


# WILL THINGS EVER BE AS THEY ONCE WERE?

5 THESES ON BRAND COMMUNICATION  
IN THE POST-CORONA ERA



APRIL 2020





The manager magazine gave the coronavirus period a name based on the geological ages: The Coronazoic Era. Fitting, since the coronavirus pandemic is a major turning point worldwide – not only in economic and social terms, but also in terms of communication. It follows that once the crisis is behind us, we will first be living in a new normal. In that new normal, companies communicate differently than before.

**What will change? And how can companies prepare today for their next steps in the Coronazoic Era?**

# BRAND COMMUNICATION IN THE “CORONAZOIC ERA”



# POST-CORONA

## RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO OR A COMMUNICATIVE RESTART?



### TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

Commencement of shutdown phase with all its personal and economic consequences

#### **Brand communication:**

Adaptation and partial set up of external communication; establishment of internal communication/home office

#### **Needs:**

Security, support, footing



### TIME OF ADJUSTMENT

Set up and adaptation in times of crisis, including new business activities

#### **Brand communication:**

Focus on measures adapted for new circumstances and solidarity activities

#### **Needs:**

Perspective, opportunity, innovation



### TIME FOR SUCCESSIVE NEW BEGINNINGS (REINVENTION/ NEW NORMAL)

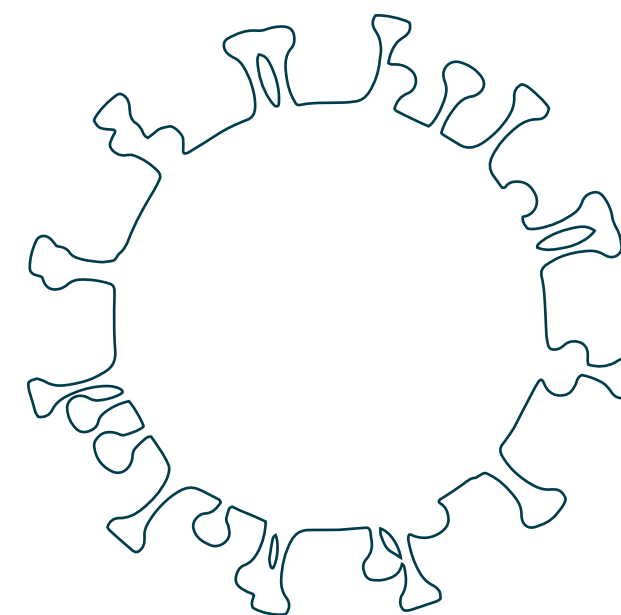


**Brand communication and needs are influenced and determined by assimilation of old and new behavior patterns**



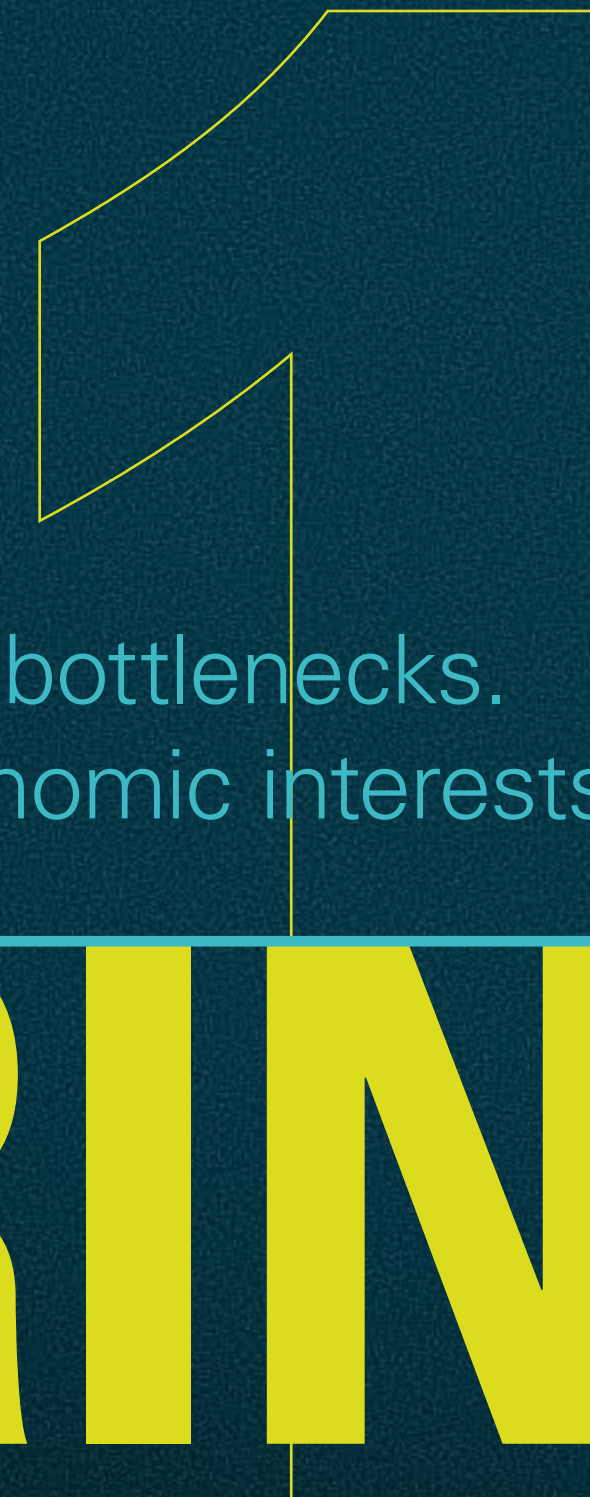
**BRANDS REACTED QUICKLY**  
INNOVATIVE OFFENSIVE MANAGEMENT  
OF CORONA  
EMPOWER. ENABLE. ENCOURAGE.

