

# UNPRECEDENTED?

How is Covid-19 changing  
the way we **connect**?

## Who's on screen



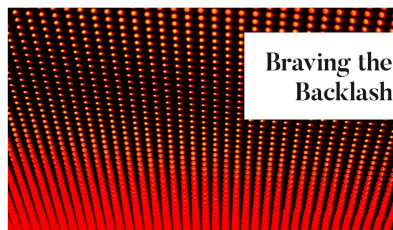
**Mobbie Nazir**  
Global Chief  
Strategy Officer

**Lore Oxford**  
Global Head of  
Cultural Insights



# Our thought leadership

Unprecedented? is the latest addition to our public facing research and thought leadership.



## Who we work with

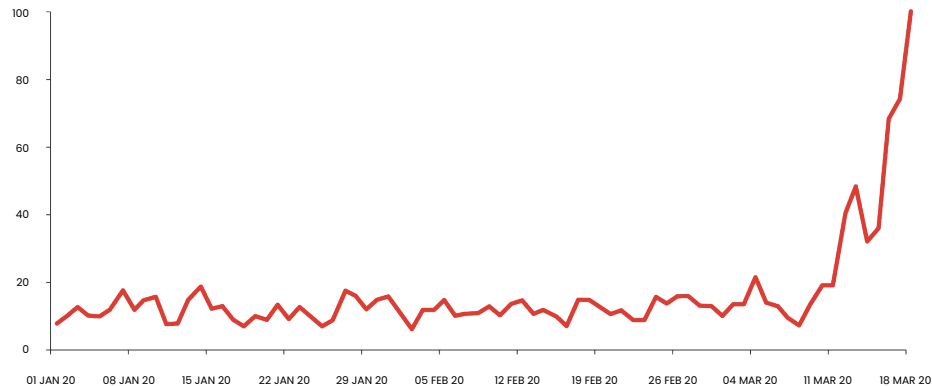
Some of the most pioneering global brands in the world.

The logo for Activision, featuring the word "ACTIVISION" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.The Burberry logo, featuring the word "BURBERRY" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.The Google logo, featuring the word "Google" in its multi-colored, sans-serif font.The Amazon logo, featuring the word "amazon" in a lowercase, sans-serif font with a yellow arrow pointing from the 'a' to the 'z'.The Virgin Atlantic logo, featuring the text "virgin atlantic" in a lowercase, sans-serif font with a small red and white logo to the right.The Netflix logo, featuring the word "NETFLIX" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.The YouTube logo, featuring the word "You" in black and "Tube" in white on a red rounded rectangle background.The First Direct logo, featuring the text "first direct" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.The Vodafone logo, featuring a red speech mark icon followed by the word "vodafone" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.The Guinness logo, featuring a gold harp icon above the word "GUINNESS" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

# Introducing Unprecedented?

A series in which we explore how much Covid-19 has really changed the way we behave online – not just now, but in the long-term.

This year, there's been unprecedented use of the word 'unprecedented'



# Introducing Unprecedented?

A series in which we explore how much Covid-19 has really changed the way we behave online – not just now, but in the long-term.

# 01

How is Covid-19  
changing the way we  
**connect?**

# Introducing Unprecedented?

A series in which we explore how much Covid-19 has really changed the way we behave online – not just now, but in the long-term.

# 01

How is Covid-19 changing the way we **connect**?

# 02

How is Covid-19 changing the way we stay **entertained**?

# Introducing Unprecedented?

A series in which we explore how much Covid-19 has really changed the way we behave online – not just now, but in the long-term.

# 01

How is Covid-19 changing the way we **connect**?

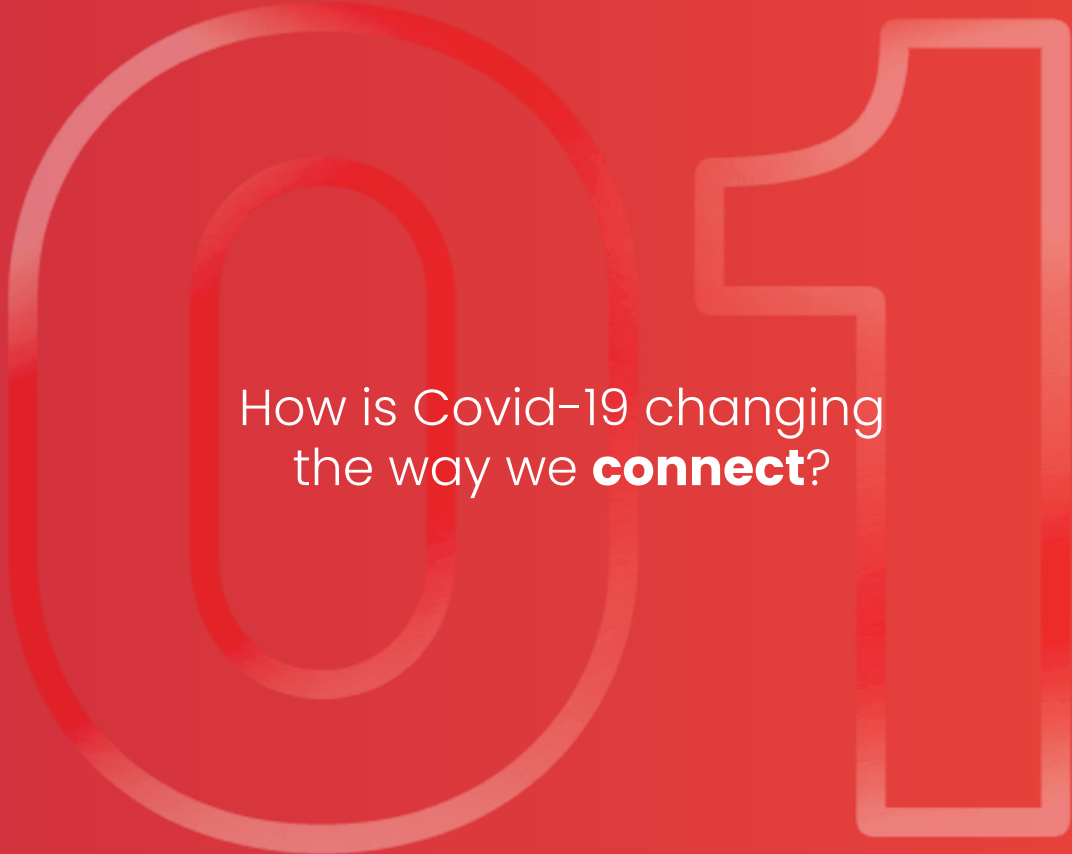
# 02

How is Covid-19 changing the way we stay **entertained**?

