

How to connect and communicate in these challenging times

A Behavioural Science toolkit
2021



Connecting and communicating in these challenging times

The Covid-19 pandemic presents us with one of the largest forced behavioural change challenges of our time. Behavioural science can help us diagnose and understand the behaviours we are witnessing and allow us to gain a better perspective on the current situation. This will enable organisations to effectively communicate with customers, citizens and society as a whole.

In this paper we will take you on a behavioural journey, showing an understanding of how behaviours are changing and [providing a behavioural road map for how to communicate today and in the foreseeable future](#).

PART ONE

Exploring with a behavioural science lens, [the new and evolving context](#) which companies and organisations are now needing to communicate within.

PART TWO

A behavioural science [toolkit for developing communications](#) in this new context.

PART ONE

This section explores, through a behavioural science lens, the new and evolving context in which companies and organisations are now communicating. Communications do not happen in a vacuum – in order for messaging to land appropriately it must be sensitive to the emerging context.

The global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has taken its toll on the UK population; **leaving people feeling stressed, worried, uncertain, and even afraid.** There are also some feelings of despair and helplessness as people look to their government for leadership, assistance and action, but feel little is being done. Yet out of this crisis, people – from individuals to huge organisations – are also showing their resilience and ingenuity, strengthening their communities, and responding quickly to calls for help.

Our emotions are in flux, characterised by highs and lows and understandably this impacts our behaviours. Looking at how we are feeling through a behavioural science lens also gives us some deep behavioural insights that can inspire how we might communicate in these times.

Behavioural Science

insights into the emotional rollercoaster of our lives today

Our everyday environments have changed drastically in the past few weeks, and this means the decision-making architecture we once relied on may have been disrupted – for some, only a little; for others, almost completely. Many people are now working from home rather than in offices; others, still going to work if they are key workers, may be in different roles or locations. Children are at home after the closure of schools and nurseries and the elderly advised to stay at home or in care homes. The structure of all our days looks very different from this time last month. As a result, we have lost the usual **anchors** we relied on for decision-making. **This can leave us feeling untethered – in good ways and bad. For some, it is a refreshing experience, opening up new opportunities, for others it is leading to worry and stress.**

In addition, for the majority of us, our normal routines have been severely disrupted. Many of the cognitively

efficient **habitual behaviours** which allowed us to be on autopilot are in flux, **forcing a more conscious, tiring time.** One of the important roles of habits is to free up space in our brain for us to think about other more complex or important things than the minutiae of brushing our teeth or driving a car. We would never get anything else done otherwise.

“Right now I am living by myself and feeling very down, not being able to go to university and work. Working online has confirmed for me that I really do prefer face to face teaching. I have not felt motivated.”

“I’m very sport focused and often cycle to and from work and go to the gym. The new situation has impacted my wellbeing. I’m looking forward to getting back into a routine.”

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

*This is an on-going self-ethnographic study monitoring the behaviours, needs and emotions of England in times of change.

Habit becomes even more important in times of stress, since it allows us to fall back on autopilot as our body and mind copes with the source of stress. But equally, stress also means it's even more difficult to break bad habits or build new habits.

The **subconscious primes** that constantly affect our thought processes and trigger behaviours and routines are also likely to be very different now. If you look out of the window of your home and no longer see anyone walking or driving about, this can prime a sense of isolation and nervousness. **Yet it is also enabling us to see our world in a whole new light.** Roads and skies are quiet, meaning less noise and air pollution. Less urban noise is also allowing the sounds of nature – such as birdsong – to break through. Whether we are conscious or unconscious of the changes, there is no denying that the world around us has changed.

“I am sure the atmosphere is a lot cleaner and fresher too!”

“It's also become quieter, as I live near Manchester Airport flight path, and so our plane noise has been cut down to almost nothing. I also live near a main road, and you can very much notice the absence of vehicle noise.”

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

In any stressful or worrying time people find it harder to see the proverbial wood or to think clearly. To make things worse, everyone and their dog is yelling at us, whether they are an 'armchair epidemiologist or virologist' or a verified expert; **we are being bombarded with messages and information at a time when we lack the mental bandwidth to process.** Because much of this is new information and often requires our **'System 2'** logical thinking head this is cognitively draining.

“If I could give myself (pre isolation) advice, I would also say that restricting the amount of news you see will improve your health as over doing it can confuse your thoughts.”

“I really have tried to shy away from the news and some social platforms as I've been finding it difficult to listen to all the negativity and people calling one another out on being selfish.”