THE THREE STAGES  
OF ADAPTATION TO  
THE CRISIS\*



\* Stages named in accordance with contribution from Concept M in marketing





Innovative activities to bridge corona-related bottlenecks.  
Guided not only by altruism, but also by economic interests.

# EMPOWERING



# EXAMPLES

Brands  
are offering  
support in the  
production of:



**BVB** employees are  
helping out at **Rewe**

**TELEKOM** Corona App  
(information with test-results)

**REWE** Special conditions  
for medical personnel

**McDonald's** employees  
are helping out at **Aldi**

**FORD** hygienic maintenance  
cleaning service

**MIELE**  
Laundry service

ETC.



2

# ENABLING

Enabling groups or individuals to better cope with the crisis (usually initiated by companies and public institutions).



## EXAMPLE

**QSC** Set up  
Home Office  
capabilities in

**96**

hours

**DEUTSCHE TELEKOM**

Web Conferencing for Schools

**3 Months**  
Free

**NETWORK OF THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

#**WIRVS**VIRUS  
DER HACKATHON DER BUNDESREGIERUNG



**DEUTSCHE TELEKOM  
MOBILFUNK**

Everyone receives a  
gift of

**10 GB**

**HUAWEI**

**5G**

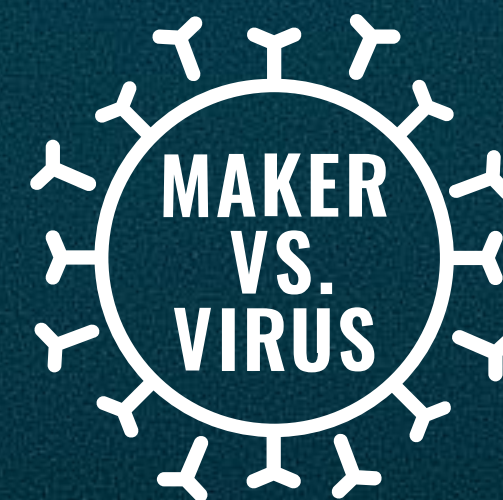
as key enabler



ETC.

Various **informational  
and educational  
portals** in the wake of  
**daycare and school  
outages**

Network of Kassel's  
**non-profit DIY  
workshop** for people/  
organizations – **exchange  
of supplies and makers**



**FORD**

Support of digital  
retailer communication





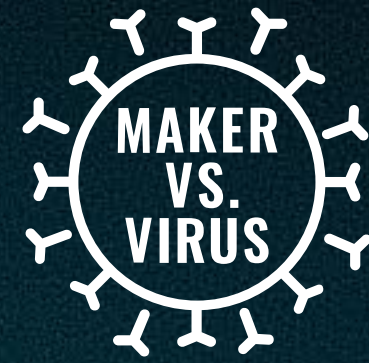
# ENCOURAGING

3

Movements and activities that emphasize solidarity (keyword: “closeness through distance”).



## EXAMPLES



**#makervsvirus** by Hammertime Kassel



**#deutschlandsagtdanke** by Raphael Brinkert  
(Germany says, "Thank You")



**#helplocalheroes** by Douglas

**#innovationfortomorrow** by Wirecard, SAP & Futur/io

**#händlerhelfenhändlern** by Rose Bikes  
(Retailers helping retailers)



**#allefüralle** (All for all) by FischerAppelt

**#stayhome** by Mercedes



**Redesigned logos**  
from various brands

ETC.



**WHAT SHOULD BRANDS  
LEARN TODAY FOR  
THE COMMUNICATION  
OF TOMORROW?**








## WHAT REMAINS AFTER CRISIS MODE? CORONA SETS TRENDS AND SPEEDS UP CHANGE

**One thing is clear:** There is life after coronavirus. However, this does not start on day one. Instead, it develops over several phases.

**And it is also clear:** The coronavirus period is followed by a new standard – for companies as well as for communications. That is because the crisis acts as a booster for existing trends and sets new ones in addition.

But what does this **“new normal”** look like?  
Fast-forward and look to China, which has been operating under the **“new normal”** for weeks.





# **THE CRISIS: A CHANCE**

## 5 THESES ON COMMUNICATION AMIDST THE “NEW NORMAL”



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### THESIS

1

“The crisis acts as a booster for the digitalization of communication – relapse excluded.”

Now, at the latest, it is digital: The coronavirus period acts as the mega booster for the digital transformation of communication. Planned analog events switch over in no time at all to web interfaces – as webcasts, webinars, or virtual reality tours. Entire companies switch to home office setups within days. Colleagues no longer meet in the hallway, but on Teams, Zoom or Slack. The battle for leads is intensifying online and is disrupting the usual price structure for digital marketing.

