform, but as McDonald's affinity love scores had been flatlining, this year, the brief was, 'How do we reinvent it to find fresh meaning and emotion in the McDonald's brand?'

Tell us about the insights behind the campaign.

Beveridge: There were two big insights that led to where we got to creatively. For the first, we did a huge amount of ethnography research and discovered that the suggestion of a McDonald's was more meaningful than the McDonald's itself. In a world of pressure and responsibility, the invitation to get a McDonald's was an invitation for a release and to do what felt good — a 'sod it' moment where you say, 'Let's do what's fun rather than what we think we should be doing'. The second was more of a creatively led insight as we started to explore that suggestion, and what we found were all these behaviours that surrounded the suggestion of McDonald's. A lot of which were unsaid: a nod, a tug on the coat or an emoji.

Sussman: Raise Your Arches had to have both of those insights to be a great ad.

'We're more interested in getting people's emotions going than we are in beating them over the head with our commercial intent'

Tom Sussman, Leo Burnett

Were these insights any different than what McDonald's UK typically uses within its advertising?

Sussman: We try to find the universal in the specific, then tell that insight in such a way that everyone can identify with it. The Beatles didn't sing 'Hey, Everyone', it's 'Hey, Jude'. It's spoken to one person and everyone sees and feels something different in it. When McDonald's is at its best, we try to find the universal in the specific, too. The reason why it has caught so many people's imaginations is that we didn't finish the thought. We left a little gap for people to interpret the insight themselves, and the bigger you make that gap, the more you get people's imaginations going. It's the hallmark of great insight: a revelation that's hiding in plain sight. It's like with a good joke, you don't want

the set-up to be so obvious that it gives away the punchline, otherwise there's nothing satisfying in it. We've found the sweet spot with Raise Your Arches and I'm convinced that's why this campaign has hit a nerve, because everyone has grabbed a different part of it and thinks that's the truth behind it.

What was the media plan in place?

Beveridge: Raise Your Arches was a massive 360 campaign and went far beyond the TV spot. With an idea like this, there's so much you could do with it, but we wanted to focus on the right stuff, so we had five key things that we wanted to do really well. First was the tease phase, called Tease the Arches, where we changed our logo to the raising eyebrows version.

Sussman: We talked long and hard about the logo

change because we knew we could do that and not necessarily be clear about what the hell we were doing. There's probably only so much teasing people want from a brand so we had to be careful to only do that for a short period of time. But doing that certainly did cause a bit of a stir.

Beveridge: Next was Land the Arches, that was the paid media and scaled TV part to create a moment in culture. Then, Spreading the Arches, which was the social and influencer part of the campaign where we were really keen for this behaviour to spread and catch fire from the bottom up. The influencers' job was to model the behaviour of social and encourage others to join in — there was quite a lot of spend behind that part of the campaign. Reward the Arches was a promotion on our app and you were rewarded if you Raised Your Arches. Finally, Flow the Arches was all about flowing the experience through into restaurants and kiosks.

Was Raise Your Arches designed to be launched in multiple markets?

Sussman: We never designed it to be global. The way that McDonald's works is that there are some global ads, but more often than not agencies just design for the local market and make McDonald's feel a part of your local culture — which is what we were attempting to do with Raise Your Arches. But we hit on a pair of insights that were so universal and so translatable without language, Raise Your Arches was picked up everywhere and is growing all the time. Some countries are going to run with it as is, but some have remade it. The Middle East has remade the ad and it's an absolute joy. It raises questions for us a little for the future, obviously Leo Burnett will continue to do what we need for the British market, that comes first and is the most important thing. I'm interested to see which insights we develop for the UK [that] also travel as we don't have a formula for it.



Why did you opt for such subtle branding in the ad?

Sussman: As we've gained people's trust and love, we've been able to say less and less — basically we're confident enough to be more and more minimal. The more transactional you make an ad and the clearer that it's from a brand, the less emotional it is. And to become more emotional, the less product focused, branded, transactional or commercial the creative has to be. You can't activate both sides of the brain at once, you have to do just one job really well. We're more interested in getting people's emotions going than we are in beating them over the head with our commercial intent. That's not just a formula McDonald's has used. If you look at anyone who's done great emotional advertising in the past 10 years, that's the model. Whether it's John Lewis or Nike, they serve up a little emotional sample of the brand and then reveal at the end what's going on — McDonald's is no different than that. But also, we've started talking about HFSS and what that's going to mean for McDonald's when it arrives. It will most likely mean not showing our food or our restaurants in our advertising, so McDonald's having to behave more as the brand that it really is — which is something much bigger both in terms of its cultural meaning and actually what we do in the world than selling our core food items.

What was your greatest learning from the campaign?

Sussman: You're always taught to be single minded. But actually, there's two insights in this campaign that we couldn't have done it without. That was a new one for me. 🍷



Insight &
Strategy

Hilton, #HiltonForTheStay

Why legacy hospitality company Hilton launched a 10-minute TikTok to reinforce its brand positioning and earn cultural relevance



Premium hotel group Hilton went against the short and snappy social media grain with a 10-minute ad on TikTok, called #HiltonForTheStay, starring heiress (and great granddaughter of the group's founder, Conrad Hilton) Paris Hilton.

The ad opens with the model and former reality TV star asking, 'Would you watch a 10-minute TikTok?', prompting influencer Chris Olsen to quip, 'No'. Paris then goes on to explain that anyone who makes it to the end of the video will be in with a chance of winning Hilton Honors Points, experiences, 'swag and more'.

The ad, created by TBWA\Chiat\Day New York (Hilton's agency since 2017), splices together skits, reaction videos and sketches from well-known TikTok creators including American Baron, Bomanizer and Girl Boss Town, all edited and performed in the creators' own characteristic style. Each video hints at the benefits of staying at a Hilton hotel, such as the quality of customer service, the menu and the beds. The ad follows the launch of Hilton's first global brand platform, Hilton. For the Stay, in July 2022.

Hilton's CMO, Mark Weinstein, and TBWA\Chiat\Day's CSO and CCO, James Sowden and Amy Ferguson spoke to Contagious about the hotel group's challenge of rebuilding its cultural awareness.

MOST CONTAGIOUS CAMPAIGNS 2023

Tell us about Hilton. For the Stay.

Mark Weinstein: In a world that wants you to just keep going and moving at all times, we're saying: 'Wait, just catch your breath, stop, come into our hotel and we'll take care of you' — that was missing from the narrative. We partnered with TBWA, who have this great disruption methodology that looks at the tension between what your competitors are doing and what you're doing. We saw a chance to tell our story differently.

Hilton encompasses so many different brands — is there a typical Hilton customer?

Weinstein: If you look at our portfolio of brands, our

goal is to serve a customer for every travel budget, need and occasion. Each of our 19 brands has its own target customer, but what's often happening is you're modulating across our brands for your travel needs. So you can have a great business meeting at a Hilton somewhere in a city centre or at an airport hotel, or you're going to a Waldorf Astoria for a great wedding experience, or your kid's football tour is taking you to a Hampton Inn. How do we make sure we tell people that each of our brands wins their category and means something important, but also that being part of Hilton means that you get the benefits of our vision for travel, the stay itself, the benefits of Hilton Honors and the perks that come with it? We need to win each category one by one, we need Hampton to be seen

as differentiated from Premier Inn, for example, in the UK, but also [show] that Hilton is something more powerful than just Hampton by itself. We think about the brands as all united by Hilton Honors and the promise that comes with Hilton.

Who are your key competitors?

Weinstein: I could rattle off a list of brands but I actually think the biggest competitor is complacency — not leaving your house — or commoditisation, which is, 'It's just about a trip and it doesn't matter how I choose to stay'. We think that is the bigger message to land in the space. Plenty of people have had great stays without having great trips. I've never heard of a great trip without a great stay.



'When a brand [...] changes how influencers talk, it's cringe, it doesn't work'

Amy Ferguson, TBWA\Chiat\Day

What role does the loyalty programme play in driving preference for Hilton?

Weinstein: If you go back to when we were founded, it was a frequent guest programme designed to engage the most frequent travellers along the way. I came in about 12 years ago and we were at about 25 million members filling about 45% of our hotel rooms. Now we're up to 150 million members that are driving upwards of 63% of all of our rooms full. And that's no accident — we realised that you have to become a club for all travellers. We're on this journey to make sure every one of our travellers sees more value. Hilton Honors is free to join and in exchange for knowing who you are, we can personalise the journey, we can make it more rewarding, we can upgrade your room, we can provide free wifi. It's about having the right combination of rational benefits and heart benefits. Hilton Honors is a marketing device that helps us connect the narrative of these 19 brands together. It's a shortcut for telling that story. We can unlock more value because we know that you're a highly engaged customer, whether that's one stay a year or 30 stays a year. It's really the glue that holds us together, and as a result, we've become the fastest-growing loyalty programme in travel. We added 50 million members in the three years that were the worst years for travel, during the pandemic. We came out stronger than we went in because of how we took care of our members during that moment.

What's your brand challenge?

Weinstein: We have a brand that's very much rooted in the cultural zeitgeist. Look at where we came from — Conrad Hilton hosted the first Grammys at the Beverly Hilton, John and Yoko did Bed-ins for Peace at the Hilton Amsterdam, and Elvis was doing residencies at [Hilton] hotels. Somewhere along the way, in trying to become more approachable and accessible, we lost a little bit of our cultural zeitgeist. And so part of how we're trying to get back into the



conversation is [showing up in culture]. We have a brand that's the number-one recognised brand in hospitality. It's not a brand awareness problem. We are showing up in culture through things like working with Paris Hilton, or [McLaren F1 driver] Lando Norris, or with the Grammys. And with the TikTok ad, instead of watching for 20 seconds, we had the audacity to make it 10 times as long and have viewership that's significantly higher. It's all about making sure that people remember to travel, and remember that it matters where you stay when you choose to travel.

What were the business objectives?

James Sowden: We had a very clear brief: to make waves in culture. There's an enduring brief on this platform, which is to evidence how we are For The Stay. That is very exciting for an agency, because it gives you a huge scope. We want to show up in culture more and more. And so engagement and buzz and cultural momentum is really important. The core of this brief is to use a platform that is incredibly ephemeral in a way that evidences that we stand For The Stay.

Why was TikTok the right platform for this campaign?

Sowden: This is a small part of a much bigger advertising campaign that is incredibly well constructed, and each element drives awareness and consideration in a slightly different way and pushes through to a platform that drives booking. So in TikTok, specifically, it's really about creating conversations so that we can lift salience, because salience is a leading indicator for all of those other metrics.

Did it take any convincing to buck the trend and make a 10-minute TikTok?

Amy Ferguson: Obviously, it's audacious to make a 10-minute TikTok, when best practice is short, short, short, but in a way that's at the core of what we do — everybody's doing this, let's disrupt and do the other thing.

Weinstein: By having a platform, it makes each piece of work less risky, because it's not trying to carry the entire campaign, it's a 360 approach on a multi-year journey, so each piece can advance the narrative. When you're trying to do one perfect commercial, not a platform, it is a big risk to get it right. When you have a narrative to tell, some things will be okay and some things will be spectacularly brilliant.

How much freedom did you give the creators?

Ferguson: We worked closely with them, but a mistake that a lot of brands make when it comes to creating content like that is trying to control it too much. There's a balance. We want it to be Hilton-branded and we want Hilton to get credit but at the same time, when a brand comes into that space and changes how influencers talk, it's cringe, it doesn't work. That was what was so nice about this, it felt authentic to the space and authentic to those voices. And we found jokes, and we found ways in that made sense for those influencers and for what they do.



How did you roll out the campaign?

Weinstein: There were media dollars to amplify it, but the pickup and the engagement is coming from people seeing it in the native channel and reacting to it there. The point is, if you want to disrupt the platform, you've got to do it in the platform.

There's a sense that a preoccupation with purpose has made advertisers lose touch with fun. It's refreshing to see a brand lead with humour.

Weinstein: Sometimes the seriousness reflects the lack of a genuine purpose. Sometimes [brands are] trying so hard to convey a purpose and [don't] necessarily have one and the tone is tropey, everything's very sombre. We feel genuinely confident and have been saying the same thing for 100-plus years, that we believe in the transformative power of travel, so we don't have to go over the top in such a dramatic way. We can be fun.

How are you measuring the results?

Weinstein: You can look at the views — there are 60-plus million views of all the derivative work across the board, and counting. What I'm looking at at the same time is the brand. I'm seeing an almost 11 percentage point lift and more consumers considering Hilton for leisure than before starting this journey. There have been well over 16 billion impressions of people seeing various components of the story along the way.

What was a key takeaway from this project?