# 03

How is Covid-19 changing the way we get **informed**?





How is Covid-19 changing  
the way we **connect**?

# Who contributed

We Are Social boasts a team of 800+ social experts spread across 15 offices globally, our global cultural knowledge is unmatched by most creative agencies.

Our **Social Spotting Network** is a core group of collaborators whose collective brain ensures we're keeping track of cultural shifts on a global scale.



# Who contributed



**Dr. Tunisha Singleton**  
Media Psychologist &  
Brand Consultant



**Sarah Whelan**  
Global Consumer Marketing  
Manager at Dr. Martens

**Harvey Cossell**  
Group Head of Strategy, UK



**Werner Iucksch**  
Strategy Director, Singapore



**Bruno Tecci**  
Head of Strategy, Italy



Covid-19 has led to some **major disruptions** in the way we communicate...



Covid-19 has led to some **major disruptions** in the way we communicate...

**01** More time at home,  
less time with others



Covid-19 has led to some **major disruptions** in the way we communicate...

**01** More time at home,  
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**02** Less face time,  
more screen time



Covid-19 has led to some **major disruptions** in the way we communicate...

**01** More time at home,  
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**02** Less face time,  
more screen time

**03** More instability,  
more collectivism



This isn't just about  
our **immediate  
loved ones**, either.