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

As few of us are true experts, or at the source of information, it's also very hard to judge what's accurate, what's opinion and what's just more fake news... Even world leaders and expert scientists have different views about the best strategy. Whilst it's healthy for scientists to challenge the consensus

amongst themselves, it's hard for the rest of us not to feel confused and adrift by it. This has also come in an era where we already had information overload and a deluge of fake news. To make things even worse, it's hard for anyone to fact check, when there is no clear consensus or reliable data. **All this contributes even more to our sense of stress and mental fatigue.**

We've been accessing information from various different sources, some of which are correct and some of which are untrue. People don't know what to believe.

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

It is no wonder then, that many are turning to simple comical memes and humour to lighten their lives. Every day there are new sketches, videos and commentaries which aim to put a smile on our faces and make us feel better.

Humans also dislike uncertainty.

Currently, we don't know if our older, more vulnerable loved ones will escape the virus or how many deaths we will eventually see as a result of the pandemic. We don't know how long and to what extent social distancing and lockdown measures will continue throughout 2020 or even 2021. We don't know if our jobs or businesses will remain, or the extent to which

the global economy will be affected and how it will recover. This is tough for even the most stoic or optimistic of people.

This uncertainty and pausing of life means we need to develop coping strategies and find ways to live in the moment, enjoying simple pleasures and pastimes. **We can't plan more than a few days ahead as there isn't much we can plan to do anyway. So, we are forced into the present.** Some people may even feel they have had so many future goals removed or threatened they might as well enjoy the present and not work so hard for a goal that might not happen anymore. Furthermore, healthy advice tells us to focus only on what we can control and not worry about anything else. Those who do this naturally, or who are able to master this focus place themselves in a stronger position.

Given the dramatic change in **context**, our homes, the places where, not so long ago, we felt most comfortable, have now become our prisons! And while many of us may also be perfectly comfortable being on our own from time to time, enforced, mandatory self-isolation suddenly makes this feel different. Knowing that you have to stay at home and can't leave the house randomly **has the effect of making what was once a place of refuge and calm, a place of stress, isolation and loneliness.**

At the same time we might be welcoming the time at home and appreciating the slowing down of life as we lose 'time sucks' such as business travel, the work commute and the school run. Couples find they have more time for one another. Some families with young children may be functioning better in some ways with both mum and dad around more, even if they are busy. Some people are also using the opportunity to learn to cook, to read more or try out exercise classes in new ways online. They are climbing virtual mountains and running marathons in their back gardens!

"Spending more time with my partner has been great. I love being at home enough to cook three proper meals for us. I have even got my old bike out and been going on local rides just to get my daily work out. I never really realised how much energy being at work all day burned."

"Positive changes are probably my children's attitudes, they've been so happy and helpful the past 3 weeks which I either took for granted or was too busy working to notice as much."

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

We are also finding ways to connect with others outside the home.

Distant friends are reconnecting using technology. There are volunteer opportunities for making phone calls to support others. And while some find it strange to have more of a window into their colleagues' homelife because of the plethora of Zoom and Team meetings, it connects us in a different way than we might have in the office, perhaps because we are forced to be authentic. It is much harder to hide behind any aura. It has also opened up new opportunities to connect. For example, friends posting amazing music sessions simply because they have the time and the goodwill to post. It's not seen as narcissism, but rather as generosity and wanting to help each other get through the day. And on our doorstep, entire streets are finding ways to connect – eg 'distance dancing' or simply coming out at a set time for a chat or to salute the NHS each Thursday night at 8pm.

"A positive outcome is that I speak to friends and family continually on WhatsApp,"

"On the positive side people have changed a bit. Everyone seems nicer and we've all got time for each other. We're all keeping in touch more and looking after each other."

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

We like to think that we are rational human beings, making optimal decisions based on all the relevant information available, but that's not always the case. While we are constantly subject to inherent cognitive biases and heuristics that affect our decision-making, many of the biases that help us make quicker decisions are also now in flux. Social norms we previously relied on have changed or become harder to detect; we are looking to emerging authorities as well as traditional ones; the status quo we loved, and which required so little effort has gone or is no longer an option; the autopilot that made life easier is also more often off than on in our new context. **In these periods of heightened emotions, this susceptibility to cognitive biases is also heightened, meaning it is potentially easier for us to make mistakes.** And so yes, you guessed it, this all makes our lives a little more cognitively challenging.

These sum up many of the feelings, emotions, behaviours and contexts people are experiencing. And it is these people with whom you are communicating. But just as a behavioural science lens can bring alive the person in the altered state of the coronavirus context, it can also inspire ways to communicate within this context, to guide us and

provide a model to empower effective communication in these challenging times. **Many of the new behaviours and attitudes to life and work we see emerging now will continue to resonate and evolve long after this year's crisis is over.**

TBA's **Behavioural Pulse** quoted above will be exploring emerging behaviours and providing insight on which behaviours will be permanently changed and which will return, much as they were.

"The positive things I can see about this dreadful time is that many people may continue to work from home if feasible meaning that long commutes on crowded trains which may improve their lives. Also pollution may be reduced as people may not use their cars as much."