Weinstein: How can you possibly break out of a sea of sameness, if you're just contributing to it? Being a little bit curious or maybe a little bit nervous, and having the confidence to lean in was a really important takeaway. At a time when people are craving travel, the message is more than ever a sea of sameness. Why wouldn't we try something different? 🌈

Economic uncertainty could help increase marketer value in 2024 /

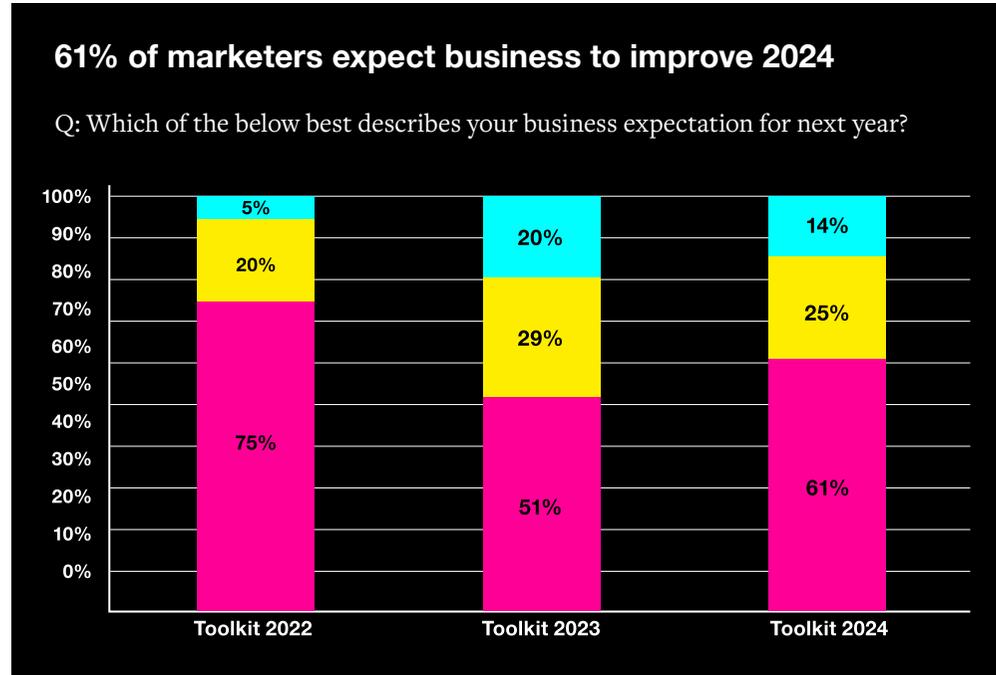
WARC insight director Aditya Kishore assesses the shifting global market and outlines the best strategies for next year

It's been a year of fluctuating economic expectations; from predictions of recession to forecasts of falling interest rates. As we drift into the peak season for macroeconomic predictions, there seems to be little consensus around the coming year.

Marketers are certainly concerned about the economy: In WARC's annual Marketer's Toolkit survey, 64% of marketers said concerns about the economy will have a significant impact on their 2024 strategies. Similarly, inflation and the cost of living are named as the top 'cause for concern'.

And yet marketers are more bullish about the coming year, with 61% holding higher business expectations for next year (compared to 2023).

This is probably because consumer spending has remained surprisingly high. It has kept the US economy out of recession, and



helped coin the term 'YOLO economy': an economy driven by consumers prioritising today over the future. While savings from Covid are likely to deplete in the coming year, there will be areas of opportunity for marketers.

We see these translating into ad spend in 2024. Thanks to events such as the Olympics and election spending, WARC expects global advertising spend to grow 8.2% in 2024, topping \$1trn for the first time.

- Worse than this year
- Same as this year
- Better than this year

Targeting the key areas of opportunity

Every year WARC releases its **Marketer's Toolkit**, a study of five key trends that will shape marketing strategies in the coming year. The purpose of the report is to identify the most important global market shifts, and provide insight into the best strategies for addressing them.

It's a rigorous four-month process, using our proprietary **GEISTE methodology** to examine global trends via six key lenses: Government, Economy, Industry, Society, Technology, Environment, and incorporating a survey of 1,400+ marketers worldwide, as well as in-depth CMO interviews. The goal is to help marketers get ahead of new, upcoming disruptions in their markets, and benefit from the opportunities they create.

The five key trends for 2024

This year, our research has identified the following trends:

I. Preparing for the age of polarisation:

With high-profile brands caught in the polarisation crossfire, there are signs of increasing timidity around engaging with social issues. Brands will benefit from having a crisis blueprint in place, since inadvertently stumbling into a controversy is far from impossible in today's minefield of social issues.

II. Unlocking the potential of Gen AI:

The emergence of generative AI holds enormous potential for advertising and marketing, but could also require significant shifts in the agency model. And it will make the media landscape murkier. Deepfakes and made-for-advertising sites will likely abound, especially with elections looming in several countries.

Brands will have to proactively take measures to avoid reputational damage.

III. Masculinity in crisis: Young men in the Western world, especially those hailing from historically marginalised backgrounds, face growing challenges with social and economic inclusion. In their search for a contemporary identity, some are being drawn to toxic role models online. It's important that brands adjust their advertising and influencer selection strategies to reflect emerging models of masculinity moving forward.

IV. Sportswashing changes the game: Sports retain a unique power to attract large, real-time audiences. That has yielded growing competition for media rights, fresh content and sponsorship opportunities, but also significant investment from controversial sources. Brands thus have more spaces to play, but face new risks.

V. Sustainability is coming home: Concerns about the climate are forcing more sustainable practices from businesses. But without generally agreed metrics and with limited visibility across supply chains, they fear accusations of greenwashing. Marketers can pivot to more local, community-based sustainability initiatives to help brands build credible consumer trust via relatable actions right in their backyards.

The 2024 Toolkit focuses specifically on 2024, and the new trends shaping strategies for the year. But of course, ongoing or 'always-on' marketing initiatives remain important, as do strategies for continuing trends we **identified last year**, such as branding and pricing during a cost-of-living crisis.

An opportunity to evolve the

role of marketing

But what does that mean for marketers? As the old quote from Sun-Tzu goes, there is opportunity in chaos. And for marketers, there is a genuine opportunity to become the eyes and ears for the business.

In times of fear and uncertainty, information and insight become even more critical tools for business decisions. Forrester **research** has found that businesses with advanced insights-driven capabilities are eight times more likely to say they grew by 20% or more.

As Grant McKenzie, chief marketing

‘In times of fear and uncertainty, information and insight become even more critical tools for business decisions’

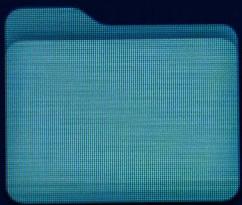
officer – Europe and International at Asahi, told us, ‘The more good data you have, the more able you are to be effective.’

Marketers sit at the top of a pile of real-time consumer data and marketing insights. Understanding emerging trends, shifts in market direction and finding the critical pools of opportunity that can help drive growth, can help shift marketing itself to a core strategic and business planning function.

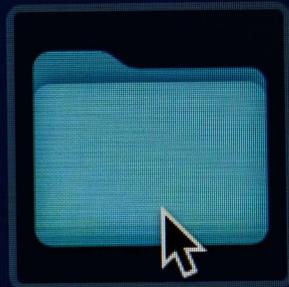
In some ways, this economic turmoil offers marketers a real opportunity to reposition themselves within their organisations. 

10 trends to watch in 2024

Tom Standage, editor of *The Economist's The World Ahead 2024*, on what to watch for



2023



2024

The world is changing at mind-boggling speed. From the situation in the Middle East to rapid progress in AI to the treatment of obesity, things look very different from the way they did just a year or two ago. You need to keep your worldview up to date — so here are ten themes to watch in the coming year.

For the first time in history, more than half the people on the planet live in countries that will hold elections in 2024, putting a spotlight on the state of democracy. But there is more to democracy than voting: many elections will be neither free nor fair.

In America, voters, and the courts, will give their verdicts on Donald Trump, who has a one-in-three chance of regaining the presidency. The result may come down to a few tens of thousands of voters in a handful of swing states. But the consequences will be global, affecting everything from climate policy to support for Ukraine.

Accordingly, Europe must step up and give Ukraine the military and economic backing needed for a long fight. This is the right thing to do — as well as insuring against the risk that Mr Trump regains power.

Hamas's attack on Israel, and Israel's retaliation against Gaza, have upended the Middle East and scotched the idea that the world could continue to ignore the Palestinians' plight. Will it become a wider regional conflict — or offer a new chance for peace?

Meanwhile, the world is preparing for more conflict now that America's 'unipolar moment' has ended. America's plan to pivot to Asia, and focus more on its rivalry with a rising China, has been derailed by war in Ukraine and now Gaza. Russia, too, is distracted and losing influence. Frozen conflicts

are thawing and local cold wars are heating up around the world.

But wars can be cold as well as hot. As tensions rise over Taiwan and America continues to limit Chinese access to advanced technologies, the 'new cold war' rhetoric has hardened. Western companies trying to reduce their supply chains' dependency on China will find it much easier said than done.

The clean-energy transition is minting new green superpowers and redrawing the energy-resources map. Lithium, copper and nickel matter much more, while oil and gas, and the regions that dominate their supply, matter less. Competition for green resources is reshaping geopolitics and trade, and creating unexpected winners and losers.

Western economies did better than expected in 2023 but are not out of the woods yet, and interest rates staying 'higher, for longer' will be painful for companies and consumers alike, even if recessions are avoided. (Keep an eye on the banks, and their exposure to commercial property, where things could go bad.)

Businesses are adopting AI, regulators are regulating it and techies continue to improve it. Debate will intensify over the best regulatory approach — and whether arguments over 'existential risk' are a decoy that benefits incumbents. Worries about AI's potential for election meddling. Its biggest actual impact? Faster coding.

Perhaps ideological differences will be put aside as the world enjoys the Paris Olympics, astronauts (maybe) looping around the Moon, and the men's T20 cricket World Cup. But it is just as likely that those hoping for some global unity will, alas, be stumped. Good luck keeping up with the fast-changing world in 2024! 🎨

‘When you can take something that people are doing with your brand and play it back to them in a way that’s relevant and credible, that’s when you have something truly powerful’

Anne Zahan, head of planning and insights, Diageo Ireland / Contagious IQ, March 2023

Most Contagious brand of the year:

Contagious editor Chloe Markowicz on the brand that stole the show in 2023

Barbie, she's everything. And this year she was everywhere, too. The doll showed up on the big screen for the first time ever, smashing box office records by earning \$1.44bn.

As part of the promotion of the Warner Bros film, the brand's signature pink hue could be spotted far beyond the toy aisle, with retailers including Zara, Primark and Selfridges peddling Barbie merch. Fans could not only purchase limited-edition cosmetics, accessories and apparel, but furnish their homes with Barbie sofas and rugs, and light Barbie scented candles. They could feast on Burger King Barbie burgers, followed by Pinkberry Barbie frozen yoghurt and wash it all down with Barbie x Swoon pink lemonade. They could even pack their cutest outfits in Béis x Barbie luggage and jet off to a Malibu Airbnb decked out as a veritable Dreamhouse. In total more than 160 different brands launched Barbie collaborations in 2023, helping turn the doll into a cultural phenomenon and making it a no-brainer for Most Contagious Brand of the Year. 'The success of the *Barbie* movie is a milestone moment for Mattel, and it really is a showcase for the cultural resonance of the brand,' Richard Dickson, then Mattel's president and COO, said following the film's release.



MOST CONTAGIOUS BRAND OF THE YEAR



‘In the past, the toy industry really focused on driving kid demand and we hadn’t really marketed to parents’

Lisa McKnight, Mattel

Given how Barbiecore took the world by storm this year, it’s hard to imagine that just a decade ago things weren’t looking too rosy for the brand. Millennial mums were not connecting to the pint-size blonde. Barbie, with her hourglass figure and feet permanently arched in heels, was deemed a little too perfect. The strongest evidence of the brand’s polarising nature was that parents no longer wanted to gift the doll at birthday parties. The brand needed to convince parents that Barbie was more than just a pretty plaything. ‘In the past, the toy industry really focused on driving kid demand and we hadn’t really marketed to

parents,’ Lisa McKnight, EVP and chief brand officer at Mattel, told Contagious. ‘But parents were now wanting to weigh in on those purchase decisions and wanting to buy into brands that shared their values.’

Mattel turned things around by taking inspiration from the brand’s past and recalling how Ruth Handler, the co-founder of the company, had invented Barbie to encourage girls to reach their limitless potential. ‘By connecting with that original purpose of the brand, we had a North Star and we used that to drive all of our communication and decision-making going forward,’ says McKnight.

In addition to a brand campaign to communicate that purpose, Mattel transformed the doll herself. The company’s head of design, Kim Culmone, asked her team, ‘If you were going to design Barbie today, what would she look like?’. The result was a range of new dolls launched in 2016: curvy, tall, petite, with different hairstyles and skin colours. Today Barbie comes in more than 175 variations. Barbie has a prosthetic limb, vitiligo skin condition, and an over-the-ear hearing aid, and this year Mattel introduced Barbie with Down syndrome. ‘By making the product line more reflective of the world the kids saw around them, we started to unlock a tonne of fandom and created a really strong connection with our audience,’ says McKnight.