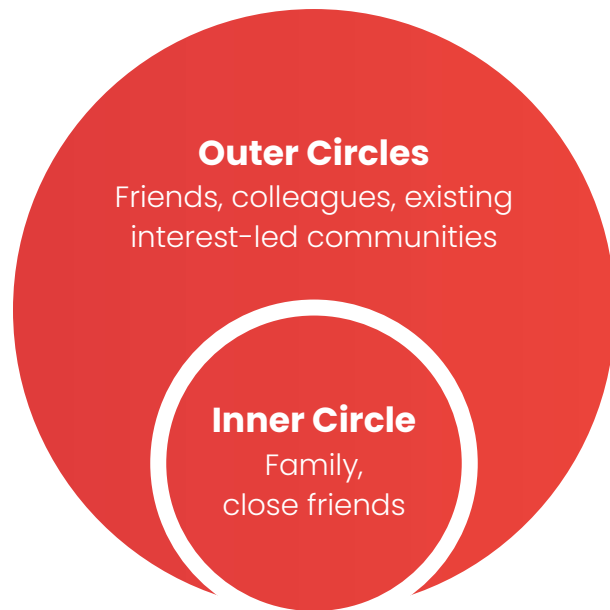


**Inner Circle**

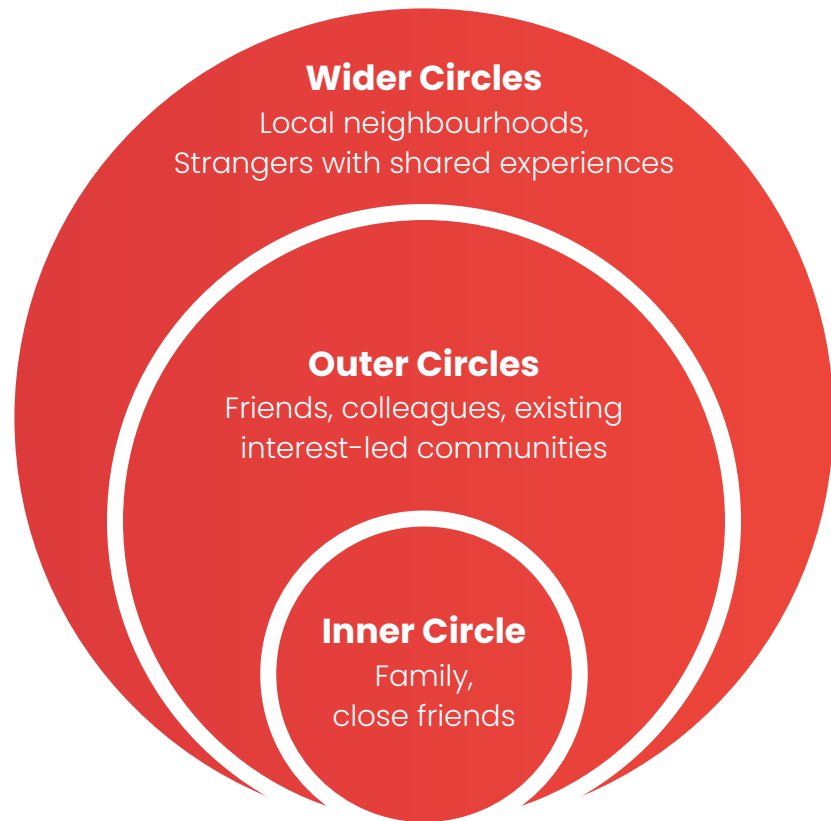
Family,  
close friends

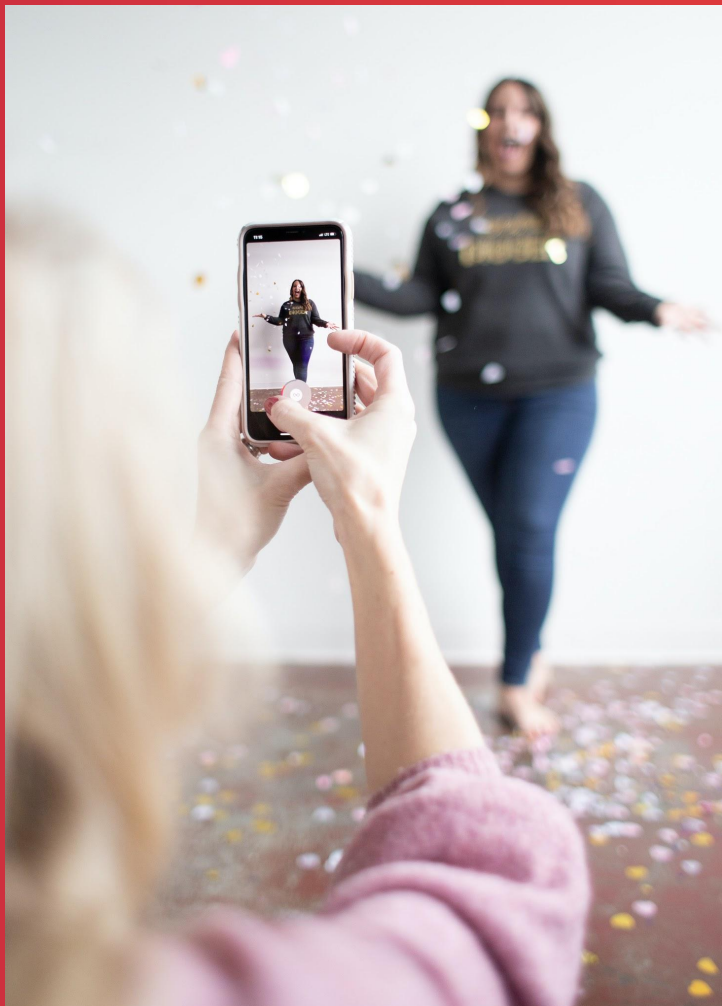


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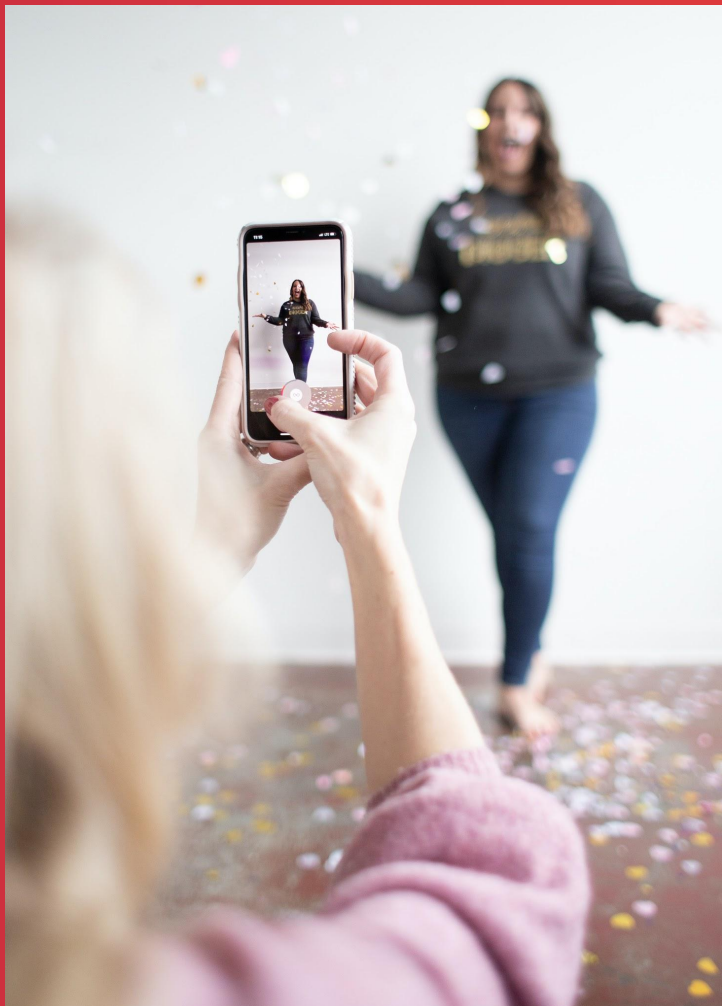


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In this environment,  
swathes of **new  
behaviours** have  
emerged.



In this environment, swathes of **new behaviours** have emerged.

So how can we predict which ones **will last?**

The short answer is that **we can't.**

We're still operating in a unique space. Even as economies reopen, for many, the coming months are still defined by uncertainty and anxiety.

Florida shatters records with over 10,000 new COVID-19 cases in single day



Leicester could be first place in England to face local lockdown



Coronavirus: Another spike forces Spain into second local lockdown in 24 hours



But we can interrogate some of the most interesting behaviours to make an **educated guess...**

**EXISTING BEHAVIOUR**



**Firstly, is it truly new,  
or is it part of an  
existing behaviour?**

**NEW BEHAVIOUR**

**EXISTING BEHAVIOUR****EXISTING MOTIVATION****NEW MOTIVATION**

**Secondly, does it speak to an existing motivation that couldn't be served during the crisis, or speak to a new one that's developed because of the crisis?**

**NEW BEHAVIOUR**



## AMPLIFICATIONS

**Amplifications** are familiar responses to existing drivers and motivations that have been temporarily exacerbated during the crisis.