Source: The Behavioural Architects Behavioural Pulse – State of The Nation April 2020*

PART 2 – A behavioural science toolkit for developing communications in this new context.

To help optimise customer communications during this turbulent time, we have adapted our existing **3-Step toolkit** specifically for the Covid-19 context. It provides you with a robust and contextually sensitive behavioural toolkit for developing communications.

Optimising communications for today's challenging times – a 3 step process



Step 1: Define the audience and strategic communication objective

The starting point of any communications strategy should be to:

- define the audience and where they are now
- define the strategic communications objective

A key question when thinking about your communications strategy – especially during this time – is who should you be targeting? People are overwhelmed by information and while it is important to communicate with your customers, consider doing so on a need-to-know basis by segmenting your audience and prioritising segments. In a time of cognitive overload putting the target consumer at the heart of your communication will allow you to develop more focussed and single-minded messages to them.

It's critical to recognise that many people's contexts have changed, often radically, both physically, and emotionally.

You'll need to understand these changed contexts, putting yourself in their shoes in order to define the objective of any communication.

Step 2: Define the desired behavioural outcomes

The second step to effective communication in today's evolving context is **to precisely define what are the behavioural and emotional outcomes** the communication is targeting.

- What exactly is it you want your audience to feel, or to think, do or not do?

Step 3: Behavioural Science concepts for developing communication structure and content

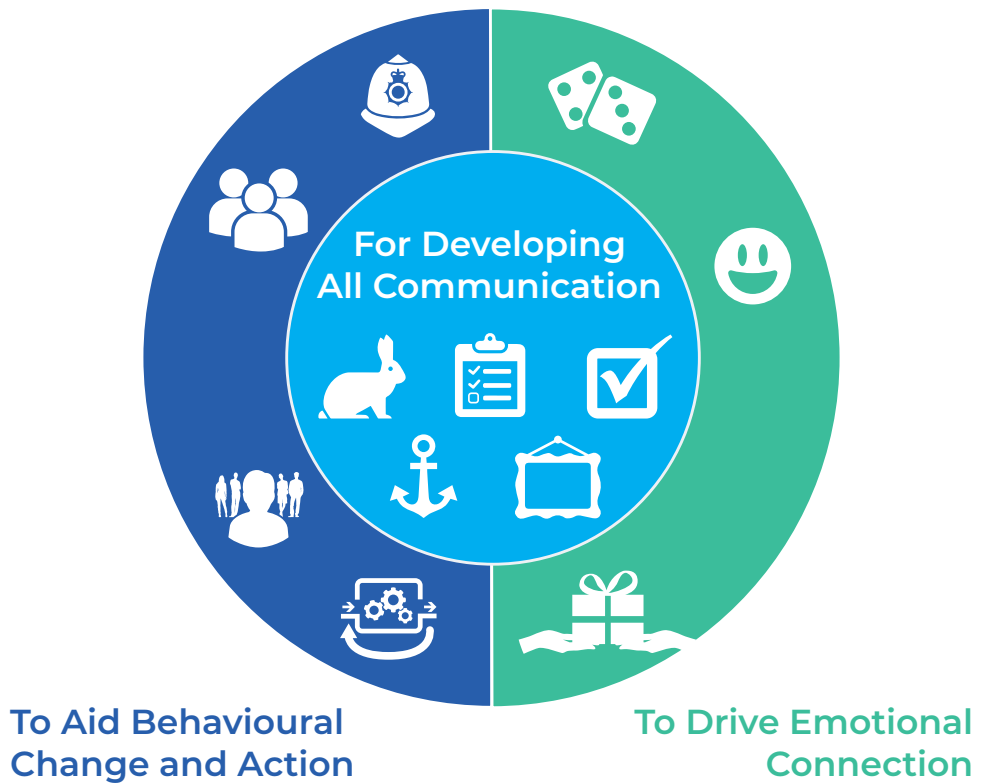
Using the lens of the current crisis, we have identified the behavioural science concepts most relevant to communicating during this time and for the foreseeable future.

In order to help you further develop communication structure and content we have grouped these concepts into three inspirational chunks:

- The core behavioural science concepts which are relevant when developing all communication
- Additional concepts that can further enhance behavioural change and nudge action
- Finally, a number of key concepts that help drive emotional connection

For each behavioural science concept in the toolkit we define the concept and then show **why leveraging this concept will enhance communications in today's challenging times.**

A Behavioural Science Tool Kit for Developing Communications



Core Behavioural Science Concepts for Developing All Communication





SYSTEM 1 and COGNITIVE EASE – Make it easy, easy, easy

DEFINITION:

The dual-system framework to describe our thought processes, divides the mind into two distinct systems. **System 1** is the brain's fast, automatic, intuitive approach and **System 2** is the mind's slower, analytical mode, where reason dominates.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

Now more than ever, we should be ensuring that our communications talk to people's **System one**. We need to help people feel less cognitively strained and make communications as easy as possible to absorb. Therefore, it will be important for communications to eliminate any excess, unnecessary noise and friction and just focus on that ONE message, that ONE key behaviour you wish to change. Make the key message stand out, keep it succinct and make

it easy for the consumer to decode your message. A very simple idea from the **New York Times**: illustrating social distancing by placing individual figures surrounded by a large circle of empty space in amongst an entire page of text. A second's glance and you've got the gist...