When Contagious interviewed McKnight in 2016, she explained that the goal for Barbie

was to become a true lifestyle brand, extending beyond toys. There’s no doubt that Barbie achieved that this year by creating products in every category imaginable that appealed not just to kids but teens and adults, too, ensuring the longevity of the brand. And, of course, the success of the PG-13 *Barbie* film helped cement Barbie’s position as a cultural icon.

But the film would absolutely not have been the hit that it was if Mattel hadn’t done the foundational work it started 10 years ago, says McKnight: ‘If we hadn’t modernised the brand to be more relevant, to be a better reflection of the world the kids see around them, to be inclusive, there would not be the reaction to the brand that we’re seeing.’

The Barbie Style Instagram channel soared from 1.5 million to 2.6 followers this year and engagement on the brand’s TikTok channel has never been higher. ‘The fandom is massive,’ adds McKnight. ‘People are celebrating this brand like never before.’ Crucially, this engagement has translated into sales. This year, the *Barbie the Movie* doll is the number-one doll in the toy industry, the number-one vehicle in the toy industry is the Barbie Corvette, and the number-one preschool toy is the Barbie Little People Dream House. Mattel also reported that its Q3 net sales were up 9% year-on-year, with revenue rising to \$1.9bn. As the doll approaches her 65th anniversary, Mattel has proven that Barbie is still a force to be reckoned with. ❄️

Ipsos research finds empathy and entertainment key to social brand building /

Ipsos' head of global products and analytics for Creative Excellence, Adam Sheridan, on how marketers can create social media campaigns that deliver long-term brand growth



Forget stopping the scroll and delaying the skip — now that social media commands such a large portion of marketing budgets it needs to deliver long-term brand growth, according to Adam Sheridan, head of global products and analytics for Creative Excellence at Ipsos.

Sheridan, who is also the author of a new book, *MISFITS: How Creativity In Advertising Sparks Brand Growth*, was speaking at Most Contagious on 7 December when he made the comments.

Social media campaigns will constitute 70% of brands' total media budgets by next year, said Sheridan. So it is important for marketers to ask, 'How can we get stronger, longer-term effects in our social video advertising?'

Optimising ways to overcome the skip or scroll, while widely practised, might not be the best strategy, he said, as research shows that

view time is not strongly related to longer-term effects. In other words, even if you get people to view your ad for longer, you likely won't get longer-term effects.

Instead, marketers should focus on good quality audience experiences, to get to those sustained benefits. Sheridan came to this conclusion after Ipsos measured the long-term effects potential of nearly 2000 linear video campaigns and cross-referenced the effects of the ads with the kind of experience they delivered.

Through this process, Ipsos was able to identify what it calls the 'Misfit mindset', which comprises three distinct advertising experiences.

The first is a creative experience — the sense that you've seen something entertaining and unique, which makes you want to talk about it. The second is creative ideas, which is less about the in-the-moment experience provided by the ad and more about the values or feelings that you take away from it. The final experience deals with empathy, and whether or not something feels represented or understood by a brand's message.

According to Sheridan, 'Video ads that consistently deliver these experiences, this intersection of creative experiences and empathetic ones, consistently outperform the average.' He added: 'They deliver up to 20% stronger sales effects than those that don't'.

But, said Sheridan, the question today is: to what extent do these experiences apply to social video? And if they do, what can we learn from that to deliver a better audience experience and get to stronger, longer-term effects?

To find out, Ipsos conducted research on social media, surveying over 1000 users



to understand what they wanted from the platforms. It found that entertainment — for example, a video of cats being startled by cucumbers that garnered 90 million views — and trend discovery were key factors.

What's more, said Sheridan, the proportion of people who continue to watch an ad after the first second 'somewhat falls off a cliff', which demonstrates the importance of things like immediate brand cues (which enhance brand attention by 15%) and tight framing (employing singular larger images to capture attention, which enhance memory encoding by 10%). So, yes, branding tactics make sense in social video ads, but they should

be regarded as only the starting point — as the baseline to create truly effective work in the long term.

Delivering a high-quality audience experience that enables trend discovery on social media and shows empathy to the audience yields far greater results, said Sheridan: 'What happens when we express empathy for our audience, when we talk about them, when we show them people like them, and when the brand fits within that, is we see three times those effects. So we see clearly the power of delivering a good audience experience, rather than just focusing on where we place our logo.'

Sheridan concluded his talk with some

advice on juxtaposing empathy with entertainment to create maximum impact.

'While empathy and ideas are really important for social — and I think we can do a better job delivering that human experience — a little entertainment can go a very long way,' he said. 'Think about entertaining people and adding value to their experience. And if you do that, you'll be on a really good footing to get some longer-term ad effects in your social media buys.'

If you'd like to learn about how creativity and empathy can spark brand growth, check out Ipsos MISFITS [here](#). 🎨

**‘Oatly is one of
the world’s most
distinctive brands,
which is shocking
considering it’s
an oat milk’**

Kevin Lynch, former creative director, Oatly / Contagious IQ, September 2023

Three things we learnt about marketing effectiveness in 2023

Magic Numbers' Grace Kite and Hal Webb share some advice on making advertising that pays

This felt like a pivotal year for effectiveness: a culmination of many years of exploring, experimenting and learning.

Here are three things we've learned, and what it means for you.

1. Online ads have tricked us into bringing them to life.

Time after time, human beings invest more into early stage innovations than is rational given how useful they are.

We spent billions on internet tech in the 1990s, even though it was slow, pixelated, and useless for commerce. And, in the 2010s, there was a similar splurge on blockchain, even though it was — and remains to this day — largely impractical for many uses.

You'd think marketing people would be wise to it. We ought to not be tempted into using stuff just because it's new. But that's

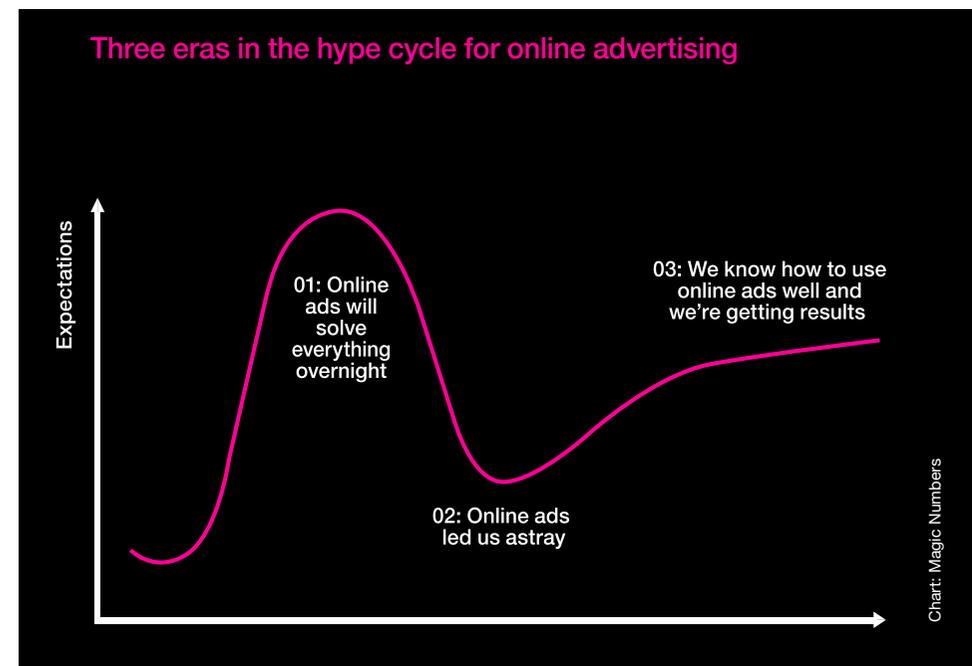
exactly what we've done with online ads.

Over the past 20 years, we've been through enthusiasm, excitement, and huge amounts of investment. Then came the disappointment and worry, and those conference speeches and articles saying things were better before.

The Gartner hype cycle (pictured right) describes why people pile into new technologies, and what happens next.

In the early days people's expectations are sky high; they think the new tech is going to be amazing. But the reality is disappointing, and it's only after time has passed, and after experiments, learning, and further innovation, that an equilibrium can be reached.

Gartner calls the final stage the 'plateau of productivity'. It's where the expectations match the reality, and the innovation is mature and working well.



MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS

2. After years of decline, the crisis in effectiveness is over.

It's true there was an enduring slump in ROIs that lasted from the mid noughties to the mid 2010s, while online ads were a novelty.

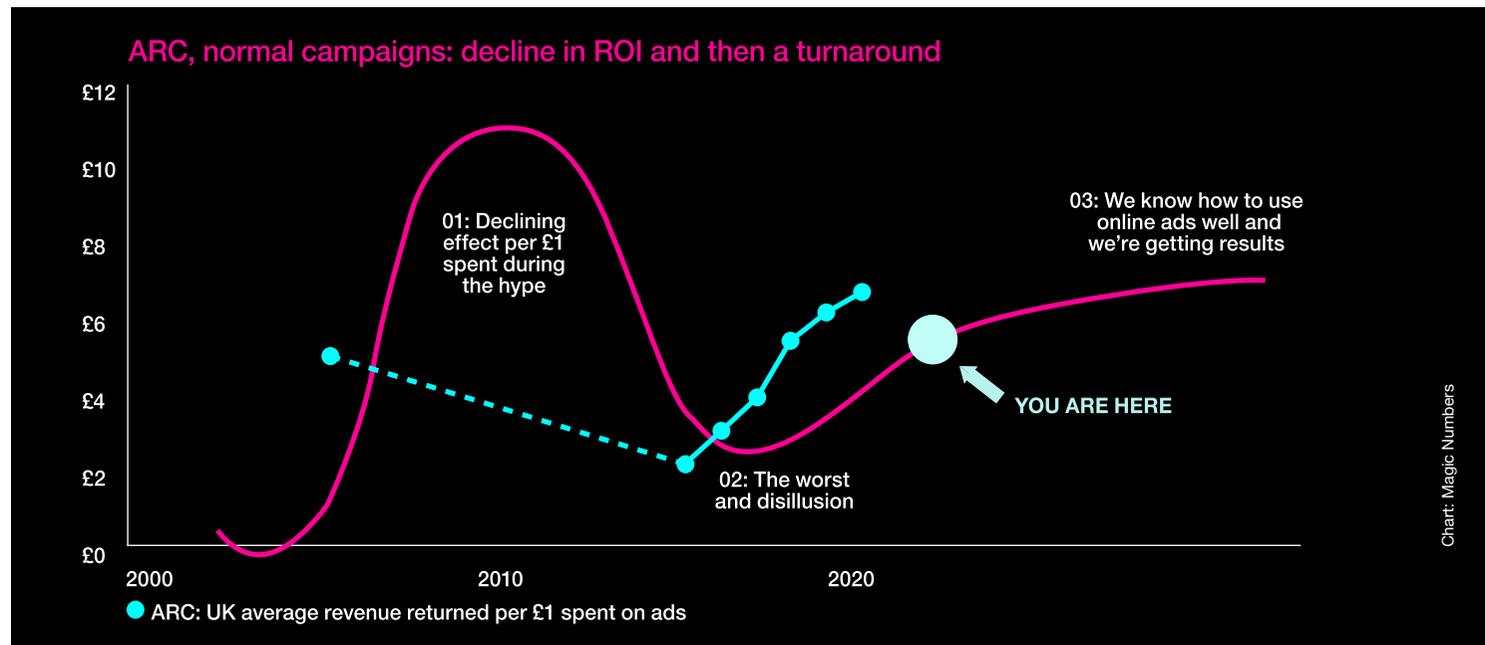
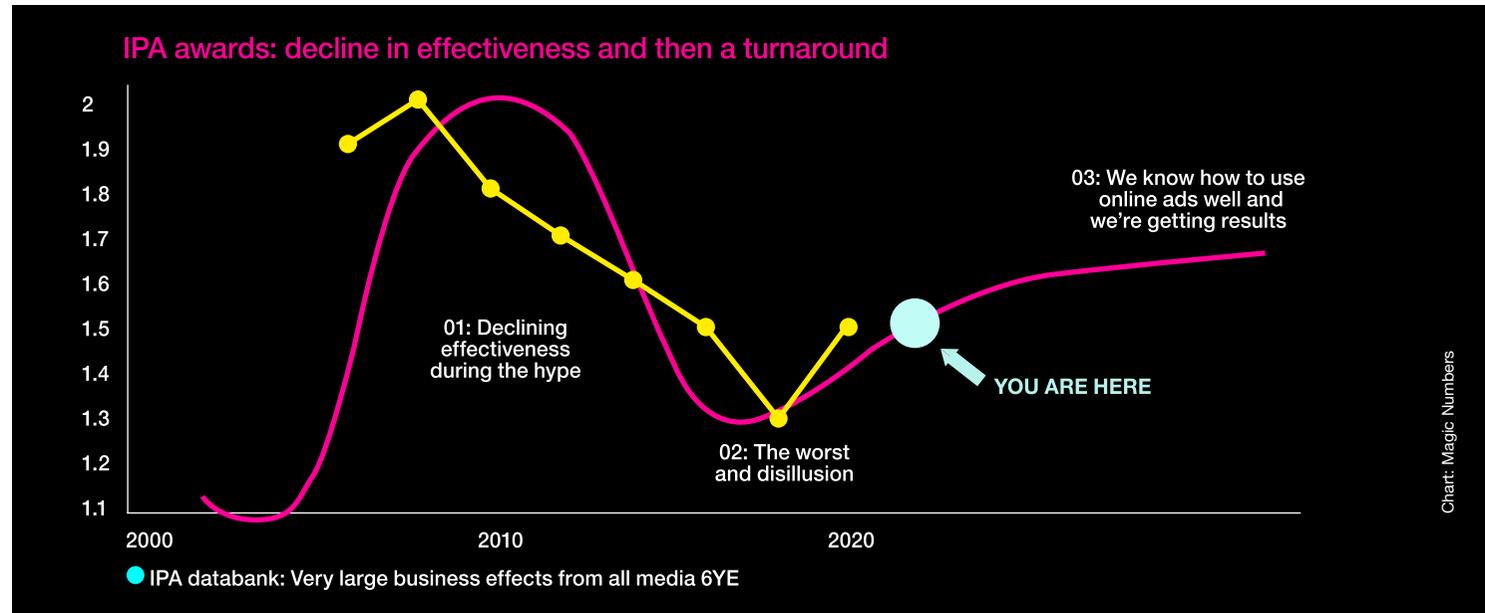
We've been beating ourselves up about it for years, but it's time we gave ourselves a break because we're approaching the plateau of productivity.