**EXISTING BEHAVIOUR****EXISTING MOTIVATION****NEW MOTIVATION****NEW BEHAVIOUR**

AMPLIFICATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

**Substitutes** are new responses to the crisis that serve existing motivations and desires in the short-term.

SUBSTITUTES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

**Adaptations** are existing behaviours that serve new motivations in the wake of the crisis.

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

SUBSTITUTES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

NEW BEHAVIOUR

**Deviations** are new responses to new motivations that could persist beyond the crisis.

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

Let's use some widely reported food trends during the crisis as an example

NEW MOTIVATION

SUBSTITUTES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

DEVIATIONS

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

**HOME DELIVERED GROCERIES**  
Previous to the crisis, buying groceries online was an existing behaviour, driven by a need for convenience. Due to lockdown, the desire for home delivered groceries was **amplified**.



EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

SUBSTITUTES

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EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

**DIGITAL SUPPER CLUBS**  
During the crisis, people were trialling virtual food events – from supper clubs to wine tastings – a new behaviour to **substitute** the existing desire to eat out in social spaces.



NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

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EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

**HOME DELIVERED GROCERIES**  
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**IMMUNITY-BOOSTING FOODS**  
 People were buying health foods prior to the crisis. But in the wake of Covid-19, a desire for foods that boost immunity in particular has developed. This is an **adaptation** in line with the anxieties of the pandemic.

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

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EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

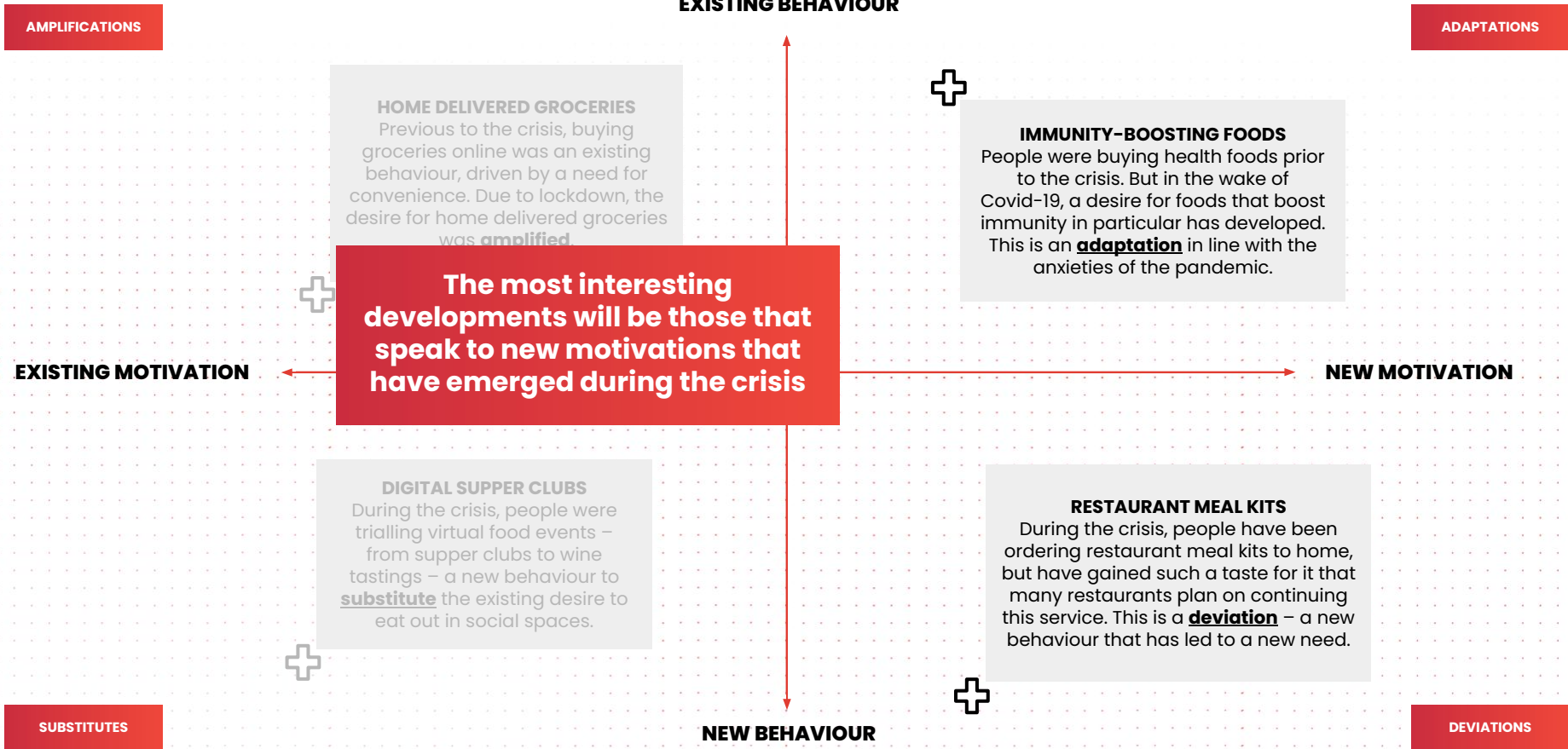
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**RESTAURANT MEAL KITS**  
 During the crisis, people have been ordering restaurant meal kits to home, but have gained such a taste for it that many restaurants plan on continuing this service. This is a **deviation** – a new behaviour that has led to a new need.

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

NEW BEHAVIOUR





So let's explore  
the key **behaviours**  
**defining the ways**  
**we connect** during  
Covid-19...

# 01

## Public Spaces

People have been **replicating the feeling of public spaces** with strangers through social



# 01

## Public Spaces

People have been **replicating the feeling of public spaces** with strangers through social

### Before Covid-19

Third spaces were an important part of how we socialised, defined by a lack of ownership of space that maximises shared comfort.

### During Covid-19

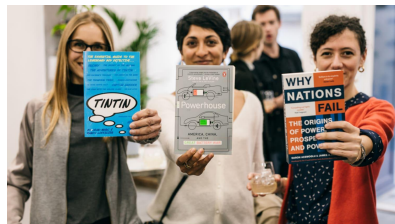
With no access to these spaces, people are growing more comfortable spending time with strangers in digital spaces.