Another key consideration is **not to fall into the trap of thinking that because people are at home and technically have more time, that they also have more mental headspace**. This is an extreme situation which requires considerably more cognitive effort than in pre-pandemic times. Some are even more time-stretched than they were before. **Others are short of money or work. Others are anxious for many different reasons. People are cognitively overloaded; we need to make things easy for them.**



CHUNKING – Staying motivated in the face of uncertainty

DEFINITION:

Breaking a goal down into sections – **chunking** – helps keep us motivated as we know what and how much more we have to do to reach our goal.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

When faced with the huge behavioural disruption we are currently experiencing and the resulting ‘things to do’ list, for some people it can often feel overwhelming; an impossible task. From learning how to order groceries and prescriptions online, topping up energy meters remotely to getting to grips with home schooling, and increasing household cleaning and hygiene, many of us don’t know where to start. Yet, we know from behavioural science that chunking up a goal – breaking it down into more manageable sub-goals – can make a large task feel much more achievable. People today are having to investigate new ways of managing their finances e.g. loan

or mortgage payments or navigating new processes such as government schemes, chunking these into simple steps will be really important. Chunking information down into smaller, easily absorbed parts can make it more memorable, gives a much needed sense of progress and momentum and, critically, makes the goals feel more achievable. Now more than ever, this is important.

A very simple example of helping people to do something different, perhaps something that they’ve never tried before, comes from the Irish food company **Bombay Pantry**. They chunked the new process for ordering takeout into a simple four step process 1: Order by card only, 2: Driver rings and drops your order, 3: Driver retreats and waits to check you pick it up ok, 4: enjoy your delicious meal! The chunks were also illustrated in simple line system 1 way to aid cognition.



DEFAULTS – Quick relief of overload and strain

DEFINITION:

When presented with preset **default options** consumers tend to accept what is presented to them. Intuitively, consumers want to go with the flow, to act without considering other options and accept what is presented to them without investigating further.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

These challenging times will **cause high levels of cognitive strain**. We are being overloaded with information, thoughts and feelings, and don't have the mental capacity to consider all aspects of any given decision. As such, **default options during this time could prove to be valuable**.

A good example of this is banks allowing people to access overdraft facilities at no charge and without having to arrange them – they have changed the default to make it easier for people to access this service (and also reduced the load on their call centres). The contactless payments

maximum has also been increased, from £30 to £45. And Halifax credit cards have suspended late payment fees. In the charity sector, **JustGiving** have cut their usual platform fees for charities, instead imposing a default payment to donors of an additional 15% of their principal donation to cover their admin costs. Whilst the default can be adjusted downwards, even to zero, it's likely to raise much needed funding.

These types of automatic processes can reduce the time and effort required to solve problems, make decisions, or take action and any tool to simplify decision-making and action at this time will be welcomed. For example, if people can be automatically opted into a service which will help them, they don't need to spend time signing up to it. Call centres are overrun and not everyone has got up to speed with digitalisation.



ANCHORING – Searching for reference points

DEFINITION:

When making a decision, **people look for anchors or reference points that they know they can rely on and adjust from this point.** However, often we rely too heavily, or anchor too blindly on one piece of information.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

During this time, people are looking to **feel some sense of connection, comfort and stability;** people find it very hard to make decisions without anchors. Old anchors might still be effective but for many the contexts have changed dramatically, or even disappeared and therefore new ones might be needed. To develop new communications, ask the question **what anchors might still be working, or which new ones might help people navigate the new decision-making architecture?**

Supermarkets have been working hard to create simple anchors and reference points to help us with new behaviours like social distancing and online deliveries. For example, **Sainsbury's** compared the mandated two metres physical distancing to the length of two trolleys – an easy reference point to imagine, or use in store.

Ocado explained why they were no longer selling bottled water by using a simple infographic to show how many more deliveries they could make if the van space was not taken up by large 1-2 litre bottles. The graphic compares two delivery vans, one with four orders and a lot of bottled water, and another with six orders and no bottled water. Beneath it states 'We've temporarily stopped selling bottled water. This allows us to deliver to 6,000 extra homes a week.'