The two charts (right) set out the evidence for that claim. In yellow, the IPA awards data collated by Peter Field shows this pattern in the number of large business effects among awards entrants.

And, in light blue further down, the ARC database of econometrics results shows the same picture in ROI from everyday campaigns.

The change in ROI is largely down to the turnaround in the fortune of online ads. We've experimented with new and different formats, tested, learned, and got to the point where we know what works.

But while the tech players' attribution models have helped us test and learn on the fly, they haven't got us to a true view of digital channels' incrementality — for that you need techniques like econometrics, holdout tests and regional tests.



3. We're truly learning to love the long.

This year is the 10th anniversary of Les Binet and Peter Field's classic book on effectiveness, *The Long and the Short of It*, and we're finally starting to put their lessons into practice.

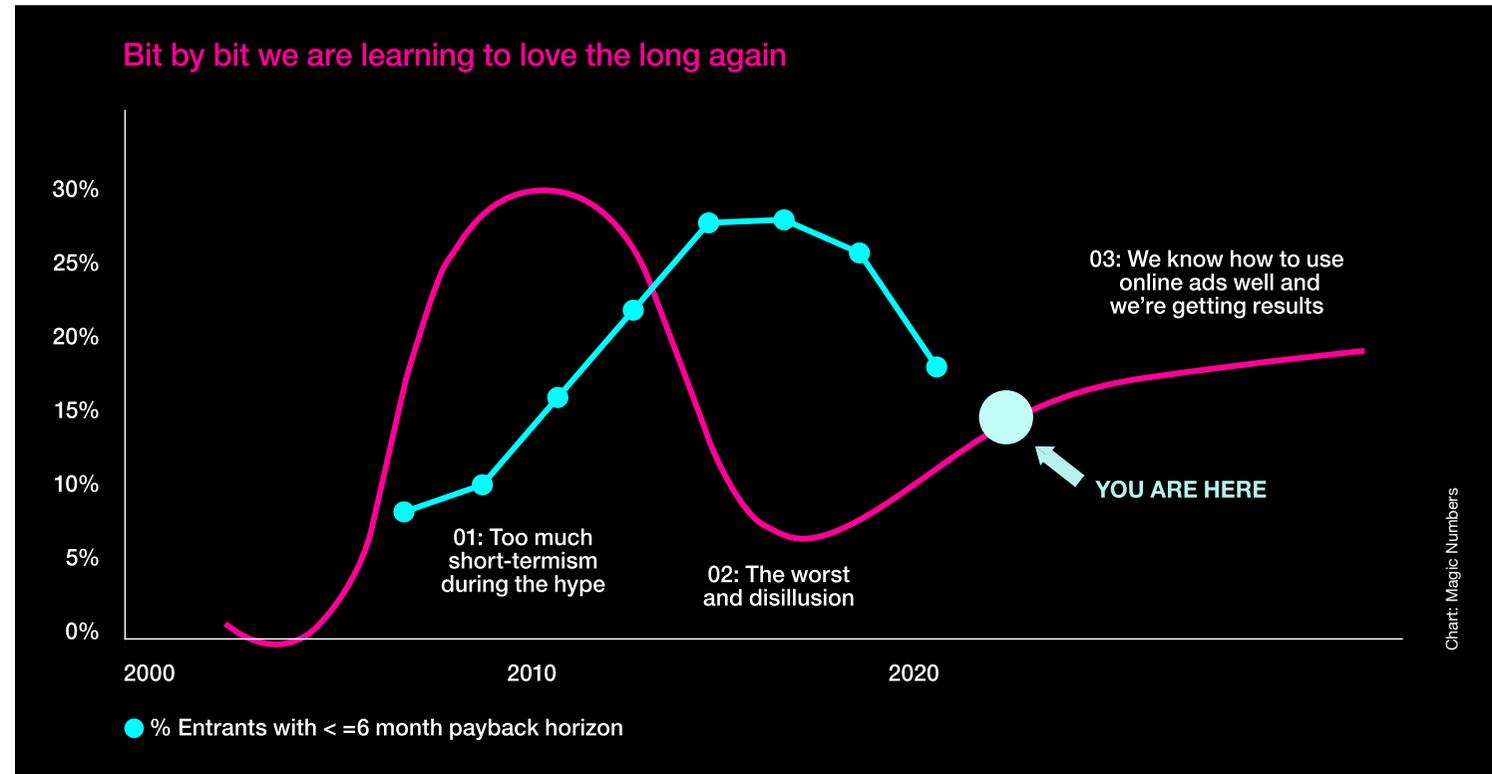
The chart (right) shows that planning horizons got shorter during the hype period for online ads. But since *The Long and The Short of It* was written in 2013, there's been a turnaround, as marketers have learnt the lesson about the role of brand building in growth.

Clients are putting their money where their mouth is, and using their budgets for long-term advertising

What does this mean for strategists?

- All that experimentation into what works on digital means there's an awful lot of knowledge out there. Learn from it. Look at what the digital platforms are saying.
- ROIs are generally improving, for award winners and regular campaigns. But this means the bar is getting higher for what creativity ought to do for businesses. It'll become harder and harder to justify not paying back, even if that is the benchmark result. Ultimately, your job is to sell.
- Everyone knows and loves those killer charts from Binet and Field, but how does it work in your category? Strategists will need to be like magpies stealing other data to support their case.

Magic Numbers' Magic Works training has two courses starting in April, one on how to use data in marketing and another tailored to online businesses that have grown beyond the start-up phase.





Emotional intelligence and the cost-of-marketing crisis /

Carat strategists Sean Healy and Emma Saddleton explain how CMOs can gain a competitive edge by raising the emotional intelligence of their brands

Amid the cost-of-living crisis, CMOs are facing their own cost-of-marketing crisis, according to a forthcoming report by Carat, and emotional intelligence (EQ) could be the key to resolving it.

During a free webinar hosted with Contagious on 12 December, Sean Healy, the global chief strategy officer for Carat, and Emma Saddleton, Carat's global strategy director, shared some insights from its third EQ Report, which will be released early next year.

Carat began investigating the idea that brands could be emotionally intelligent in 2019, inspired by the work of psychologist and author Daniel Goleman, who coined the term in 1996.

According to Goleman, there are five domains of emotional intelligence: self-awareness & understanding your own feelings, self-regulation, empathy & understanding the feelings of others, motivation and social skills (i.e. effective communication). Putting these domains to use into a skilled relationship builds your emotional intelligence.

Carat took these components, created a set of questions that took the human qualities listed by Coleman and reframed them to apply to brands.

What the agency learned soon after conducting its research was that the brands with the highest EQ were often the most profitable. Carat also discovered that people tend to rate brands more highly when the latter are creating value and advocating for people.

When Carat first did its EQ research, the world was heading into pandemic lockdowns and brands were really advocating for people.

'And guess what?' said Healy, 'we saw the [EQ] scores climb sharply'. But, he added, amid the cost-of-living crisis, people no longer feel brands are on their side as much as they did, and it shows in the EQ study.

Brands tend to score the lowest on self-regulation — which essentially means behaving with honesty & integrity — which is also the hardest metric to move with trust in brands notoriously hard to build. Comparing three years of EQ data, Saddleton said that what separated best and worst-performing brands the most over time was self-awareness and

empathy. Interestingly, they saw brands at the bottom of the table tended to have longer purchase journeys, said Saddleton, and they tend to be more functional and have fewer interactions with customers. This was not however a blanket finding, meaning we can learn from those brands with longer purchase journeys and higher brand EQ.

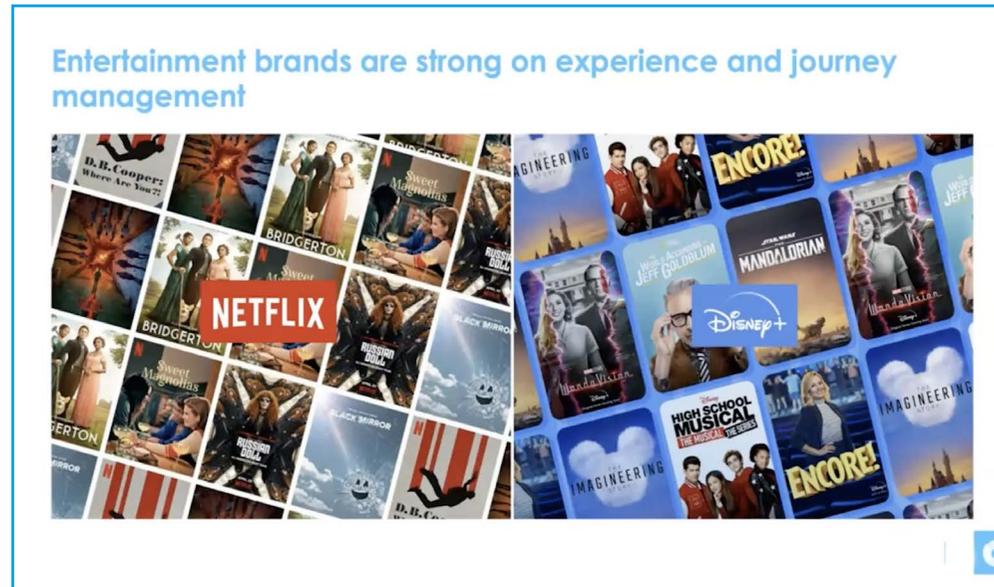
After revealing Google and Disney had topped this year's EQ Report, both with a score of 77%, Saddleton and Healy expanded on four trends from this year's data. The first, explained by Healy, concerned tech brands. To the team's surprise back in 2020 tech companies were often among the brands ranked highest for EQ. This has continued to be the case in subsequent studies. Healy believes that this is because people subconsciously equate humanity with things that help them to solve problems simply.

'So for us there's a real thing about being simple, reliable, adaptable, and also high touch,' he said.

In terms of generational differences, millennials (defined as those aged 25-34) tended to score brands much more positively than Gen Z, said Saddleton, adding that it could be because the younger cohort have had a tough time, especially since the pandemic.

The number of brands polarised to certain groups also increased - Tesla was the top-ranking brand for Gen Z, while millennials tended to favour familiar high-street brands, and those aged 35-plus gravitated towards more traditional brands.

The EQ data also demonstrated the importance of end-to-end experiences, said Healy. Being connected, holistic and thinking about



brand conversion was 'super important', he said, adding that Carat's client Netflix was a good example of a brand that combines being high touch with creating big cultural moments.

The final story was around integrating with and creating culture. The sports apparel brands Addas and Nike excel at this, but QSRs such as McDonald's also do well in this by putting their biggest fans at the heart.

Concluding the webinar, Healy and Saddleton summed up the findings of the report into some practical advice for marketers.

They said that, according to Carat's EQ data, being a high-touch brand and showing up regularly in people's lives, being agile and responding to them as well as creating value for them and engaging with them, was invaluable.

They also said that the best-performing brands tended to be focused on the customer journey, and excelled at tailoring it both in the moment and over the long term.

'Rewarding experiences are a great investment in future brand growth,' said Healy. 'So, from a cultural perspective, be meaningful at scale, and from a personal perspective, look to foster these rewarding relationships over time.'

He concluded: 'We're convinced that if you follow some of our brand EQ principles, there's a really big opportunity to make the whole greater than the sum of the marketing parts — and use emotional intelligence to overcome the cost-of-marketing crisis.'