# Where we've seen it?



**Club Quarantine is an LGBTQ+ nightclub hosted on Zoom**

*Canada / Global*



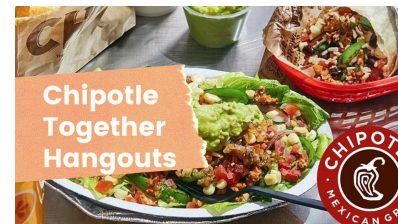
**Rebel Book Club is a book club that's been hosted online during lockdown**

*UK / Global*



**Quan Min Party is an online karaoke bar for people to sing together**

*China*



**Chipotle has been hosting virtual lunches with influencers on Zoom**

*US*

*At Dr. Martens, our social communities have become key spaces for people to meet, engage and connect. We've seen a significant increase in conversations happening on our channels, not just between us and the consumer, but consumers connecting with each other. It's been interesting to see like minded individuals start relationships and internet friendships in the comments of our Instagram posts*

**Sarah Whelan Global Consumer  
Marketing Manager at Dr. Martens**



AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION



PUBLIC SPACES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS



AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

*This is replacement behaviour.  
They're looking to replicate  
something that they can't currently  
do, replacing IRL, with URL. Is this  
replacement as good? Probably not*

**Harvey Cossell, Group  
Head of Strategy, UK**

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION



PUBLIC SPACES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

*These tools are replacing public spaces now, but post-Covid, they could be remodelled, not to replace public spaces, but to complement them. After this is over, we'll be more open to recognising that technology can be an enabler of these experiences when we need it to be*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media Psychologist & Brand Consultant**

PUBLIC SPACES



NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

# What it means for brands

## In Q3 and Q4...

For any products launching towards the end of this year, there's an opportunity to make tactical use of this. In this sense, it will continue to be useful until there's a vaccine.

## In the new normal...

For brands whose products and offline spaces already facilitate a social element, there's an opportunity to recreate these spaces online.

# 02

## Intergenerational Media

People are **connecting  
with their families**  
by merging their  
media habits



# 02

## Intergenerational Media

People are **connecting  
with their families**  
by merging their  
media habits

### Before Covid-19

Media habits between generations were highly differentiated, meaning it was often a barrier to family bonding, rather than an enabler.

### During Covid-19

Families that have been locked down together, are spending more time in each other's spaces and media habits have overlapped. Those that live separately have been communicating via more digital mediums.

# Where we've seen it?



**Families are coming together around the 'family hearth' of TV**

*Europe*



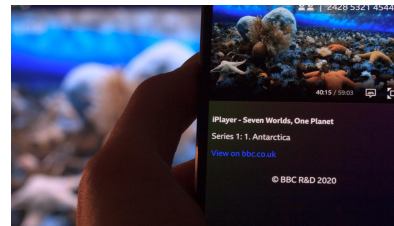
**Families are making TikToks together as an exercise in bonding**

*Global*



**Parents and kids are baking recipes they find on Instagram together**

*Dubai*



**The BBC launched a tool for shared viewing during lockdowns**

*UK*

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION



INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIA

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

## EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

*Once parents go back to work and life returns to some normality, we may see this behaviour reduce, but common ground has been built here. It may reduce in terms of frequency, but I don't think it will disappear, either*

*Bruno Tecci, Head of Strategy, Italy*

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION



INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIA

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS



AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

*There's not a lot of digital literacy among the oldest generations. Will we see more great- great-grandmothers dancing to Bruno Mars when this is over? I'm not sure*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media Psychologist & Brand Consultant**

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION



INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIA

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

# What it means for brands

## In Q3 and Q4...

Older audiences have gotten a crash course in digital comms and memes, which will continue to be put to use as we move in and out of lockdown.

There's an opportunity for all kinds of brands to lean into this – whether Netflix encourages family viewing or Barilla encourages cooking together – especially right now.

## In the new normal...

Brands can continue to teach seniors and older generations digital citizenship.

There's an opportunity for brands to use intergenerational communication plans to draw in older audiences, without compromising on their youthfulness.

## 03

## Local Spirit

People are more **invested** in their **immediate offline locales** and communities



# 03

## Local Spirit

People are more **invested in their immediate offline locales** and communities

### Before Covid-19

Recent years have seen a rise in conscious consumption – a growing desire to redirect spending away from big business, and towards smaller and more local businesses.

### During Covid-19

During Covid-19, small businesses have been at particular risk. Unable to travel, and united with neighbours and local communities through a shared enemy, our desire to support these businesses and communities on a local level has been heightened.

# Where we've seen it?



**Bars and restaurants have launched GoFundMe pages, tapping into local communities to survive the pandemic**

*Global*



**British communities have started WhatsApp groups to protect the vulnerable in their neighbourhoods**

*UK*



**German football club Borussia Dortmund created a platform to support local businesses you'd usually visit on matchday**

*Germany*



**Diageo has launched a \$100 million recovery fund to help independent pubs and bars, demonstrating investment in local communities**

*Global*

*With people being more engaged with their immediate locales, they're also noticing the issues. Take the Black experience in America right now. Many are seeing how Black communities have been mistreated. As a result, people in these local communities from all demographics and cultures are supporting Black businesses and shopping from local establishments that share their values*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media  
Psychologist & Brand Consultant**



AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

LOCAL SPIRIT



NEW BEHAVIOUR

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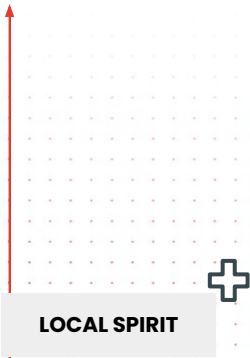
AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

*What this really highlights is conscious consumerism. That's increased post-Covid because the meaning behind community has been heightened. We're viewing ourselves as emotional stakeholders, as being a part of something greater than ourselves*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media Psychologist & Brand Consultant**



EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

NEW BEHAVIOUR

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AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

LOCAL SPIRIT

*Let's not forget that e-commerce is going through the roof. People are more connected with their communities, yes. But that won't necessarily translate into investment in the community in the long-term*

**Werner Iucksch, Strategy Director, Singapore**

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

# What it means for brands

## In Q3 and Q4...

For big brands that are perceived to be disconnected from local communities can show people that they're ingrained by giving back, especially during a time of such heightened uncertainty.