FRAMING – New frames for a new order

DEFINITION:

Our decisions and preferences are affected by **how information is presented to us**. The emotional references of particular words can make some features of the particular message more or less salient to us. The way in which numbers and statistics are presented can also sway our decisions in one direction or the other.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

In these unusual times we are seeing appeals to people's altruism and sense of community. Framing communications around **helping society and coming together as a nation** are helping to encourage desirable behaviour change, whether that's appealing to people to stop a particular behaviour such as taking public transport unless strictly necessary; or to

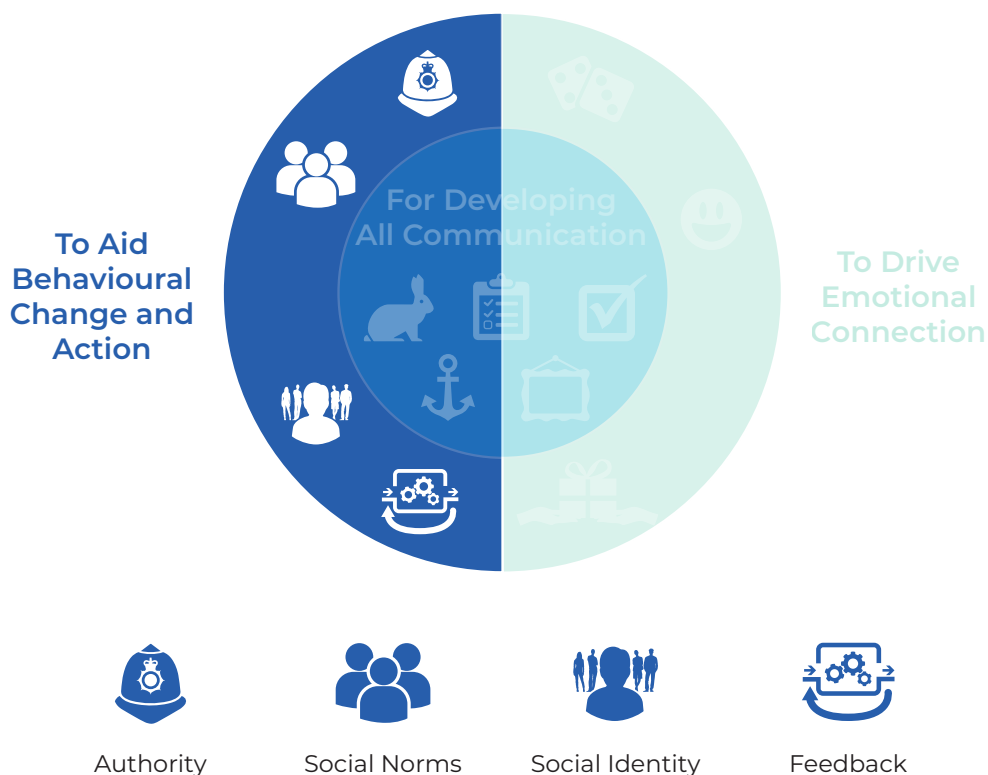
encourage people to start a new behaviour such as volunteering to help vulnerable neighbours. Everyone cares about someone and framing communications around our social responsibility to take care of our children, our parents, our grandparents, our friends and neighbours, our NHS and care workers and our country or can be a powerful motivator.

An example of how important framing is during this crisis is the framing of the phrase 'social distancing'. During a time when we are particularly susceptible to feeling isolated, the emphasis on social distancing may be increasing that likelihood, by making the lack of 'social' interaction most salient. The increasingly common re-frame to '*physical* distancing' might be helping to reduce feelings of isolation, while still reinforcing the core message.

When thinking about any message always remember ‘**change the frame – change the meaning**’. Ask yourself, with a new sensitivity to the context in which people find themselves, ‘**is there a better way to frame a message?**’. It is easy, if you are not careful, to sound opportunistic or greedy rather than supportive. A nice example of a sensitive reframe done well is by American clothing brand **Draper James**. They sent customers a sensitive and personal email from the founder that addressed the current situation, and, in an effort to be a “source of happiness and positivity” in customers’ lives followed up by asking politely whether it was all right to share their new Spring collection.

Another good example comes from **Nike**, who have reframed the idea of exercising indoors into something far more exciting now we can link up online. **Nike** sponsors, including golfer Tiger Woods and footballer Cristiano Ronaldo have also shared posts of themselves “playing inside.” **TimeOut** too have had to have a quick rethink about how to connect with their audience and launched the simple reframe ‘TimeIn’ with fun in-home activities for individuals and families.