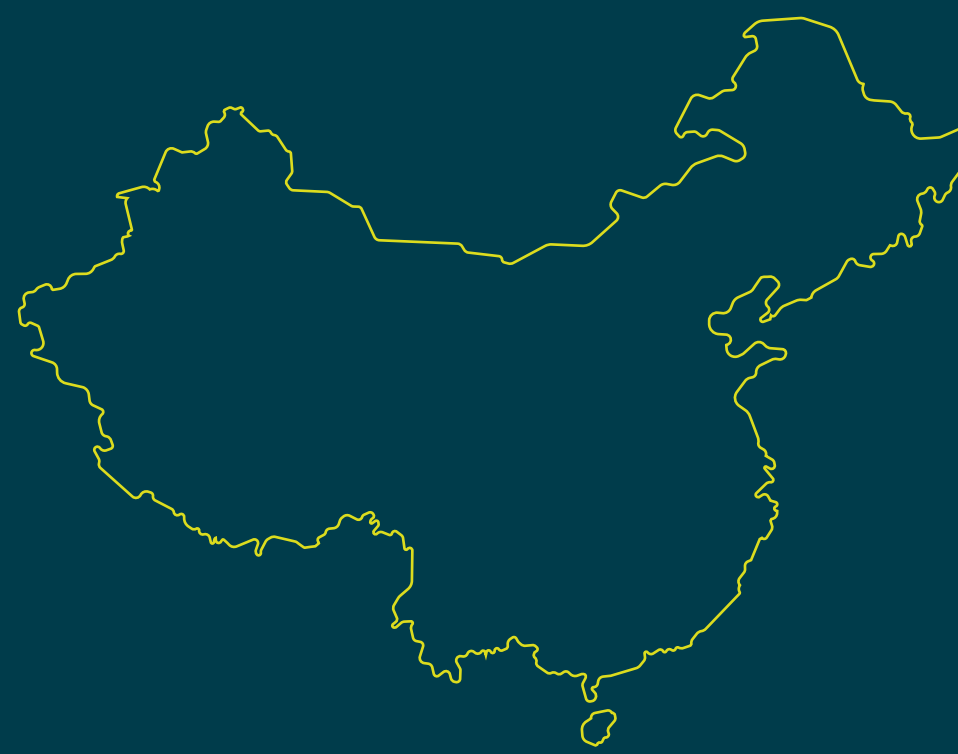
**This will remain:** Brands adjust precisely to the touchpoints from which they reach their target groups. Three things will then happen in the future:

1. Previously existing digital communication will be strengthened and expanded: more digital focus for campaigns; more LeadGen on the net.
2. The parallel piloting of analog and digital will cease: only digital employee or customer magazines remain; the landing page replaces the brochure.
3. Personal encounters go digital: web events instead of trade fairs; video calls instead of meetings.

The change will create completely new, elaborate formats and drive brands to expand their business models with digital services. Incidentally, communication also makes its contribution to the green deal (“Oh yeah, there was another issue”).