During this time, brands should also tap into local figures and businesses to make content as locally relevant as possible.

## In the new normal...

With Facebook Shops rolling out globally, the role social could play in increasing the footprint of small and medium businesses may grow.

In the long-term, this will play out very differently in different markets and locales. While cities with high population densities may have less connection to local business, for example, this will have particular impact on suburban and rural consumers.

# 04

## Notification Fatigue

People are **feeling overwhelmed** by always-on digital communications



# 04

## Notification Fatigue

People are **feeling overwhelmed** by always-on digital communications

### Before Covid-19

Amid an uptick in mental health awareness and self-care, social media and tech have been painted as the enemy. People have been seeking ways to form healthier relationships with their screens.

### During Covid-19

At the height of the first wave, our screens were no longer optional, becoming integral to our work and relationships. Combined with an uptick in global bad news, we've been forced to find new ways to protect our emotional wellbeing.

# Where we've seen it?



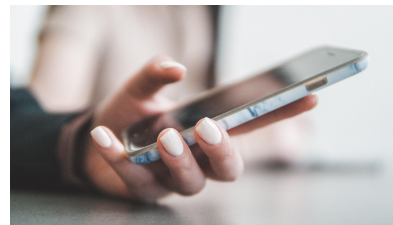
**People are unable to stop scrolling through bad news – a phenomenon that's referred to as doomscrolling**

*Global*



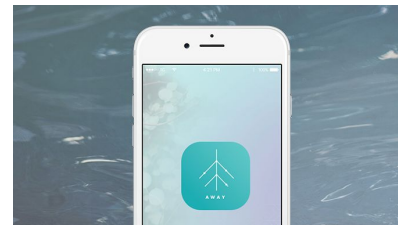
**People are feeling fatigued by video calls – whether work meets on Zoom or hangs on Houseparty**

*Global*



**People are muting WhatsApp notifications to protect their mental health**

*Global*



**Thrive Away is an app from tech consultancy Thrive Global, which lets users block all notifications**

*Global*

AMPLIFICATIONS

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EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

NOTIFICATION FATIGUE



EXISTING MOTIVATION

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AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

NOTIFICATION FATIGUE



EXISTING MOTIVATION

NEW MOTIVATION

*There are so many emotions happening through our screens – you're in a work meeting, then you're reading about police brutality, then you're at a virtual happy hour. It makes some of us feel busier than they were before. It used to be something you engaged with casually, but now we're being forced to. So we're building up emotional resilience to protect ourselves*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media Psychologist & Brand Consultant**

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

# What it means for brands

## In Q3 and Q4...

People aren't necessarily going to want to leave their screens for good, but there are ways that brands can help them feel more positive about their screen time.

Whether encouraging new routines around time away from your phone, or providing content that encourages you do something non-screen related, it's about encouraging balance and moderation.

## In the new normal...

We could see people pruning their feeds more – muting, blocking and unfollowing. In this landscape, brands will need to maximise the value of their content to maintain engagement.

There could also be more opportunities for brands to help people disconnect from their phones and immerse themselves in the world around them without it feeling paternalistic.



# 05

## Mobilised Fandoms

Fan communities are **mobilising to make the changes** they want to see in the world



# 05

## Mobilised Fandoms

Fan communities are **mobilising to make the changes** they want to see in the world

### Before Covid-19

Fandom have wielded a growing amount of cultural clout online for years, with fans coalescing into tight-knit communities online and using their shared voice to make themselves heard.

### During Covid-19

Galvanised by a landscape ridden with a heightened sense of anxiety and political unrest, fan communities are using their power to effect real social and political change offline.

# Where we've seen it?



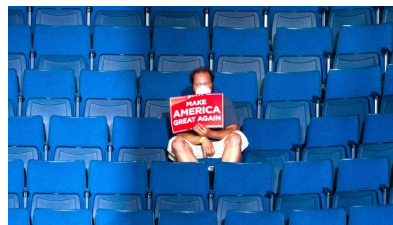
**Chiara Ferrangi's very global following clubbed together to raise €3.3 million for Italian healthcare services**

*Italy / Global*



**Harry Potter fans mobilised to speak out against JK Rowling in light of her controversial tweets around trans rights**

*Global*



**K-Pop Fans have been mobilising against racism online through sabotaging Trump rallies and racist hashtags**

*China / US / Global*



**The Washington Redskins are changing their name and logo off the back of community backlash during BLM**

*US*

AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

MOBILISED FANDOMS



NEW MOTIVATION

NEW BEHAVIOUR

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*Fans have been recognising that they're in the driver's' seat when it comes to culture and the marketing around their interests. So it brands can't figure out how to connect with fans or give them what they want, fans have realised that they can just show them*

**Dr. Tunisha Singleton, Media Psychologist & Brand Consultant**

EXISTING MOTIVATION

MOBILISED FANDOMS



NEW MOTIVATION

SUBSTITUTES

NEW BEHAVIOUR

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AMPLIFICATIONS

ADAPTATIONS

EXISTING BEHAVIOUR

EXISTING MOTIVATION

*Covid-19 is a disaster, of course, but it's also raised an opportunity to be better. A lot of young people are coming together to say – I don't want to miss an opportunity for the world to be better. They're driven to add positivity to the world*

**Bruno Tecci, Head of Strategy, Italy**

MOBILISED FANDOMS



NEW MOTIVATION

NEW BEHAVIOUR

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

# What it means for brands

## In Q3 and Q4...

Now is the time to lean into existing fan communities. If you already have a fan community around your brand, build them up and support them.