Behavioural Science Concepts to Aid Behaviour Change and Action





AUTHORITY – Looking for trust in a new world

DEFINITION:

The authority bias refers to our tendency to alter our opinions or behaviours to reflect those of someone we consider to be an authority on a subject. **People follow the lead of people they believe to be credible and knowledgeable experts** when they are unsure.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

Now, more than ever, we are confused and feeling out of depth in terms of what we know to be true. Authority figures usually provide a strong sense of direction for people during periods of instability, but right now in the UK and other countries, figures of authority and trust are very much in flux. For communications during this time you need to think what authority figures might still hold credibility for you. In this authority-questioning or cynical context being authentic or genuine is critical. **Brands can play an important role as authority figures e.g. supermarkets have already been doing this in relation to setting boundaries around food buying and even access** e.g. certain times only for essential workers.

The Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman recently noted the importance of non-verbal communication in this crisis. Being advised by someone in authority to socially distance, self-isolate or not stockpile is not as strong a message as observing that person do that behaviour themselves:

“When you see people within the wrong distance of each other and clearly not taking the kind of precautions that they would like everyone else to take, that sends a very strong signal and not a good one.” (Daniel Kahneman, The New Yorker, 3rd April 2020)

Many leaders of UK companies have been strong role models in this sense. For example, on 15th March, the chair of **KPMG** UK, Bill Michael made a decision to self-isolate after noting his temperature was higher than normal.



SOCIAL NORMS – we all love to follow others

DEFINITION:

The concept of social norms in behavioural science refers to **our tendency to conform to the behaviours of those around us**. There are two main types of social norms: descriptive and injunctive.

- **Descriptive norms** refer to our tendency to want to follow the behaviours of the majority;
- **Injunctive norms** describe behaviours we perceive as being approved of by others.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

During this highly uncertain time, **we will look to those around us to help guide our decisions around the actions we will or will not take**. Injunctive social norms will be very much at play with the new behaviours that we know society believes we 'ought' to observe: stay at home to save those at risk, don't visit family and friends, work at home if you can, don't go on public transport, don't panic buy.

We also know from behavioural science that **dynamic norms** – describing how other people's

behaviours are changing – may be as effective, if not more so, than communicating static norms. During this time of disruption, communicating dynamic social norms, rather than communicating what the majority of people are currently doing, may prove to be a powerful tool. For example, rather than communicating the current use of public transport, which may still be higher than desired, the message could focus around how norms are changing towards the desired behaviour, i.e. 'the majority of people are starting to reduce their use of public transport' or 'the majority of people are starting to shop normally, not panic-buying' instead. Another example is headlines and social media content observing some landlords giving tenants a break on their rent if they are struggling to pay. And many households who employ cleaners and nannies have pledged to keep on paying them despite the lockdown forcing them not to work, recognising the fragility of their income.



SOCIAL IDENTITY – The power of tribal identity

DEFINITION:

Social identity theory recognises that humans are inherently social beings who **derive meaning and direction** from groups and their norms, and gain value from doing things which affirm their social identity.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

Tapping into social identity is a powerful tool for behavioural change as it **promotes the internalisation of norms, so that the desired behaviour becomes part of self identity**. People like to act in ways that are consistent with their identity and if their actions contradict those of the group with whom they identify, they experience cognitive dissonance.

The crisis means that **some of our identities are threatened** and certainly less salient than perhaps they usually are, whilst **others will come to the fore**. Some, like being a parent, spouse or child will be more salient during this time, but other identities cannot necessarily be reinforced. Footballers can kick a ball around but they can't actually play a game. Football fans can't watch a game. In

addition, new social identities will be developing as people search for how to behave in this current world, what to do and what not to do. This is being beautifully illustrated by the weekly 8pm clapping for the NHS on doorsteps and pavements which allows individuals to identify, not only with those in their own street, but with other people up and down the country, all wanting to share the same social identity.

Think how you could tap into this social identity uncertainty. It could be a powerful way to connect to a specific group of people but could also spur longer-lasting behavioural change within them.

For communications, this means identifying the group you are targeting and then framing any message to signal the behaviour of that group. For example, **Scotland** launched a campaign to emphasise how Scots put each other first: 'In **Scotland**, we look out for each other. Only buy what you need.' Or **Andrew Cuomo** priming people to think and act smart and be tough because it's the social identity of New Yorkers:

“We’re going to get through it because we are New York and because we’ve dealt with a lot of things, and because we are smart. You have to be smart to make it in New York.... You have to be tough to make it in New York.”

Other examples could be things like: ‘We are British, British people care about their NHS’; ‘Londoners

are responsible, we stay at home’; ‘Members of this gym aren’t quitters, we’ll work out in our back gardens’; ‘Gamers – we’ve been training for social isolation for years!’.