Watch the full talk here and register to receive the full Brand EQ report in January 2024 [HERE.](#)

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'It's impossible to be a brand for everyone in the midst of the culture wars' /

Creative Equals founder Ali Hanan on Bud Light, backlash and handling haters



Picture this: On 1 April, as part of its March Madness campaign, Bud Light partnered with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney on an Instagram promotion. The video, on the surface, seemed harmless — light-hearted, if slightly disingenuous. But this short clip set off a chain reaction of conservative outrage and boycotting, and then a backlash to the backlash, which would leave the brand as one of the most talked about of the year.

More importantly, this episode put the fear of getting diversity wrong into a staggering 64% of marketers, according to research from the Unstereotype Alliance. As a result, many brands pulled back their spend on LGBTQIA+ campaigns for Pride this year.

For trans people — one of the most margin-

alised communities at the centre of the culture wars in the US — the ramifications were devastating. As Mulaney said: 'For a company to hire a trans person and then not publicly stand by them is worse, in my opinion, than not hiring a trans person at all. It gives customers permission to be as transphobic and hateful as they want.'

As for the financial fallout of Bud Light, the beer brand's parent company, AB InBev, suffered a 10.5% drop in second-quarter revenue in the US. Meanwhile, operating profit nose-dived nearly 30%. Globally, AB InBev, actually managed to increase profits, thanks to price hikes and sales growth outside the US. But it was generally acknowledged that AB InBev had suffered a catastrophe in its largest market, as far as Bud Light was concerned.

All this shows the challenge of mass mar-

keting in 2023. It's impossible to be a brand for everyone in the midst of the culture wars, an increasingly divided society and one where there is an increasing erosion of civil rights. But it's how you set out your 'brand stand' that will make the difference in this environment, which is why many companies now have a clear diversity, equity and inclusion mandate at the heart of their brands. After Bud Light, the stakes are too high.

Context and timing, particularly in local markets, is king. While the culture wars heat up in the US and UK ahead of elections in 2024, the LGBTQ community was at the centre of backlash in Singapore last year. Drag queen actors in Samsung's wireless earbuds adverts received death threats from a deeply conservative Muslim community. At the time, gay sex

was illegal (this was changed in November 2022) and Samsung pulled the spot, apologising for causing 'offense'. Many criticised its decision to pull the ad, pointing out that it contradicted the company's statement that 'innovation and growth are driven by diversity and inclusivity'.

But while the Bud Light episode has sown this fear of a DEI catastrophe in marketers, brands that have a strategy and stick to it are reaping the benefits. In 2023, Disney, after its own employee backlash in 2022, continued to stand against the Parents Right to Education Act AKA the 'Don't Say Gay Bill' in 2022. While the company is now embroiled with a bitter dispute with governor of Florida, Ron De Santos, Disney has posted a 7% increase in revenue in 2023, of \$88.9bn.

And Creative Equals' Cannes Lions analysis shows 45% of all Grand Prix and Titanium winners in 2023 had DEI at their heart. One of the most talked about campaigns of the year was Vanish's Me My Autism and I, which won a slew of awards. Most importantly, sales of Vanish in the UK are up 2%. This shows DEI in marketing is a driver for creative excellence and more powerful storytelling, which is why brave marketers now have a strategy for backlash. Identifying potential sources of backlash, professional cancellers, impacted insiders, or anti-woke haters is crucial.

Predict and ride the backlash meaningfully and it can propel your brand forward. The fact is there will always be 'haters' — the question is how you handle it. As Nike co-founder Phil Knight said in 2019: 'It doesn't matter how many people hate your brand as long as enough people love it.' This is more true than ever before. And as long as you have that attitude, you can't be afraid of offending people. You can't try and go down the middle of the road — that is what mass marketing is. The work is never brave, outstanding or award-winning. 🍷

‘It’s often far easier to change behaviour by removing friction than it is to change behaviour by motivating people to want to change’

Richard Shotton, Astroten / Contagious.com, May 2023

From data to creators: the future of creativity / the Open Creative Project /

What are the challenges and opportunities for creatives presented by digital platforms and tools? Marketing experts of varying stripes chewed over the big questions, with a little help from Google, at Most Contagious



Marketing experts debated the future of creativity, data and the creator economy on the Creative Voices stage at Most Contagious on 7 December.

Google Creative Works sponsored the new stage, and curated a programme of lively talks to get to the root of some of the biggest issues facing creative marketers today.

Nisha Mathews, a creative strategist at Google, kicked off the first panel discussion. She began by introducing Google's Open Creative Project, a publication it produced with Contagious, Bain & Co and tech writer Benedict Evans, to help the ad industry understand how technology is transforming creativity.

Focusing on how brands can reach the right people with less data, Mathews put her first question to Luca Corteggiano, McCann's executive creative director for Europe, asking

him about his work on Mastercard's Where To Settle Campaign and the idea of using data for good.

Corteggiano stressed that Mastercard wanted to put data to work in ways that benefited its customers as much as itself. He also said that while a lot of big brands talk about purpose, it was vital for them to pick something that's 'part of your DNA', because seeing the business impact of a purpose campaign ensures that they will commit to it over the long term.

On the question of the challenges and opportunities of using data in a creative way, Google creative technologist Sam Mayo reiterated Google's mission to organise the world's information and said one of the biggest hurdles was that 'there's exponentially more data being created', so it becomes a huge challenge 'to add filters and processes so we can make it comprehensible'.

But, Mayo added: ‘Good useful data drives personalisation, and when you cater your communications to people you know you will get more engagement.’

As for how we can ensure data is used the right way, Contagious’ editor Chloe Markowicz borrowed some sage advice on AI from Abba’s Björn Ulvaeus. ‘When it comes to AI,’ Markowicz said, ‘you should be defensive and offensive. You can’t ignore this but also have to be aware of the threats and act responsibly.’

Google creative business partner Jordan Berkowitz hosted the second panel session, on the creator economy.

Directing his first question to Firdous El Honsali, the VP of external communications at Dove, Berkowitz asked how working with creators had changed the personal care brand’s perspective on its mission to promote ‘real beauty’.

El Honsali responded that it was a ‘very logical’ move to work with creators because the message belonged to them as much as it did the brand. She added that Dove’s Cannes Lions Grand Prix-winning #TurnYourBack campaign would ‘never have seen the light of day if it was not for creators’, because they were the ones who started the conversation about the Bold Glamour filter on TikTok.

Marketing professor Marcus Collins then chimed in that creators had changed

‘the modality of how we as marketers communicate’, adding: ‘Before, it was like, “this is our campaign, we want to roll it down the bowling alley and knock over as many pins as possible”. But the Dove campaign is a great example of how (now) it’s more like a pinball machine, where we have a point of view about the world and we’re bobbing it over to other creators to bounce it around and hit more people — not only does that give you greater reach, it gives you greater connection.’

Meanwhile, Bobby Nolla, a creative lead at Google, reiterated the importance of giving creators the freedom of a tight brief. ‘It’s not about being prescriptive,’ he said. ‘It’s about having a clear brand message and giving the creator the freedom to deliver that message while bringing their own magic.’

Kay Monday, a creative business partner at Google, hosted the final panel discussion, on the new digital age and how creativity is being transformed in this ever-shifting landscape, with new tools, new platforms and new technologies.

Asked about the tension between grabbing attention with new ideas and reaping the benefits of long-term campaigns, Google creative lead Andrew Bent said creatives are always pushing for new things because they want to ‘own that new expression’. But he added that it was important not ‘to throw the

‘Good useful data drives personalisation, and when you cater your communications to people you know you will get more engagement’

Sam Mayo, Google



baby out with the bathwater’ by switching brand strategies too often.

Balancing those two things means brands can turn up in a fresh way but also keep the familiarity of their brand expression, which people can grow to trust and believe.

Tati Lindenberg, the marketing VP at Unilever responsible for Persil’s Dirt Is Good campaign, which has been running for 20 years, explained how her brand ensures it hits all the levels of the funnel, saying that 20% of its budget goes to purpose-driven campaigns, while 80% is spent on more product-focused activations that incorporate the big ideas.

‘I’ll say something maybe controversial,’

she added: ‘The 20% on pure purpose is much easier to do. The hard thing is when you need to tell a product story in a way that embeds your belief system.’

Bent then added that some of the best advertising that he sees on YouTube now comes from small, D2C brands, who don’t feel constrained by traditional techniques. ‘They basically collapse the funnel into one asset. They don’t have assets that drive salience and other assets that drive performance. They do it all in one go.’

Learn more about the Open Creative Project [HERE.](#) 🎨

THE MOST CONTAGIOUS THINGS OF THE YEAR

The Contagious team catalogues the (non-advertising) trends and events that defined 2023

POPE COAT



In March, an image of the Pope sporting a Balenciaga-style puffer jacket in pure papist white was posted on Reddit. The author of the work, who, by his own admission, was tripping on shrooms at the time, had used the AI image generator Midjourney to conjure this eye-catching portrait of the pontiff. The artwork, which masterfully combines the timeless Italian exports of fashion and faith, went viral overnight.

Pope Francis has a reputation for being a man of the people, and this peculiar picture only seemed to amplify his streetwise persona. But the image also served as a wake-up call about the growing challenge of distinguishing fact

from fiction online. It was the turning point when typical millennials realised probably for the first time that they were now just as vulnerable to a digital duping as their long-suffering boomer parents.

As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent in the coming months and years, it seems likely that consumers will develop sharper critical faculties and a better nose for the improbable. 'Pope Coat' will be remembered as a significant moment in internet lore, a heretical marriage of the divine and the digital — an opportunity to reflect not only on the Pope's prodigious fashion choices, but on our own evolving perception of reality.

By David Beresford, senior strategist

CHINA'S PROPERTY CRISIS



The pandemic is barely in the rear-view mirror and China is already struggling with another contagion, this time in its property market.

China's property market problems began three years ago when the government introduced new restrictions — the 'three red lines' — about how much debt developers could take on. But the crisis escalated in August when the country's largest property developer, Country Garden, announced it had lost \$7.1bn in the first half of the year and made worrying noises about bankruptcy. Unlike the other sinking property developers, Country Garden did not falter because it was over-leveraged but because ordinary people were losing faith

in the market.

Property has been a huge part of China's growth. Construction kept local productivity high, land sales kept local governments in cash, and property became a store of value that fuelled the emerging middle class. Flats in China's most desirable cities soared to over 40 times the median salary, a bigger multiple than in New York or London.

Now the bubble has burst and China must work to keep the crisis from infecting the wider economy. Its GDP is still expected to increase 5.1% in 2023, but as far as driving global economic growth is concerned, it looks like China has left the building.

By James Swift, online editor

THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP



The Fifa Women's World Cup in Australia was the most attended women's sporting event ever, breaking viewing records for women's football. There were memorable moments throughout: Morocco knocked out Germany against all the odds, Sarina Bolden made history by scoring the Philippines' first-ever goal at the tournament, and Lioness Chloe Kelly fired off a winning penalty at 111km/h (faster than any Premier League goal last season).

Ultimately, Spain triumphed, defeating England 1-0 in the final at Stadium Australia in Sydney. But almost immediately, the victory was overshadowed by a bitter — and at times bizarre — sexism battle, triggered by an unwanted kiss from the then Royal Spanish Football Federation president, Luis Rubiales, on Spain's Jennifer Hermoso.

Despite protests from the national

women's team and condemnation from the Spanish government, Fifa, the United Nations, and countless other players and clubs, it took Rubiales nearly three weeks to back down and resign — during which time his mother locked herself in a church and went on hunger strike to protest the treatment of her son.

Rubiales announced his decision in an exclusive interview with divisive UK broadcaster Piers Morgan, whose weak questioning reduced the whole saga to an innocent misunderstanding, rather than a symptom of systemic misogyny in football. In October, as part of the 'immediate and profound' changes promised, the Spanish FA put Rubiales on a three-year ban from all football-related activities.

By Phoebe O'Connell, writer/analyst

OZEMPIC



In October Walmart's CEO, John Furner, told Bloomberg that customers who had bought Ozempic or similar drugs from its pharmacies were buying slightly fewer groceries, reminding everyone that generative AI was not the only disruptive innovation on the market.

Ozempic is the brand name for semaglutide, which belongs to the class of drugs known as glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists. The US approved Ozempic's use as a treatment for diabetes in 2017, but it quickly became the go-to prescription for people who wanted to lose weight because it mimics a hormone that makes you feel full.

Like many miracle drugs, Ozempic — and Wegovy, which is the same drug under a different name and approved

as a weight-loss treatment — caught on among the rich and famous first. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel even joked about it in his monologue at the Oscars.

But Morgan Stanley predicts that nearly 7% of the US will be taking drugs like Ozempic by 2035, and if that's the case, it will be more than just snack companies and fast-food joints that feel its effects.

If it turns out to be true that semaglutide also prevents strokes and heart attacks, and curbs impulsive behaviours and cravings for alcohol and nicotine — and there are no disastrous long-term side effects — this diabetes medication could even end up surpassing those jumped-up chatbots in societal impact.