If you don't, feed other fan communities what they need to coalesce, give them something to rally around.

## In the new normal...

Brands in these communities will need to play a role and stand with their community. They won't be able to ignore the political values of their fans.

Brands could also have the opportunity to tap into their own communities, customers and fans to genuinely bring about change in line with their values. This could change the face of brand purpose forever.

*People expect brands to have an opinion – you have to have a point of view and you can not sit on the fence. It will come from the brand, but it won't just be about what the brand wants to say anymore. It will have to be a collaborative strategy*

**Sarah Whelan Global Consumer Marketing Manager at Dr. Martens**





# To recap



01

## Public Spaces

People have been replicating the feeling of public spaces with strangers through social

02

## Intergenerational Media

People are connecting with their families by merging their media habits

03

## Local Spirit

People are more invested in their immediate offline locales and communities

04

## Notification Fatigue

People are feeling overwhelmed by always-on digital communications

05

## Mobilised Fandoms

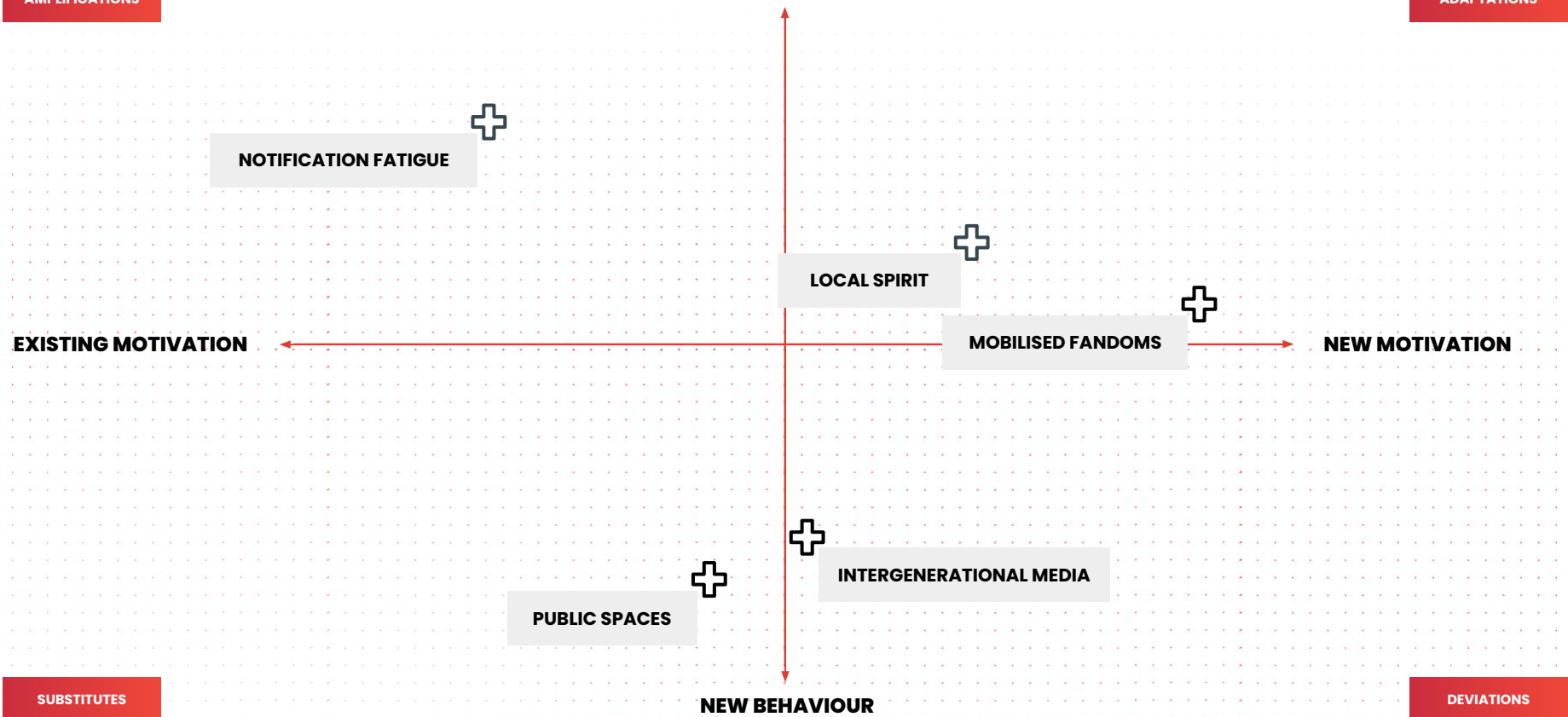
Fan communities are mobilising to make the changes they want to see in the world



AMPLIFICATIONS

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EXISTING MOTIVATION

So what unites the three newest and most promising developments we're seeing in communication behaviours that have emerged during this crisis?