FEEDBACK – We all need some positive reinforcement

DEFINITION:

When people receive **timely and personalised feedback on a task, it can motivate them**, increase their engagement and, ultimately, help them achieve their goal.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

For all kinds of behaviour change challenges, people like to know where they stand. Communications that aim to encourage people to stay indoors or not to stockpile items should provide feedback on how effective their action or inaction is, where possible. For the government this could mean providing some easily understood indications of the impact on transmission rates of our remaining at home, and how transmission and fatalities are reduced as a result of our actions.

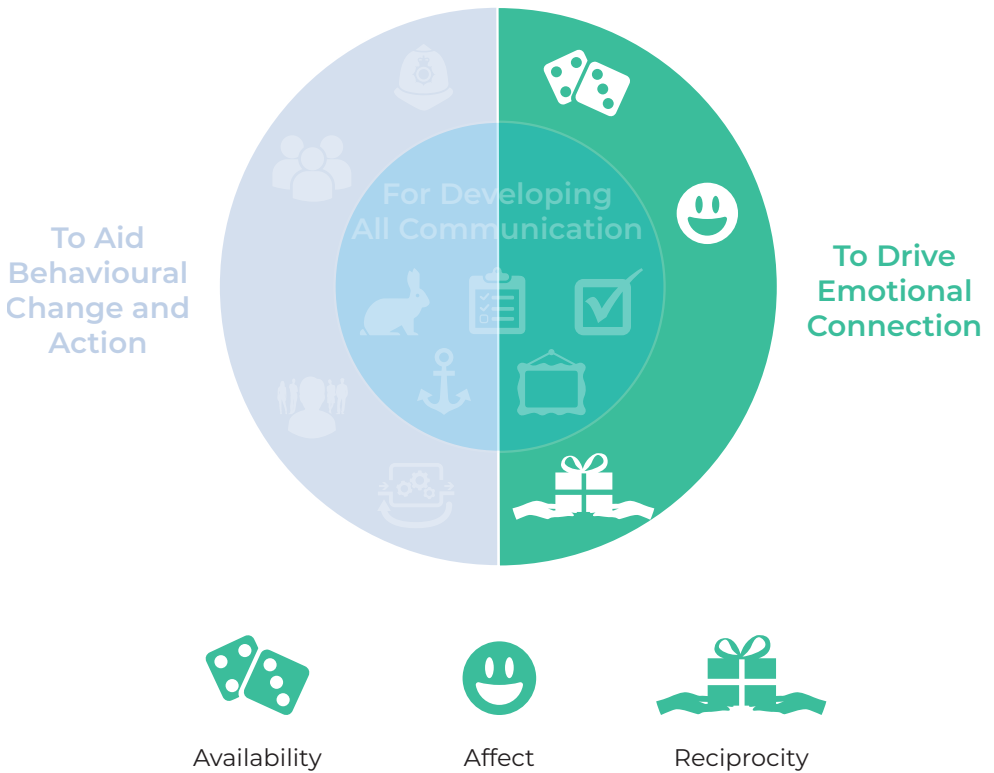
However, these are difficult statistics to measure currently, and it is vital that our facts remain facing during this time. But feedback can also be less specific while **still recognising people's efforts to do the right thing**: 'Thank you for keeping yourself and others safe by not travelling'. **This recognition is also a form of feedback – we feel noticed.**

Similarly, communications from some of the key sectors like supermarkets are already giving us feedback on how our actions are helping to improve the availability of products. For example, **Tesco's** message "Thanks for keeping us stocked up" provides us with feedback that we are not overbuying anymore and that the supermarkets have caught up with demand.

TfL has also been giving people the feedback that public transport has been running smoothly for key workers, as more non-essential workers stay at home: "Thank you for keeping key workers moving."

Banks could give us feedback on our new versus old spending patterns to help us all budget more – many of our staple mental accounting processes will be seriously in flux. We are already seeing lots of companies simply saying 'We listened to your feedback and we've made changes'. The feedback here is that we know our requests are being heard and paid attention to.

Behavioural Science Concepts to Drive Emotional Connection





AVAILABILITY – Scary information is sticky

DEFINITION:

The availability heuristic refers to a decision-making shortcut that helps us **assess the probability of risk quickly**. Rather than taking into account the true probabilities of risk, we often judge the likelihood of an event, or the frequency of its occurrence by what is salient to us and the ease with which examples and instances come to mind.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

What we know is people are being bombarded with messages that are increasing the perception of risk and for many creating a degree of panic.

Brands and companies can help **reduce the prevailing sense of anxiety and fear**. Comms could take **advantage of availability bias by increasing the number of positive messages and make these highly salient**. This could be achieved through increasing the frequency of positive messages and have them run over multiple media, and through making the positive content of the messages much more visibly salient. Behavioural science suggests we need at least four positives to offset one negative message.