By James Swift, online editor

GIRL DINNER



We've reached the illogical endpoint of trends: an ouroboros in which they and memes are eating each other, morphing into a single indistinguishable entity. Mends? Tremes? Whatever you call them, they're a defining feature of current culture.

Case in point: 'girl dinner.' Launched by a single TikTok comparing mediaeval peasant eating to an ideal modern meal, the phrase refers to the simple act of assembling a selection of charcuterie-like foods to comprise a dinner. Earth shattering? No. But novel enough to start a wave of copycat posts and become grease for the superficial flywheel of social media.

The formula is clear: take a common

behaviour, give it a catchy name, gender it for some reason, and boom you have a 2023 trend. Lookalikes spawn (see: boy dinner, girl math), try-hard brands attempt to ride the attention coattails, and everything soon fades back into the cultural ether.

The result is a complete devaluation of trends as we know them. As Matt Klein, Reddit's head of global forecasting, wrote in *Contagious*: 'Consider a balloon and bowling ball. Both are the same size, but very different weights. It's the weight that we're after here.' Useless for anything beyond a fleeting spike in attention, girl dinner and its ilk are empty calories.

By Chris Barth, principal strategist

THE WRITERS' STRIKE



This year's Hollywood writers' strike was one of the longest in decades. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers thought they could stare down the Writers Guild of America, until — as one exec put it — union members started losing their apartments. But the good guys prevailed, and the writers strolled off into the sunset with a new three-year contract that gives them a fairer slice of streaming residuals and assurances about generative AI.

The agreement comes against the backdrop of a studio system in flux. After years of spending during the streaming boom, studios and platforms are tightening their belts. And in the long run,

if AI can help cut costs further, the reality is that they will find a way to exploit it — as labour pundit Hamilton Nolan pithily wrote in the *Guardian*: 'The WGA has laid the first brick in a wall that every other union in America must rush to help build in their own upcoming contracts... All of us had better hope that that wall is sturdy enough to keep the job-eating algorithms boxed in.'

A scary thought indeed... maybe the ending of this saga will be less *Indiana Jones and Last Crusade* and more *Carrie*, with the seemingly dead and buried Hollywood baddie rising up to grab the writers by the throat.

By Adam Richmond, deputy editor

OCEANGATE



For a brief period this year the biggest story in the world was that of the fate of the five people (two of whom were billionaires) on board the Titan submersible operated by tourism company OceanGate.

The minivan-sized vessel had set out for the wreckage of the Titanic at the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean. However, Titan lost contact with the surface and the world spent several days on tenterhooks as rescuers tried to locate the sub before it ran out of oxygen, only to eventually discover that it had imploded on its descent to the ocean floor.

One of the more unexpected aspects

of the incident was the number of people who had little or no empathy for the people that perished. Across social media, people created countless memes making light of the incident, resurfacing conversations around wealth inequality and people's general hostility towards the wealthy elite who can afford a \$250,000 ticket to the bottom of the ocean.

At the end of September, Deadline reported that the tragedy was being made into a film, with the working title *Salvaged*. The co-writer has said that the movie will be an indictment of society's non-stop media cycle.

By Sunil Bajaj, writer/analyst

TAYLOR SWIFT'S ERAS TOUR



There were lots of reasons why this year was dubbed 'Year of the Girl' — Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour kicked things off in February, 'girl dinner' (see above) and 'girl math' entered the TikTok dictionary over the summer, and the *Barbie* movie was a whirlwind of corporate feminism and pink. But perhaps the biggest 'girl' cultural force of 2023 was Taylor Swift, whose Eras tour crashed TicketMaster, broke sales records, and reportedly gave the US

economy a \$5.7bn boost.

Resale tickets for the North American leg of the tour fetched an average of \$3,801; those who couldn't make it could watch the concert movie instead — which beat Scorsese's latest release at the box office. Such is the power of the Taylor effect and her army of Swifties, her rumoured relationship with an American footballer even brought an additional 2 million female viewers to the NFL.

By Phoebe O'Connell, writer/analyst

BAD GIG BEHAVIOUR



On my way to the Contagious office, I walk past Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on London's Southbank. Hundreds of years ago, it would have been a raucous place: working class 'groundlings' crammed into the pit, overlooked by preening posh attention seekers who'd paid a premium to sit on the stage. Pickpockets and prostitutes roamed freely, and drunkenness was as habitual as the boos and fruit being tossed at the actors.

History is and always will be a loop. Echoes of 1592 could be heard this year in shocked media reports of anti-social behaviour in theatres and gigs on both sides of the Atlantic. From musicians being pelted with phones or chicken nuggets to violent theatre patrons being ejected by riot police, it seems we're suddenly back in an Elizabethan etiquette tailspin.

Psychologists, professors and

journalists seem torn on the reasons behind this year's erosion of order and respect. Some argue that event spaces are paying the price for milking the cash cow of alcohol sales. Others blame high ticket prices for giving people an unreasonable sense of entitlement. Social media's insatiable urge for salacious content could be another driver, while many think the Covid cocoon made us forget our manners in the public realm.

The University of Bristol's Dr Kirsty Sedgman told Sky News that we've entered 'the disconnection economy' whereby people have been 'relentlessly incentivised into individualistic modes of thinking' — causing social contracts to collapse.

Not sure that's what Shakespeare meant when he wrote 'to thine own self be true'.

Paul Kemp-Robertson, contagious co-founder

EXTREME WEATHER



Sceptics used to say that you could look at the insurance companies for proof that the climate crisis was overstated. If the risk of fires, rising sea levels and all the rest of it were real then insurers would stop selling coverage to homeowners, they argued.

You can see their logic. Insurers rely on their ability to accurately assess the likelihood of disasters for their livelihood, and you have to assume that the successful ones are quite good at it. But now that insurers really are starting to abandon homeowners, the argument is starting to lose credibility.

In August the largest home insurance company in California, State Farm,

announced that it would no longer sell coverage to homeowners anywhere in the state because of the increased risks from wildfires. Meanwhile, homeowners in Florida are struggling to find anyone who will offer them protection against storm damage, according to the *New York Times*.

In June, July and August the global average temperature was the highest on record at 16.8C. Canada, Greece and Hawaii burned while China and South Korea flooded. Every month in 2023 seemed to bring some new freak weather event. You'd need a lot of faith to still be a sceptic.

By James Swift, online editor

Innocent wins Global's Look Ahead contest /

Juice and smoothie brand Innocent has won a two-week media placement across Transport for London sites with a campaign idea that takes commuters deep underground

Innocent Drinks has won Global's Look Ahead contest with an OOH campaign concept that takes London's commuters down into the earth.

The smoothie and juice brand's idea uses innovative digital advertising formats to show how healthy soil is vital for producing nutritious fruits and vegetables, and explain what Innocent is doing to protect the environment.

Anto Chioccarelli, Global's creative solutions partnerships director, and Paul Kemp-Robertson, co-founder of Contagious, announced that Innocent had won the Look Ahead at Most Contagious London on 7 December.

Innocent's entry was chosen from a shortlist of seven by a judging panel comprising 13 leaders from across the ad industry.

One judge described Innocent's entry as 'a warm, upbeat and cutely voyeuristic idea that fuses entertainment and education', while another said it was 'very on-brand and with a clear call to action'.

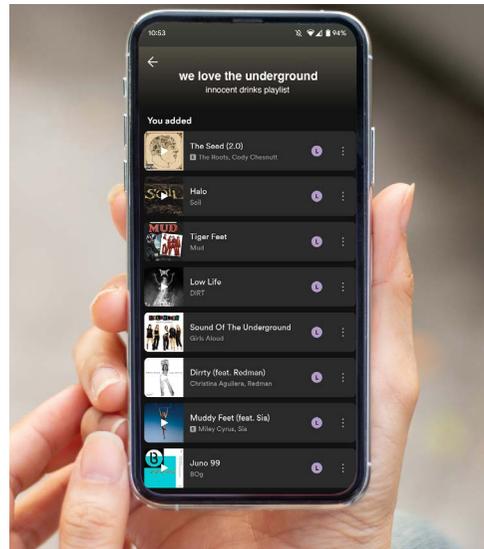
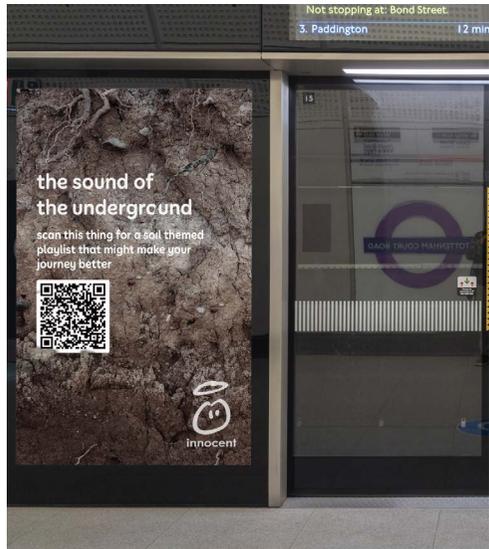
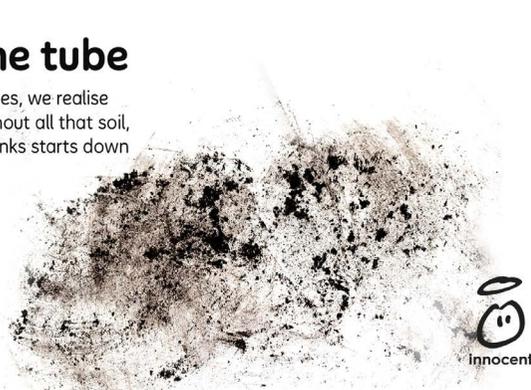
As the winner of the Look Ahead competition, Innocent will see its 'We Love the Underground' campaign displayed on the digital gateway, digital runway and digital escalator ribbon screens across Transport for London (TfL) Elizabeth line stations at Bond Street, Tottenham Court Road and Farringdon in early 2024.



the dirtiest ad on the tube

For a company that makes tasty fruit smoothies, we realise that this isn't the most appetizing ad. But without all that soil, we wouldn't exist. Everything we put in our drinks starts down there, so it's pretty important we look after it.

Which is why we're investing in projects that will help provide healthy soil for our future generations. To find out more, head to innocentdrinks.com/planet.



Accepting the Look Ahead award, Carol Feeley, Innocent Drinks' executive creative director, offered 'a massive thank you', and told the audience at Most Contagious that she and her team were all 'pretty surprised' when they heard they had won. Feeley added that the award was a 'good example of an in-house team working alone.'

'It's really exciting for us as a brand and a good example of how we're trying to get more fruit and veg into people,' she said. 'And we look forward to seeing it live soon.'

This is the second Look Ahead competition hosted by Global, in partnership with Contagious and Transport for London. Havas won the inaugural contest in 2022, with a campaign demonstrating how virtual reality can help Alzheimer's sufferers by immersing them in footage from the past.

Explaining the purpose behind the Look

Ahead contest, Chioccarelli told the Most Contagious audience that Global was 'on a journey to raise the bar for creativity in outdoor' and create work 'that matters', and after the success of last year's competition, Global wanted to 'continue to champion the London transport network as a rich place for brands to tell a story.'

The brief for the Look Ahead contest is for ideas that 'channel the limitless, eye-catching, sharable and experiential opportunities that out-of-home has to offer,' added Chioccarelli, and take tube-users on an unforgettable journey with their brand.'

Chioccarelli said everyone involved in the competition was 'truly impressed' with the quality of this year's entries, adding: 'It was amazing to see what you can achieve creatively when an idea is designed for a channel or even more for a format rather than adapted to it.'



A year in advertising research /

Throughout the year we keep tabs on new academic studies that explain how advertising works and how consumers behave. We then condense the most interesting and relevant research into easy-to-read digests that we publish on Contagious IQ. These are some highlights from the past 12 months

SLOW-MOTION CAN INCREASE PERCEPTIONS OF LUXURY /

When and How Slow Motion Makes Products More Luxurious. By SungJin Jung and David Dubois. First published in the Journal of Marketing Research.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Showing products in slow motion can make them seem more luxurious.

Give me a little more detail.

The researchers tested whether using slow motion in video ads increased people's perceptions of luxuriousness by conducting 12 experiments with ads for chocolate, mineral water, wine and shampoo.

The participants who were shown ads with

slow motion consistently rated the products in them as more luxurious. The researchers think it's because slow-motion increases viewers' feelings of immersion, which leads them to anticipate more pleasure from the thing being shown.

'In other words,' wrote the researchers, 'immersed viewers expect greater hedonic value from the product or brand being spotlighted.' These effects influence not just people's expectations but also their experiences. In one experiment, participants sampled the wine they had seen advertised, and those who had watched the slow-motion ad rated the drink as more luxurious.

The effect of slow motion on perceptions of luxuriousness was noticeably weaker on people who self-declared as either very easily absorbed

by video content or very resistant to absorption. It also didn't work as well when the video ad was blurry or it spent a long time buffering.