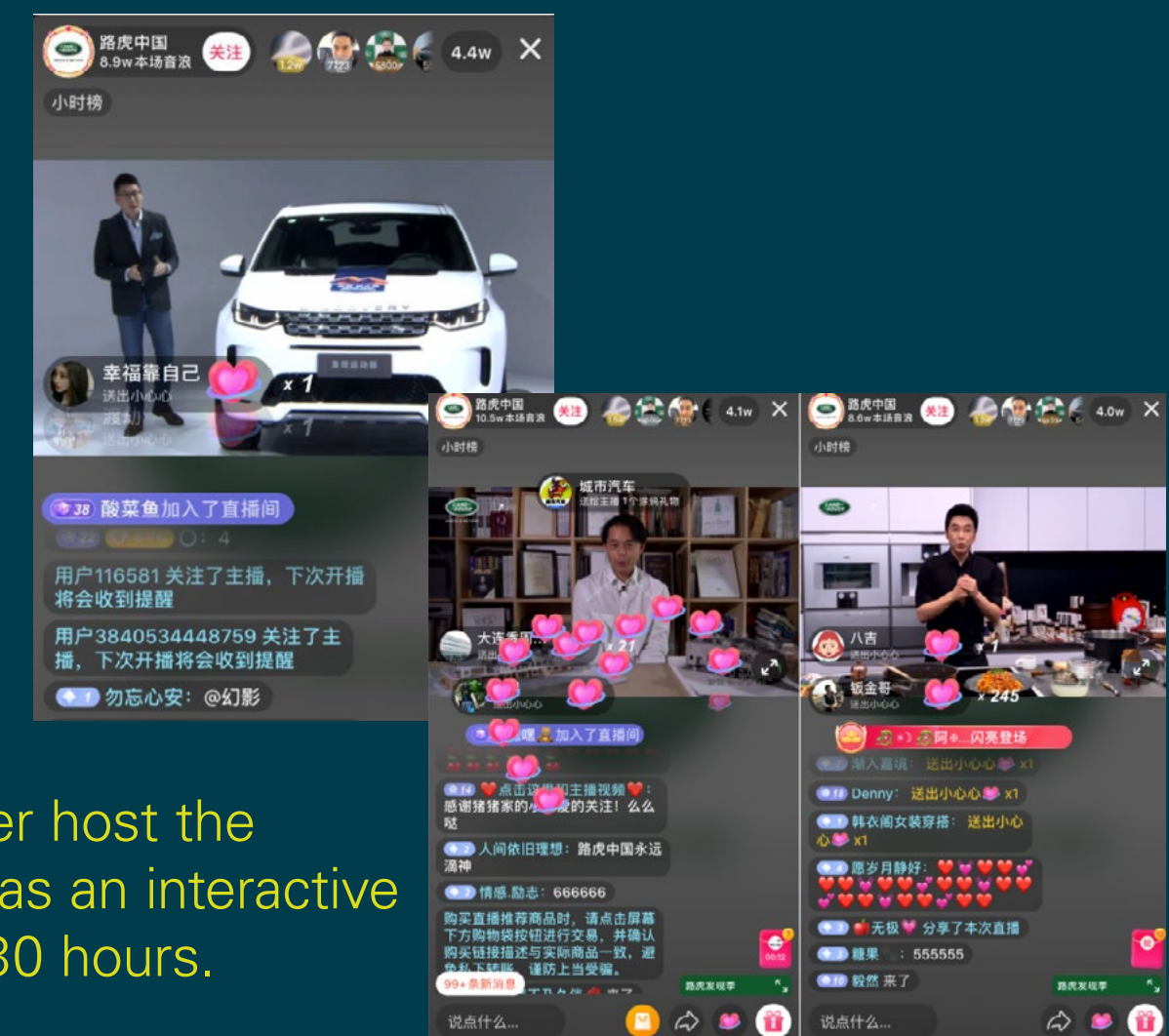
# FAST-FORWARD CHINA



- » Huge digitalization boost for conferences/events, educational offers and telemedicine
- » Business meetings occur mainly online, despite easing of continued public health measures
- » Boost in live streaming in brand communication. Only when the crisis became a popular digital marketing, sales and service element did streaming remain an integral part of the marketing mix. Pioneer: Social media and eCommerce platforms such as Taobao from Alibaba or Xiaohongshu and Pinduoduo
- » Extreme growth in corporate social networking apps: “Ding Talk” from Alibaba is far ahead of personal social networking apps according to downloads. Further increase in digital collaboration within companies and between companies is forecasted.



The Hubei brand celebrated the end of the shutdown with a 2-hour live stream show.



TikTok and Land Rover host the “Super Brands Day” as an interactive live stream – lasting 30 hours.



# THE CRISIS: A CHANCE

## 5 THESES ON COMMUNICATION AMIDST THE “NEW NORMAL”

### THESIS

# 2

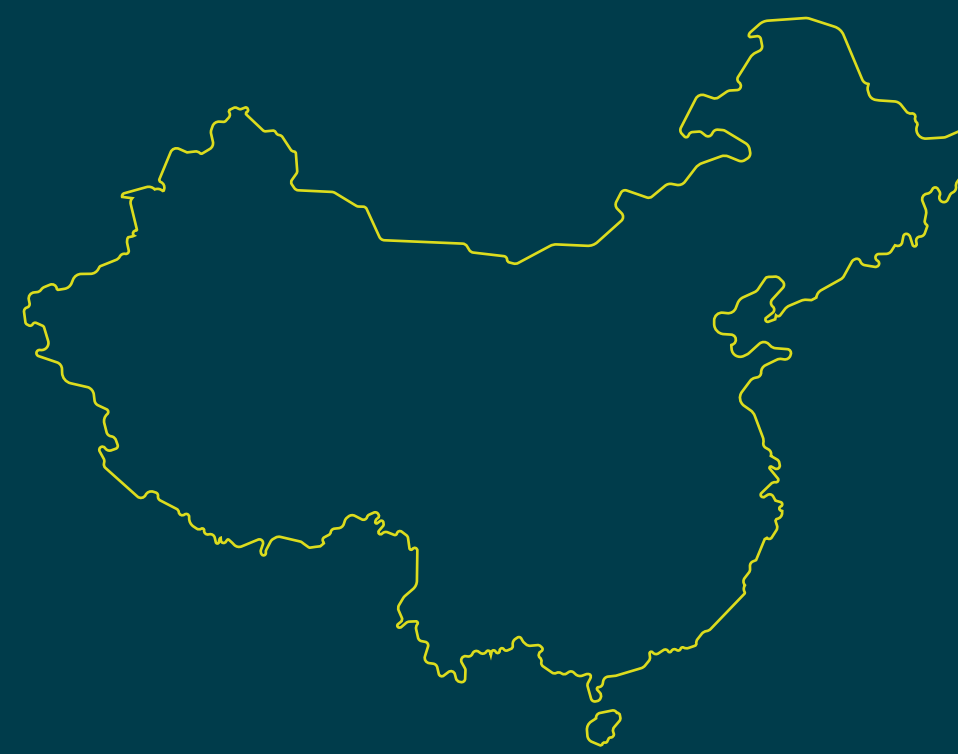
“Anyone who showed purpose during the crisis will benefit from it. Those who did not will have their cover blown.”

The coronavirus has changed society – though probably not forever. Values such as solidarity and mutual altruism are suddenly priority in the face of existential threats. Many brands reacted quickly in the crisis and have shown how they take on social responsibility. In communication, they focused on their purpose. ...probably those who had already defined their stance and contribution.