AFFECT – Communicating with emotion

DEFINITION:

The affect heuristic is **people's tendency to make decisions based on how they feel** rather than any rational or logical reasons. This is an example of our **System 1** working – intuitive and emotional – and it can act as a shortcut for decision-making.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

During this crisis **we are experiencing particularly high emotional states**. In behavioural science we refer to 'hot' and 'cold' states and rather than going from a more rational state (cold) to emotional state (hot) and back again throughout the day as we used to do in pre-pandemic times, many of us are currently experiencing a constant hot state; flipflopping between highs (e.g. feelings of pride around clapping for our carers) and lows (e.g. feelings of worry for our loved ones).

Brands communicating during this emotional time should be conscious of these emotional states and be

particularly sensitive, demonstrating high levels of empathy and care.

They might also attempt to reinforce a sense of hope, positivity and even a sense of stability by their mere presence.

For example, in the image right, **HSBC** characteristically shows appreciation of and says a humble, but warm thank you to our key workers, saying:

"Thank you to our croc wearin', patient carin', stethoscope slingin', bin collectin', letter postin', prescription fillin', shelf stackin', lorry drivin', loo roll deliverin' heroes".

A new ad for **Taco Bell** (drive-thru) in the US also tries to offer hope and comfort in a difficult time, highlighting improved food safety and hygiene with their new sticker-sealed bags – "When you need a little light, it helps to open a window. Let our drive-thru help you get through."



RECIPROCITY – let's start a positive wave!

DEFINITION:

We are conditioned to respond in kind. So, we **respond to a positive action with another positive action**. Equally, we tend to respond to a negative action with another negative action.

CONTEXTUAL FRAME:

During these times of isolation and anxiety, **many consumers will look to brands to step up** – and a number of them already have. From offers to repurpose manufacturing to supply much-needed medical supplies, handwash and sanitiser, to relief on payments, to providing platforms on which consumers can feel a sense of community, and much, much more, we are seeing a number of positive signals of goodwill from brands. This is important. We will not be in this situation forever, and **when we emerge on the other side, these brands will be remembered**. Not only will they be remembered, but due to our innate tendency towards returning gestures of reciprocity, they will also be rewarded.

Both **Uber** and **Addison Lee** have been offering free rides for NHS staff during this period, whilst **Deliveroo** have set up a donation system so people can donate free meals to NHS workers. **Pret a Manger** have been giving free drinks and half price food to NHS workers.

In the US, car insurers, recognising that there are far fewer accidents as people reduce travel by as much as 35-50%, are refunding customers part of their premiums. For example, **Allstate** are immediately refunding each customer 15% of their premium, a gesture which amounts to a \$600 million give-back. "This is about fairness," says **Allstate** CEO Tom Wilson.

Airbnb hosts have taken a large hit to business as the travel and tourism industry dried up. Yet **Airbnb** have set up a relief fund for hosts, and an additional fund for superhosts, to support them through this period, showing that they value the people who form the key part of their business.

Contrast this with some self-catering holiday companies who are refusing to refund their customers, whilst still taking those payments back from cottage owners. Those who have made mistakes along the way and have been seen to treat either their customers or employees (or both) poorly, will also surely be remembered. A number of hashtags to boycott certain companies once this is over has already emerged.

From insight to activation – working with The Behavioural Architects

The Behavioural Architects are experts in applying behavioural science to optimise communication. We can help you activate this toolkit to successfully connect with consumers in this challenging new context.

Optimising communications for today's challenging times – a 3 step process

A Behavioural Science Tool Kit for
Developing Communications



To Aid Behavioural Change and Action

To Drive Emotional Connection

The Behavioural Architects

The Behavioural Architects (TBA) is an award-winning global insight, research and consultancy business with behavioural science at its core. It was founded in 2011 by Crawford Hollingworth, Sian Davies and Sarah Davies.

The company was one of the first agencies built around the new insights coming from the behavioural sciences. This new thinking has inspired them to develop powerful frameworks that fuel deeper understanding of consumer behaviour and behaviour change.

TBA has offices in London, Oxford, Sydney, Melbourne, Shanghai and New York and has worked with many global corporations, NGOs and governments, reinvigorating traditional research methodologies alongside pioneering new ones. Their aim is to make behavioural insights both accessible and actionable for clients.

The Behavioural Architects invests heavily in its core intelligence team dedicated to supporting its global teams, keeping them up to speed with developments in the behavioural science field; from both the academic arena and among top practitioners.

In 2019 TBA won Best Presentation at the Market Research Society's (MRS) Annual Conference Awards and ESOMAR's Best Global Paper, as well as being a finalist for AURA's 2019 Award for Most Inspiring Agency Speaker. Previous awards include winning the AQR Prosper Riley-Smith Qualitative Excellence Award in 2018, the highly competitive MRS Best Place to Work in 2015 and MRS Best New Agency in 2013.

For more information, please visit www.thebeearchitects.com

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