Slow-motion video also had a small effect on people's purchase intentions and on how much they were willing to pay for a product, as well as on click-through rates. But the researchers discovered that they could triple the size of the effect on purchase intent by telling participants to imagine that they were in the mood to splurge on a treat for themselves. So, slow motion may be especially effective on consumers who want to treat themselves to something luxurious.

Why is this interesting?

It seems like a fairly reliable and easy way to increase perceptions of luxuriousness. And even if the effects of slow-motion on things like purchase intent are small, they can become meaningful at the large scales in which online video operates.

One thing to note is that this effect of slow motion on perceptions of luxuriousness only seems to apply to ads that just show products in slow motion — chocolate crumbling, wine swirling in a glass, etc. An earlier study found that when people watched a video ad of a person eating a product in slow motion, they felt like it was trying too hard to persuade them, and they were consequently more negative about the brand.

Any weaknesses?

One limitation mentioned by the authors was that all of the products included in the study had at least some luxury potential. We therefore don't know if this effect works for less hedonic goods.

THE POWER OF CREATIVE MEDIA PLACEMENTS /

When the Medium Is the Message: A Meta-Analysis of Creative Media Advertising Effects. By Zeph MC van Berlo, Marijn HC Meijers, Jiska Eelen, Hilde AM Voorveld and Martin Eisend. Published in the *Journal of Advertising*.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Putting ads on physical objects that don't usually carry marketing messages can be more effective than using traditional media.

Give me a little more detail.

Researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies to quantify the effects of creative media advertising. They defined creative media advertising as using everyday physical objects to carry marketing messages. For example, when Sprite made beach showers that looked like soda dispensers to convey the idea that its product is refreshing.

The meta-analysis revealed that creative media advertising was better at strengthening brand associations than traditional media. It also showed that creative media advertising outperformed traditional media when it came to persuasion (which, in this case, was defined through ad attitudes, brand attitudes, purchase intent and intention to share the message electronically).

Creative media advertising was found to be especially effective when the physical object chosen to convey the message was a metaphor for the product or brand itself.

And when people see a creative media placement indirectly (either online or in print), they are even more likely to internal-

ise the brand associations than if they had seen the ad in real life. Which works out well, since one of the largest persuasive effects of creative media advertising is to encourage people to share the ad online.

Why is this interesting?

The meta-analysis suggests that creative media advertising is useful for repositioning a brand and strengthening brand associations.

That said, the results also showed that creative media has a more pronounced effect on people's attitudes towards the ad than their attitudes towards the brand. According to the researchers this means that 'people are more likely to connect creative media advertising to

the product category rather than to the brand'. More broadly, the researchers state that the analysis lends weight to the importance of the two fundamental pillars of advertising creativity: originality and appropriateness. Originality is important because creative media advertising was found to work primarily by surprising people. And appropriateness is important because the effects of creative media advertising are even stronger when the chosen medium is congruent with the message.

Any weaknesses?

The researchers warn that the effects of creative media advertising could be a little bit inflated because of the bias in academia for publishing strong positive results.



BRAND GROWTH COMES FROM LIGHT BUYERS /

Where is the brand growth potential? An examination of buyer groups. By Giang Tue Trinh, John Dawes and Byron Sharp. Published in Marketing Letters.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Almost all brands grow more off the back of light and non-buyers than heavy ones.

Give me a little more detail.

The researchers investigated the contribution of three buyer groups — previous non-buyers, light buyers and heavy buyers — to a brand's future sales by comparing how often they purchased a particular brand with how often they bought from the category. Heavy buyers were defined as the top 20% of a brand's customers, and light buyers as the remaining 80%.

The researchers created a probability model that simulated the purchase behaviour of 10,000 shoppers across four product categories and brand sizes. The overall average showed that the most growth comes from non-buyers (62%), followed by light-buyers (28%) and then heavy buyers (10%).

Next the authors looked at real purchase data from 12,407 households in the UK. The results were almost identical to the simulation. For small and big brands alike, growth primarily stemmed from non-buyers and light buyers, who accounted for 66% and 25% of a brand's sales potential, respectively.

Large brands rely more on current light buyers than smaller brands for their growth but, like small brands, their primary growth

'A brand's true sales potential does not reside with its most frequent customers but its light and non-buyers'

potential still lies within non-buyers. For very large brands however, current light buyers were the largest sources of growth potential, with non-buyers following closely behind. That is because bigger brands already have a significant customer base, which results in fewer non-buyers to tap into as a source of sales.

Why is this interesting?

Studies that analyse current brand sales often highlight the importance of heavy buyers, who are often shown to account for between 50% and 73% of sales. But these studies do not tell you which groups of customers are most likely to help you grow.

By bridging this gap, this study offers insights for brand growth strategies and targeting. It reveals that a brand's true sales potential does not reside with its most frequent customers but its light and non-buyers.

Any weaknesses?

The researchers point out that this information should be considered as complementary to a more comprehensive strategy — which should include factors like a company's capabilities and the costs of reaching a buyer group.

SURPRISING SYNTAX SELLS /

Creating Effective Marketing Messages Through Moderately Surprising Syntax. By Selin Atalay, Siham El Kihal and Florian Ellsaesser. First published in the Journal of Marketing.

Give it to me in one sentence.

Advertising messages written in moderately surprising syntax are more persuasive than those that either follow the expected patterns of grammar completely or deviate from them too drastically.

Give me a little more detail.

People start trying to comprehend sentences before they've finished reading them, essentially guessing what's going to come next and then seeing if reality matches their expectations. For instance when people read a verb they expect a direct object to follow. So, 'Amazon sells diapers' is expected. 'Amazon sells fast' is less so.

The researchers hypothesised that syntactic surprise influenced the effectiveness of advertising through message processing. Commonplace syntax would be easy to process but less attention grabbing. Outright weird syntax would be attention grabbing

but hard to process. And in between the two there would sit a persuasion sweet spot that balances surprise and processing fluency.

The researchers created a machine learning model to measure syntactical surprise and then used it to test their hypothesis. In one experiment they turned their model loose on data from an experiment in which participants tried to persuade each other to donate money. In others, they used it to measure the syntactical surprise of online ads — in one case, for permanent eyebrow tattoos — and then recorded the click-through rates.

In all, they conducted eight experiments, and all of them confirmed that moderately surprising syntax was more persuasive than either very or not-at-all surprising syntax.

To give you an idea of the kind of uplift they're talking about, ad copy that was assessed to be in the 'ineffective' range in terms of syntactic surprise was only about 80% as effective — in terms of click-through rates — as ad copy within the 'optimal' range.

Why is this interesting?

As the authors write: 'We found that syntactic surprise is a unique aspect of syntax that accounts for the effectiveness of marketing messages beyond previously established measures.'

Any weaknesses?

Syntactic surprise depends on common usage. If every advertiser adopts the same kind of wording, it then becomes less surprising and loses its potency. So, it's like trying to hit a moving target. ❌

**‘The brand is
not the package,
the brand is the
Uber driver delivering
the package’**



Ready for 2024? Discover the creative trends set to shape the year ahead /

LIONS analysed the most awarded work from the world's most creative people and it revealed five focus areas that will help you create on-brand, effective work

Creativity has the power to drive business growth. And at LIONS, we see the tangible outcomes of investing in it every day.

Every year after the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, we

analyse Lion-winning and shortlisted entries to identify emerging trends. We speak to jurors, brands and agency leaders and map their insights against the sessions hosted on our Festival stages. It all comes together in the Lions Creativity Report, which you can access [here](#).

The five trends identified in the report are:

Back to brand

Ask anyone to name a strong brand, and chances are Apple will come up.

Cannes Lions' 2023 Creative Brand of the Year is laser-focused on its product. Just look at its Grand Prix winning in-house spot Relax. It's iPhone – RIP Leon. The film perfectly encapsulates what Tor Myhren, Apple's vice president of marketing communications, said at Cannes Lions: 'Often the answer is inside the product. You don't have to delve into pop culture, you don't need to jump on a trend. It's right there.'

Brands such as Heinz, British Airways and Ikea regularly provide masterclasses in how to be playful and build on decades of heritage. And Grand Prix Health & Wellness Lions winner The Last Performance — from Partners Life Insurance and Special, Auckland — proves that you don't need to stay in your lane. Find new, unexpected spaces where you can surprise your audience.

Go for growth

Your brand has a better chance of being effective if it's consistent — a lesson from this

year's Creative Effectiveness Lions Grand Prix winner, Cadbury's Shah Rukh Khan-My-Ad. In 2018, Cadbury settled on generosity being at the heart of its identity. And by sticking to this brand DNA, even during challenging times such as the Covid-19 lockdowns, the confectionery brand experienced 35% growth.

And growth can often show up in unusual places. When AB InBev-owned Brahma beer was banned from football jerseys in Brazilian tournaments, the brand had to change tack. The result? A 39% sales rise following The Foamy Haircut, a cheeky take on footballers' haircuts through São Paulo-based Africa DDB Creative.

Community-first creativity

To build brand loyalty, talk with, not at, your audience. And prioritise inclusivity, just as Adidas and FCB Toronto did with Runner 321, the Direct Lions Grand Prix winner.

If you know your audience inside out, you're already on the right path. Clash of Clans went all in with Clash from the Past, and the audience loved it. As reward for its work, Wieden+Kennedy Portland took the first ever Entertainment Lions for Gaming

Grand Prix and the Entertainment Lions Grand Prix. The agency's creative director, Lawrence Melilli, told us: 'It took on a life of its own when we released it into the wild. And people added to it.'

Reset with AI

AI was talked about a lot at Cannes Lions. Google's Creative Lab vice-president Robert Wong described it as 'raw clay' whose potential can only be harnessed by 'people with curiosity, creativity and compassion'. And a number of Cannes Lions wins showed that potential.

Some used AI to help people manage specific conditions. Eurofarma's Pharma Lions Grand Prix winner Scrolling Therapy, through Dentsu Creative, Buenos Aires, helped people living with Parkinson's disease do their facial exercises. Some used AI to fight for the planet, like WWF Germany's Climate Realism, through Leo Burnett, Frankfurt, which manipulated classic works of art to show the devastation of climate change.

AI also showed how it can make customers' lives easier in a fun way. HungerStation's The Subconscious Order, by Wunderman

Thompson Riyadh, took the Creative Commerce Lions Grand Prix for playfully helping people decide what to order. The unifying theme? Use AI to unlock and support your creativity and it'll take you to some interesting places.

Seize the future

'Turbulence is likely to be the norm for the next couple of years,' predicted Conny Braams, Unilever's former chief digital and commercial Officer, at Cannes Lions.

So brands should be using their incredible power to help shape a better world — addressing climate change, improving access to healthcare, fighting against racism. We saw brands rolling up their sleeves and taking on these giant challenges at this year's festival.

Fight for justice and visibility for every community. As long as your approach is consistent, like Media Lions Grand Prix winner Dove's 20-year commitment to Real Beauty, audiences will trust your authenticity.

For more insights and a closer look at how you can fine-tune your creative strategies in 2024, access the [Report here](#). 📄



Why creative doesn't pay /

Creative agencies aren't growing. Is their labour-based business model to blame and does productisation offer a better way, asks Contagious online editor James Swift

The chief executive of Publicis Groupe, Arthur Sadoun, told *Campaign* magazine in July that creative agencies are no longer 'accretive to growth'. He was discussing his company's second-quarter results at the time, and this was a diplomatic way of saying that the creative agencies were underperforming and would likely continue to do so.

Interpublic Group's third-quarter results told a similar story. There, the division that houses creative agencies such as McCann, MullenLowe and FCB, was down 4.1% year on year, while the other segments all managed to grow at least a little.

In fact, it's a fair generalisation that across the industry right now, it's the media, data and specialist agencies that are driving growth while the creative shops stagnate or decline.

For the most part, holding companies have blamed the poor performance of creative agencies on the less-than-ideal economic conditions, and the belt-tightening among tech

sector clients, in particular. Those are both real impediments, but there is also another narrative taking hold. In June, agency consultant Michael Farmer's book *Madison Avenue Makeover* came out. It charts Huge CEO Mat Baxter's attempt to rescue the digital agency by ditching the standard fee structure and repackaging its services as fixed-price products that promise to help clients grow. Farmer's book revived the debate over business models and the years of declining fees, working conditions and corporate status that creative agencies have endured. In that context, their recent sluggish financial performance was just a symptom of a deeper problem.

There's no question that creative agencies are still fundamental to the success of holding companies. Sadoun said in that same interview with *Campaign* that creativity is still at the centre of Publicis' business model. But then why does the industry still struggle to make money out of what is supposed to be its core competence, and has Huge found a better way?



Photography: Michael Yarish/AMC

Model failure

It bears repeating that the creative agency business model was broken from the start.

For most of the 20th century, agencies charged a 15% commission to buy media for clients, and they threw in creative and planning services as perks. Then when media and creative departments split into separate agencies towards the end of the 1980s, the creative agencies adopted a fee structure based on the number of hours it took to do the work.