NEW MOTIVATION

NEW BEHAVIOUR

NOTIFICATION FATIGUE

LOCAL SPIRIT

MOBILISED FANDOMS

PUBLIC SPACES

INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIA

SUBSTITUTES

DEVIATIONS

We're seeing a shift  
**from** passive connection **to**  
conscious connection

# These behaviours point to more active forms of digital communication...

**Local Spirit** sees people use digital communication to engage more actively in offline communities



**Intergenerational Media** sees people use digital media to engage more actively with their families

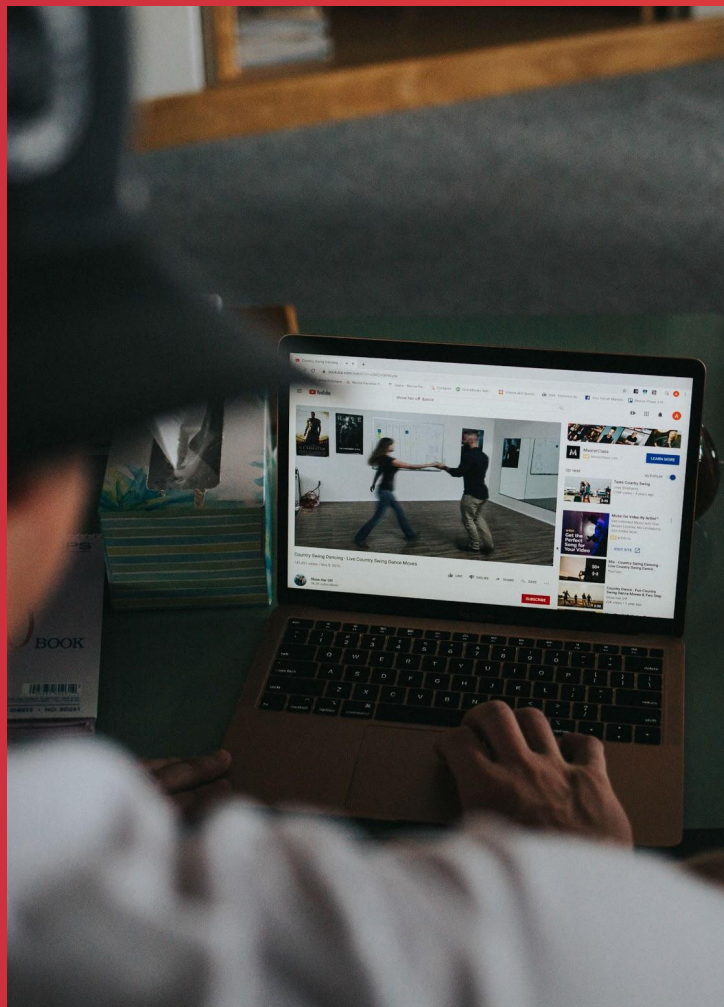


**Mobilised Fandoms** sees people use digital media to engage with people who don't share their political values

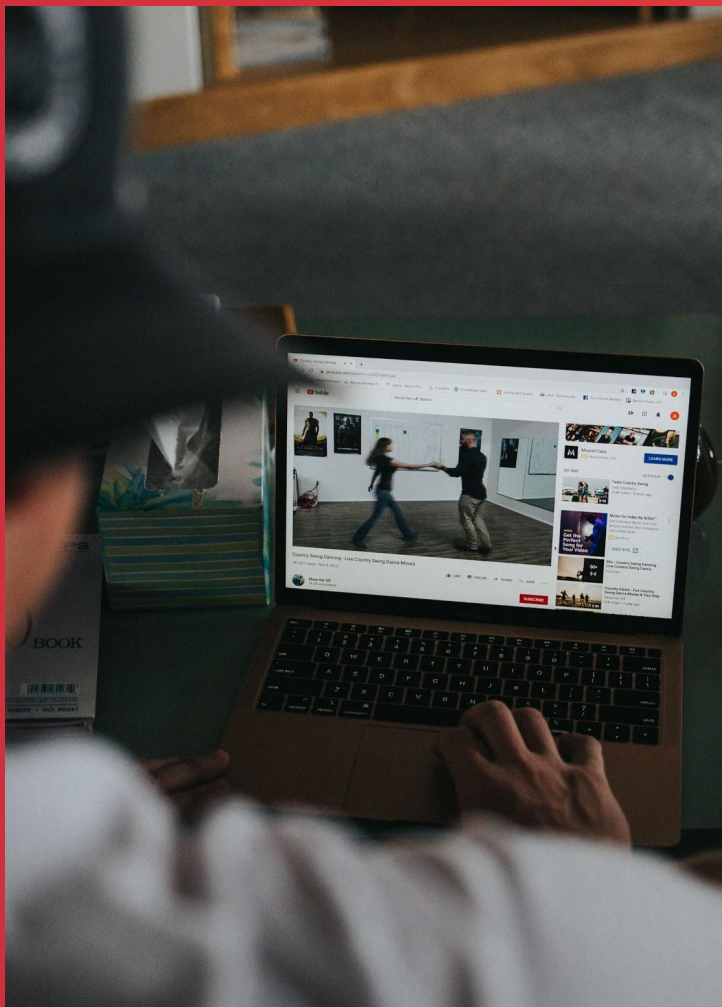


It's a departure  
from the more  
passive forms of  
connection our  
social feeds  
have long  
enabled





We've been forced to use digital to connect in every aspect of our lives



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In doing so, we've realised that when we lean in, **digital communications can make a tangible impact** on our offline relationships and experiences

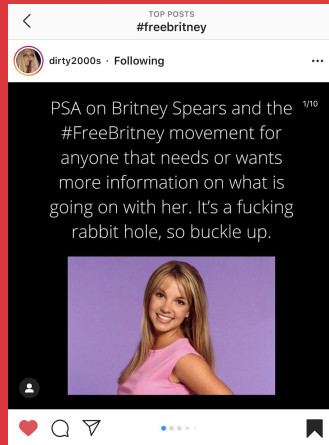


And already, we're seeing this shift play out in new and exciting ways...

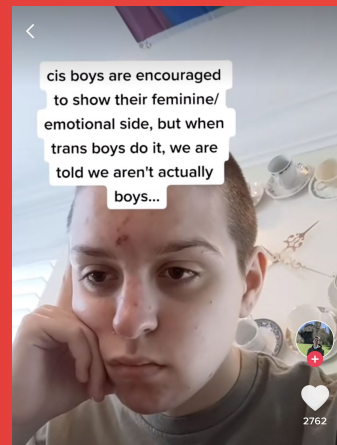
**#ShareTheMicNow** saw celebrities redistribute their disproportionate influence to promote anti-racist ideas



**#FreeBritney** has seen meme admins shift from posting '90s throwbacks to engaging with the reality of her experience



**#LetsTalkAboutIt** is a TikTok hashtag providing a space for people to provoke healthy debate around what matters to them



**we  
are.  
social**