**This will remain:** Long-time buzzword now being put to the test: “Purpose” not only does well on PowerPoint slides, but also in real life. The crisis has made it clear what the point is. Because of this, companies will join suit and focus even more on what their purpose is. Or they will develop it further and blossom out of it. In this sense, it stands that crisis engagement in the coronavirus period must serve as a stance for the duration of the Coronazoic Era – to be implemented strategically in all areas. This means that only those who answer the how and why will convince and inspire people long-term. The value of the brand increases with the purpose.



# FAST-FORWARD CHINA



- » Many companies present themselves as “Good Citizens”: for example, BMW in their commercial for a new logo featuring almost no cars. Instead, empty streets, blue skies and optimistic people.
- » A current McKinsey survey\* shows that consumers are now more sensitive to issues such as product safety or environmental friendliness as we head into the Coronazoic Era. Brands adjust to this, showing more substance and orientation towards the common good.



BMW almost completely refrains from showing its vehicles in the BMW commercial for the introduction of the new logo. Emotional storytelling combines coronavirus-related scenes of empty streets with encouraging and optimistic images and messages. The brand responds to the great social challenge and conveys a strong “together we create that feeling” message.

\*Chinese consumer behavior post-COVID-19



Nike also acts as a “Good Corporate Citizen” and emphasizes the strength of social cohesion in overcoming the crisis. The video on Wechat, cut from documentary material from the community, conveys the clear message “We never give up. This virus can’t break us.”



# THE CRISIS: A CHANCE

## 5 THESES ON COMMUNICATION AMIDST THE “NEW NORMAL”

### THESIS

3

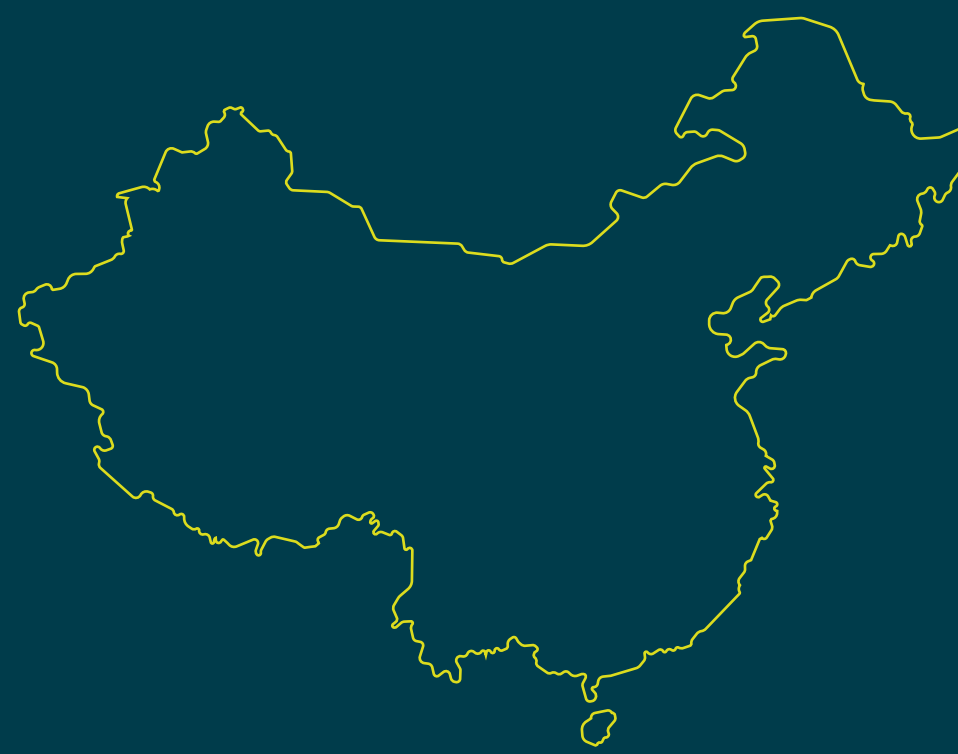
“Brands are becoming more human, more personal, more approachable, more authentic.”

In difficult times, people long for security and familiarity. That is why companies have focused on brand and people during the crisis – and pushed their sales product communication to the back burner. The brand message of the hour seems to say, “We are all in the same boat.” Brands are also exchanging ideas with their communities more intensely than ever before. This has significantly improved the reputation of many companies. The CEO has a special role: he or she shows themselves – often and very personally.

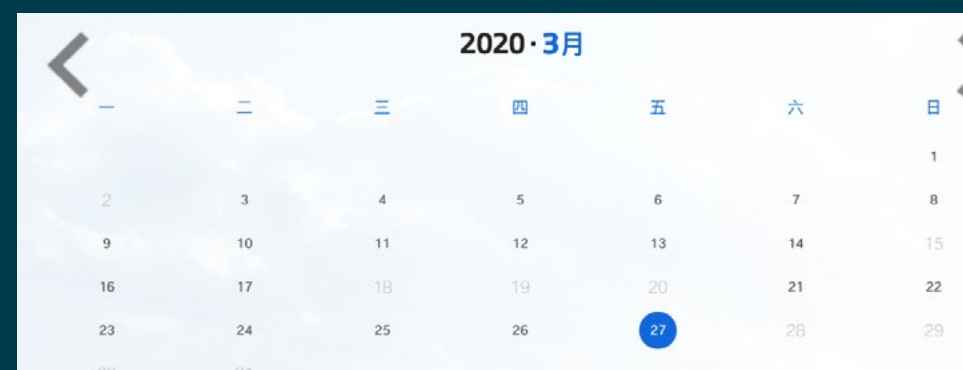
**This will remain:** The good-natured approach at eye level gains further ground through the coronavirus period. It is met with positive reactions, and is therefore continued. More than ever, companies understand the value of corporate influencers (with the CEO as the top influencer) who convey messages from person to person. The structure of influencers and opinion leaders is now being systematized and professionalized and the community is being cultivated to maintain the reputation and contacts gained. The further shift of communication to the web (see thesis 1) reinforces the trend and makes proximity in the mass market possible in the first place. But be careful: A casual approach is not enough. Information based on content, personal tonality and reliable dialogues is now required.