Separating creative and media was a mistake, says Rory Sutherland, vice chairman of Ogilvy UK, but creative agencies compounded the blunder. First, they missed the opportunity of being untethered from media departments to branch out into other kinds of creativity beyond ads. Second, by adopting the billable hour they ‘basically inherited the consulting model without the advantage that consultants have’, says Sutherland, ‘which is that you basically go and sell the same fucking deck to seven people with just the logos changed.’

There were other problems with the business model. Not least, says Sutherland, because ‘the most valuable thing that creative agencies do has absolutely nothing to do with time’. Constrained by the billable hour, creative agencies grew deformed, hiring more account handlers and support staff to deal with all the admin, and dumping senior talent who were too expensive and worked too fast.

Fresh pitch

A few agencies have tried to do things differently. Anomaly, for instance, doesn’t use timesheets and instead charges for performance or takes an equity stake as payment. But by and large the advertising industry has

‘The burnout rate of our talent, the lack of respect that we have commercially as an industry; there are so many really obvious symptoms to the problems of being on the wrong model’

Caroline Johnson, *The Business Model Company*

never really wavered from the billable hour.

‘I’ve been consulting to the industry for 30 years,’ says Farmer, ‘and despite all the problems in the industry, I had never run into a CEO, who said, “Oh, my God, this is terrible, we have to do something about it.”’

So when Mat Baxter contacted Farmer and asked if he would like to document the transformation at Huge, Farmer didn’t need to think long. ‘I probably would have paid to do that project,’ he says.

Baxter, who is described in Farmer’s book as a driven and unconventional character, was parachuted into Huge by Interpublic Group in 2021. Until that point, Baxter had only run media agencies, and his assessment was that creative agencies had become commoditised service providers. Working with the existing management team, Baxter devised a new strategy to increase Huge’s sales significantly over the next three years by transforming it from a digital creative agency into a growth acceleration company dedicated to improving clients’ results, and

selling fixed-priced products instead of charging fees.

The product structure worked like this. When clients engaged Huge they would encounter three offerings, or ‘doorways’: experience transformation, technology realisation and growth creation. Doorway selected, clients would then pick from three ‘performance challenges’. For instance, within the growth creation doorway, clients could choose to ‘identify and deliver products to new, high-value customers and markets’. From there, Huge offered five ‘drawers’, each representing a step in the process of the work, such as ‘develop a framework’ or ‘drive results’. (Incidentally, the term ‘drawer’ was later abandoned at Huge.)

This model not only gave Huge control of its profit margins, it changed the agency’s entire proposition.

‘That’s going from “we’re all about creativity” to “we’re all about fixing client performance problems”,’ says Farmer. ‘And that’s a new theory of what an advertising agency is.’

Changing neighbourhoods

The advantage of productisation, says Caroline Johnson, co-founder of The Business Model Company and architect of Huge’s pricing strategy, is that it places value on outcomes rather than effort.

Focusing on effort has led the advertising industry into what Johnson calls a ‘goodwill service model’, where agencies give away ideas in pitches and say yes to every client demand because they think it will make them more popular with clients.

‘That has caused a complete crisis in our industry,’ says Johnson. ‘The burnout rate of our talent, the lack of respect that we have commercially as an industry; there are so many really obvious symptoms to the problems of being on the wrong model.’

Successfully switching from a model that rewards effort to one that rewards value requires total commitment on the part of the agency. Half measures are no use. Clients simply won’t buy into it if they think they’re being charged more for the same thing.

AGENCY MODELS

Johnson likens a superficial attempt at productisation to an all-you-can-eat buffet that suddenly starts to charge more for the best food. ‘Do you think [clients are] going to pay extra for the prosecco and the smoked salmon, when everyone else has it on the all-you-can-eat buffet? Of course they’re not.’

Procurement departments also don’t know what to do with hybrid agencies. ‘What procurement people want when choosing an agency is to some extent ease of comparisons,’ says Sutherland. ‘If you’re the only agency that charges differently, you effectively make it impossible for you to get your prices to be compared objectively, so you’re kind of discounted.’

That’s why, says Sutherland, ‘it’s very difficult to change a pricing model in a B2B environment when it’s become kind of enshrined’.

But those agencies that successfully manage to — as Johnson likes to call it — ‘change neighbourhoods’ can command a different kind of price. ‘It’s really common when repackaging services into products or programmes to go from achieving a 13% net margin to a 33% net margin,’ says Johnson, who adds that revenue per head, which, in the UK, tends to cap out at £100,000 in the creative agencies, can rise to £300,000.

Of course, it’s not all champagne and cartwheels in the land of productisation. Blair Enns, founder of a coaching organisation Win Without Pitching and author of two books on pricing for creatives, tells Contagious that productisation can be ‘part of the solution to the monetisation problem’ and thinks agencies should consider it. But he also says the model presents challenges, ‘such as the tendency to price the product instead of pricing the client, or the fact that sellers of productised services

have a harder time focusing on value when they have an actual product they want to sell’.

Cut to the quick

It has only been about 18 months since Huge restructured and that’s not enough time to know whether it has been a success. All we know so far about Huge’s performance is that Interpublic Group’s CEO, Philippe Krakowsky, said in an earnings call in October that it was among a group of digital specialty agencies that had produced ‘challenged results’.

But the argument for reforming creative agencies should not turn on what happens

at Huge. ‘Clients are not growing, clients fire agencies every three years, clients pay agencies very little and those fees are in decline, and agencies don’t pay their people very well,’ says Farmer. ‘That isn’t a very strong argument for what agencies are doing is successful.’

Productisation may or may not be the answer, but agencies will need to find some way to charge for the value they create, rather than the effort they put in, if they want to be taken seriously by clients and make enough to pay their talent properly. And that need is only going to become more acute as AI tools become more proficient.

‘The business model of the holding companies to a very considerable extent is to get paid for bodies,’ says Farmer. ‘And I have seen enough AI to know that a lot of those bodies are going to be replaced.’

‘Even if you assume that the digital and social scopes of work represent 40% of the total workload of an agency these days, how much of that is vulnerable to AI? I’d say half of it. So maybe 20% of a typical creative agency workload could be replaced by AI. Well, that’s 20% of the people, not counting [support staff]. There isn’t a holding company that can survive that big a change.’



‘One of the things I learnt early in my career from Pat Fallon himself was that pop culture was part of our jobs. It’s common ground for wide swathes of people. And for briefs, it’s a treasure trove of insights’

Kara Buckner, chief strategy officer, Fallon / Contagious.com, January 2023



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**EARNED
IMPACT
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TWS

Unveiling the power of ‘the earned effect’ /

If brands want people's attention, they're going to have to earn it

In the dynamic landscape of modern marketing, ‘Earned First’ thinking has emerged as a strategic example that places genuine audience engagement at the forefront. This approach recognises the importance of building authentic connections with the audience, aiming to earn attention and trust rather than relying solely on paid strategies.

Central to ‘Earned First’ thinking is the understanding that cultivating meaningful relationships with consumers through valuable and relevant content is key to long-term success. It’s a departure from traditional,

interruptive advertising methods, emphasising the creation of content that naturally resonates with the audience.

In January, our Weber Shandwick Collective’s chief executive officer, Gail Heimann, took to the stage at Most Contagious NY to explain that we are living in an era of radical complexity and apathy and if brands want people’s attention, they’re going to have to earn it. This philosophy contends that by genuinely earning recognition, brands become more valued, shared and spotlighted in the media — an approach we call ‘earned first.’

‘Understanding the value of earned media has never been more critical in shaping effective communication strategies’

In partnership with the IPA, we delved into this concept, conducting a study to grasp and quantify the impact of the ‘earned first’ approach. The findings proved enlightening. Campaigns adopting an earned first strategy in promoting sustained coverage and conversation were 53% more likely to produce substantial business impacts and 2.6 times more likely to achieve significant profit growth compared to alternative methods.

These campaigns not only showed improvements in standard metrics but also experienced positive shifts in important business measures, ranging from increased shares to enhanced customer retention. Crucially, embracing an earned first approach goes beyond simply using earned media; it represents a mindset that influences strate-

gic planning processes. This approach offers a unique perspective on how brands can be worthy of attention in the era of earned media.

Expanding on this initiative, we’ve recently unveiled an innovative solution that uses the power of proprietary AI models — a solution we’re calling Earned Impact Value. This initiative directly addresses the ongoing challenge of quantifying the outcomes of earned media efforts, giving data-driven insights for informed strategic decision-making.

Comprising three essential products, the solution includes the *Earned Score* for real-time assessment, the *Scenario Planner* for medium-term impact analysis and the *Conversion Model* for evaluating long-term business outcomes. These tools not only equip brands with the means to navigate the ever-

evolving landscape of earned communications but also provide unprecedented insights into the traditionally vague realm of earned media measurement. Understanding the value of earned media has never been more critical in shaping effective communication strategies.

This solution represents an inflection point for our industry. Our belief is that by embracing these cutting-edge technologies and harnessing their capabilities, we can deliver unparalleled service and maximise return on investment for brands. Through Earned Impact Value, for one of our clients we have directly linked a 9% impact on business outcomes to earned media, showcasing an impressive ROI of 11.5, surpassing other channels. Additionally, we’ve demonstrated an indirect enhancement of 28% in the performance of other media channels for a healthcare client.

The Earned Impact Value solution underscores the imperative for brands to establish cultural and emotional connections with their audience, fostering sustainable value. It also highlights the critical importance for brands to actively measure impact and enhance creative effectiveness, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their communication strategies and their influence on business performances.

Creative effectiveness plays a fundamental role in bringing ‘Earned First’ thinking to life. Crafting compelling and authentic narratives, visuals and experiences is essential for capturing audience attention. Creative

content that aligns with brand values and connects emotionally with the audience has the potential to amplify the earned impact, encouraging a sense of loyalty and advocacy among audiences.

Focusing on ‘Earned First’, our approach underscores the significance of building authentic relationships and meaningful narratives for brands, with an emphasis on measurable outcomes. Enhanced by innovative AI models, the Earned Impact Value introduces a groundbreaking solution that comprehensively measures the short, medium and long-term effects of earned communications, addressing the longstanding challenge of quantifying results in this specific landscape. In essence, ‘The Earned Effect’ not only redefines communication strategies but also empowers brands to navigate the evolving landscape with data-driven insights for informed decision-making.

About The Weber Shandwick Collective (TWSC)

The Weber Shandwick Collective (TWSC) is the strategic communications and consulting network. In addition to Weber Shandwick, TWSC brands include Cappuccino, Current Global, dna, Flipside, KRC Research, Myriant, Powell Tate, Prime Weber Shandwick, Resolute Digital, Revive, ThatLot and United Minds. The Weber Shandwick Collective is part of the Interpublic Group (NYSE: IPG). For more information, visit thewebershandwickcollective.com. 📄

What marketers can learn from...

Every day is a school day in marketing. Here's what the biggest news stories and cultural events of 2023 can teach us about the business of brand building, according to Contagious' online editor, James Swift

The success of the *Barbie* movie:

When it comes to marketing, more is more. You can never have enough.

Twitter's rebrand to 'X': There's a good chance that you understand branding better than the world's richest man.

Warner Bros Discovery rebranding HBO Max as Max:

There's also a good chance that you understand branding better than one of the world's premier entertainment companies.

The coronation of King

Charles III: The UK public had conniptions when it was reported that they would be asked to pledge their allegiance to the new king. If that's how people respond to a request for loyalty from their monarch, what chance do you think your brand has of getting it?

The adoption of generative AI

tools: Algorithms won't have to exceed human capabilities before they start putting us out of jobs. They'll just need to be able to do a passable job and cost a lot less.

The success of KSI and Logan Paul's Prime Energy drink:

This is why the advertising industry is obsessed with young people — because you can get them to pay many times the RRP for a bottle of sugar water if they think it will make them look cool.

Unilever CEO Hein Schumacher's announcement to investors that the FMCG company will not 'force-fit' social and environmental purposes onto its brands:

Purposeful marketing isn't over, but there sure are a lot of signals that it has passed its peak.

Economist, Tyler Cowen:

Popular culture and design has become much safer and homogeneous because the internet does such a good job at catering to fringe sensibilities that 'the fight over the mainstream middle becomes all the more mainstream'.

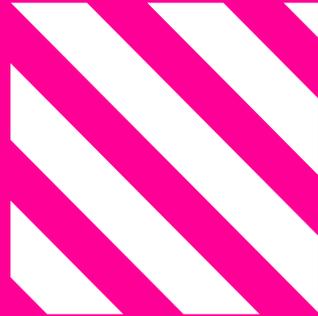
The Writers Guild of America strike:

The way writers' witty protest placards went viral on social media demonstrates, once again, the strange power that creative out-of-home advertising commands in online spaces.

The global slump in demand for luxury goods that's dragging down the performance of upscale fashion houses:

Even the well-off are tightening their (Dolce & Gabbana) belts.





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We help agencies and brands supercharge their marketing by learning from the world's most creative and effective companies and campaigns.

We do this via our IQ intelligence platform, consulting services, training and events. The company's mission is to inspire and enable contagious creativity by championing excellence and innovation in marketing.

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