# FAST-FORWARD CHINA



- » Personal profiles not products – this is the new trend in China. It was barely conceivable before coronavirus that a car dealer would personally present their models via Live Stream. Now it has become practice on WeChat or TikTok. The trend that came with the crisis has become established regardless of the industry or the question of B2B or B2C.
- » The move away from the product also means that many brands offer more background information on entrepreneurial activity or seek content with a connection to the existing limitations for people.



A BMW dealer presents his models personally.  
And customers can make live stream appointments.

**There's no Huawei a virus can stop us! 90% of our staff in China are already back at work, says CEO**

And ready to build the stuff that the rest of the world needs to stay online during the CoronaCrisis

By Robbie Harb 26 Mar 2020 at 07:28

27 SHARE ▼



Ren Zhengfei

Huawei CEO and founder, Ren Zhengfei, takes a clear stance in light of coronavirus.



A fresh beverage manufacturer advertises fun fitness exercises to imitate at home.



# THE CRISIS: A CHANCE

## 5 THESES ON COMMUNICATION AMIDST THE “NEW NORMAL”

### THESIS

4

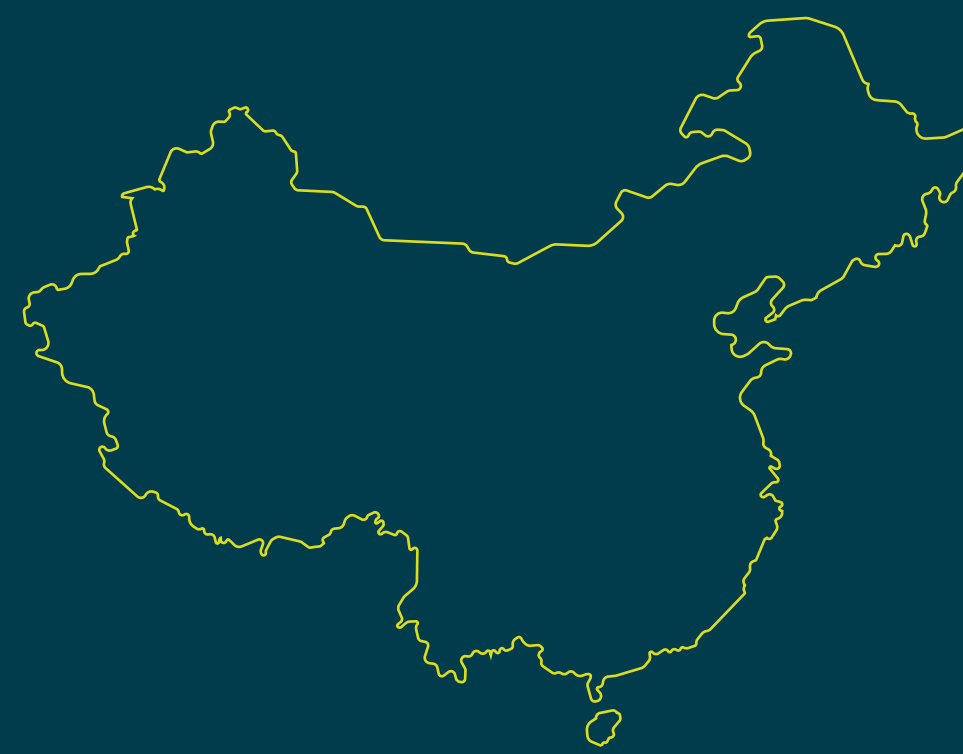
“The demands continue to increase. Communication is becoming faster and more individual.”

Start a campaign in 10 days? The crisis makes it necessary. And the crisis makes it possible. Companies think quickly and implement new ideas in no time. Thanks of course to digital possibilities. And to the highest level of commitment from everyone involved. And thanks to the establishment of new structures and processes. Necessity – also in communication – is the mother of invention. It unlocks enormous potential. The daily communication adapts exactly to the current needs and moods of the target groups – and it works.

**This will remain:** The development remains dynamic. Expectations of flexibility, speed and the individualization of communication remain high. Stakeholders demand immediate reaction to what has happened. Those who come too late to the party will be punished by target groups. Therefore, companies are beginning to establish short paths and agile campaign development in the new normal. Tracking and analysis of data as well as constant adaptation of the customer journey become the basis from which to react quickly to the demands of the target groups and from which content can be played out individually and in real time. This can only be achieved in an agile and collaborative environment. For this reason, companies are checking their communication setup for agility and flexibility. And some of them have to establish new processes, structures and partners.



# FAST-FORWARD CHINA



- » Many companies and agencies are emerging from the crisis stronger because previous beliefs made much of what has happened during the crisis seem impossible.
- » The period of shutdown has in many cases produced new structures and processes in the planning and implementation of campaigns, which are now being sustainably anchored.



The video platform QIY enables local providers in particular to quickly create relatively inexpensive advertising clips.

In its communication with TikTok, Nike also relies on videos made by the community itself and allows its member to act as protagonists for the brand.





# THE CRISIS: A CHANCE

## 5 THESES ON COMMUNICATION AMIDST THE “NEW NORMAL”

### THESIS

5

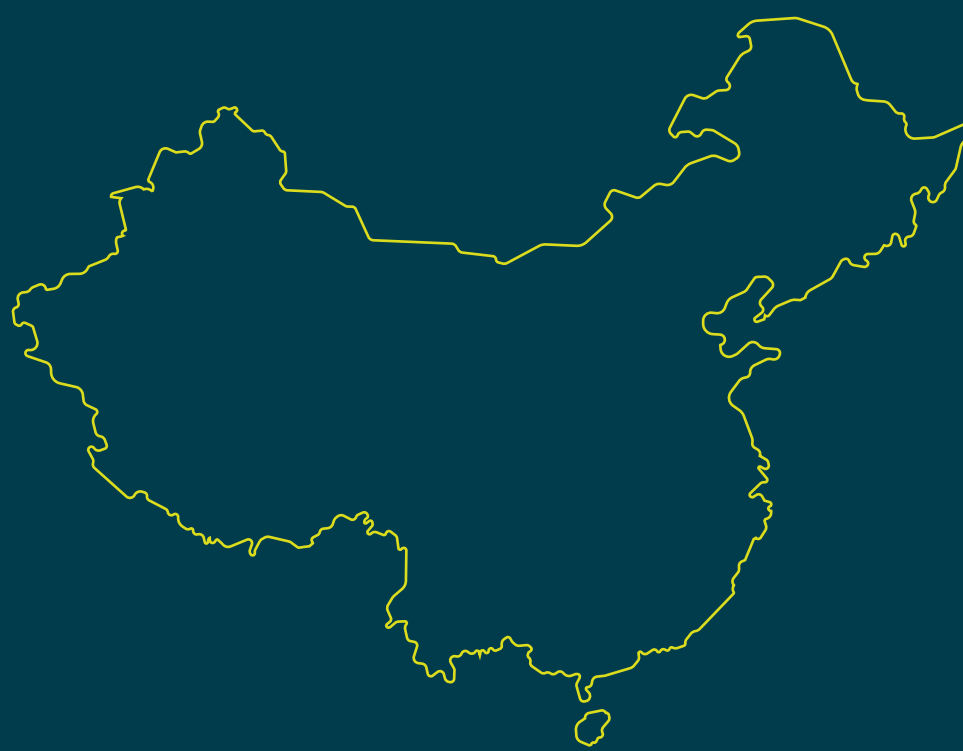
“Technology and creation – new love with a happy ending.”

The coronavirus period has shown that even in times of shutdown, it is possible to develop and implement creative campaigns. For many, pragmatism is the order of the day. Working with on-board equipment and stock material, supported by technologies for research, archiving and processing, sets new standards. And shows that complex conception, photoshoots and video shoots are not always necessary.

**This will remain:** The time of long planning, perfecting and production is finally over. Creation must rely more on prototypes and rough concepts. And technologies are increasingly supporting this. Be it in the form of cloud solutions and architectures that enable faster work with large amounts of data; Be it researching and archiving via AI tagging; Or processing images, for example with 3D rendering pipelines. AI is also involved in moving images: Based on written content, images are automatically compiled from databases. The appropriate program also supports transitions, subtitle creation and exporting. Last but not least: In order to not only produce, but to roll out final products, faster and more accurately, all players organize themselves in a shared workspace, for example via digital content and collaboration platforms like Figma, Miro, Microsoft Teams, Slack, Jira or Confluence.



# FAST FORWARD CHINA



- » Restrictions in the handling of on-board equipment led to new experiences that creative people can benefit from at present.
- » During the crisis, many companies relied on stock materials such as vignette illustrations, graphics and photographs – without sacrificing their impact on the market.
- » Due to the success, many expect an increase in database providers for vignette stocks.
- » Use of CGI (Computer Generated Images), 3D visualization and compositions with photographs are rapidly increasing.



Mercedes Benz uses vignette illustrations for World Women's Day.



**CHECKLIST:**  
WHAT CAN  
BRAND MANAGERS  
ALREADY DO AT  
PRESENT IN  
CONCRETE  
TERMS?

Are there lessons to be learned from the crisis and what are the conclusions to be drawn? Do conclusions require a revision of the brand strategy or parts of it (e.g. due to a stronger digital orientation)?

How is the development on the market? Do changed peer group activities possibly have to be taken into account?

Could the crisis have changed the needs of the target groups (entrepreneurial as well as communicative)? Does it make sense to enter into dialogue with target groups?

Are the existing touchpoints for addressing stakeholders the right ones or do they have to be supplemented with digital options, also preventively, in the event of a new crisis?

Which entrepreneurial and communicative activities can be launched to provide stakeholders with the motivation for a successful “new start,” both during and after the crisis?

Observe communication in more industries than your own. Could positive examples from other industries possibly be adapted for your company?

Are the organizational and technical requirements for a more dynamic and flexible brand management given?



# POTENTIAL RATHER THAN PROBLEMS

## COMMUNICATION IN THE CORONAZOIC ERA



As a result of the crisis, there will be lasting brand communication change. For this reason, we need to pay particular attention to this very moment. So let's:

» **Discover potential**

» **Take chances**

» **Emerge stronger from the crisis**

BECAUSE  
COMMUNICATION IS  
DIFFERENT IN THE  
CORONAZOIC ERA –  
AND THEREFORE  
MORE RELEVANT.



## RELATED LINKS (FREELY AVAILABLE)

McKinsey survey – Cautiously optimistic: Chinese consumer behavior post-COVID-19

Presentation G&P – Emotional answers in times of crisis

PRESENTATION B&B – BRANDS & COVID

Marketing – Dealing with coronavirus: Act sensibly rather than chancing the future!

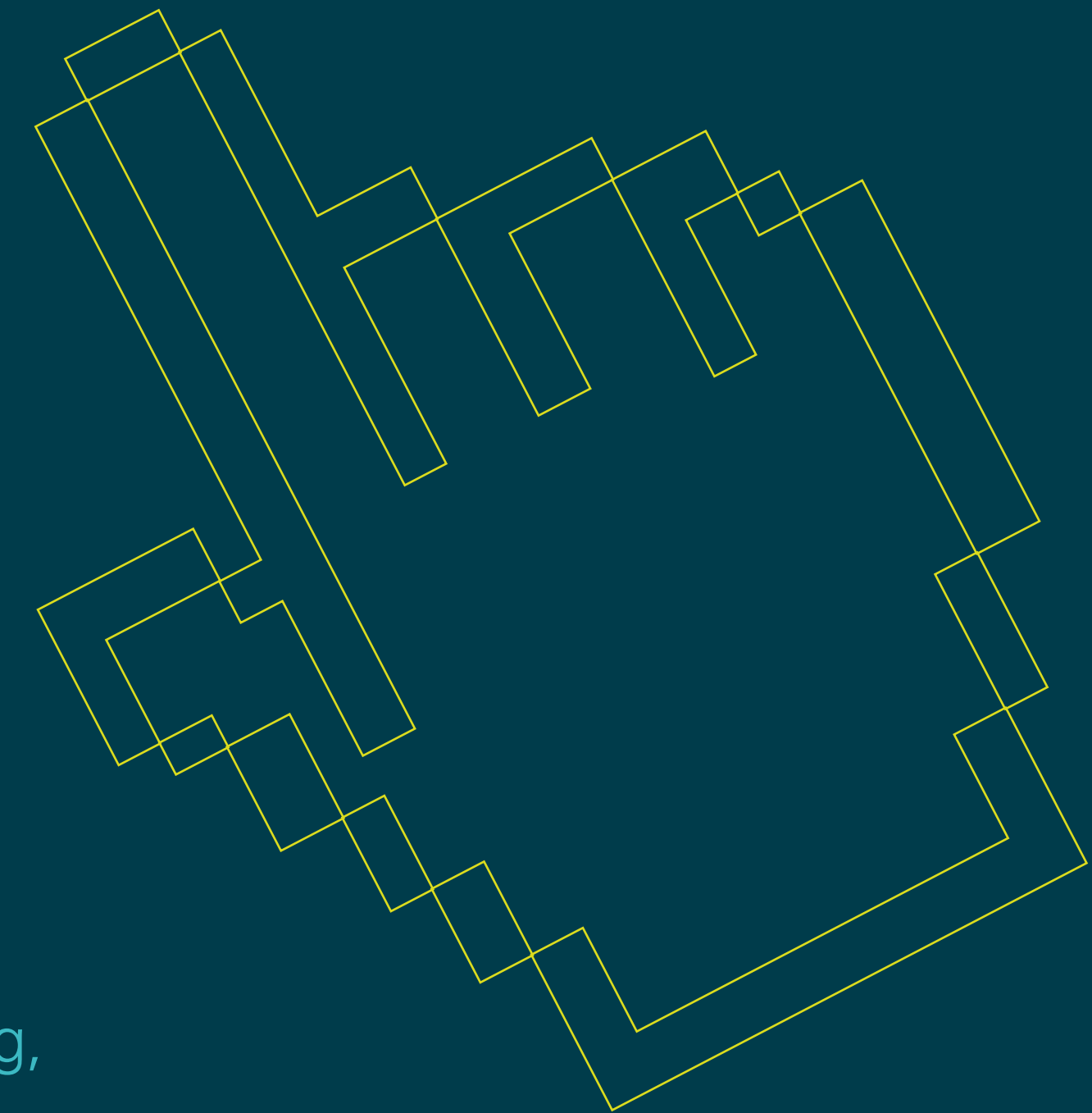
Marketing – The Post-Coronavirus World – How we will be surprised after the crisis

Marketing – How brands can show their stance during the coronavirus crisis

Horizont – Practice as the firemen do – crisis communication according to coronavirus

Image sources:

Auto-Motor-Sport, digitaling.com, Douglas, horizont, Huawei, Hugo Pfohe, makervsvirus.org, Mercedes Benz, TikTok, unsplash, Wechat, wirvsvirushackathon.org, wuv, youtube





# LET'S MASTER THE CRISIS. TOGETHER EVEN.

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HARGREAVES



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