

# COVID-19

A snapshot of the actions, words and behaviours  
defining communications

5 observations on the current climate

**GRAYLING**

creating advantage

# COVID-19 Communications Trends



The End of Online  
vs Offline



Community &  
Collaboration



Humanity



Brands, Know  
Your Place



Change &  
Disruption



# 1 The Death of Online vs Offline

The first quarter of 2020 has seen a huge cultural shift across the globe, as the new social norms enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic have developed. The need for social distancing has resulted in huge swathes of human life moving online - creating enormous changes in human habit and communication



# Out with the old, in with the new

While the web has been a part of mainstream life for two decades for most people in the developed world, distinctions persisted between life 'online' and life 'offline'. The previously-held distinction between actions and interactions mediated by a screen and those not is vanishing, at a pace and scale that would have been hard to imagine even three months ago, and with it the concept of 'online' and 'offline'.



# Keep your distance

The need for social distancing has resulted in huge swathes of human life moving online.

Whole communities and demographic groups have moved their existences and networks to the web with a speed they would previously have thought impossible.





## Embracing a new normal

Businesses and organisations that primarily existed in a bricks-and-mortar capacity have discovered how quick and easy it can be to establish an online presence.

# What this means for you

- **Everything is possible** - existing systems and technologies are there to be exploited, to create a seamless on/offline experience at minimal cost
- **Trust the consumer** - the past few weeks have shown us that actually EVERYONE can do online stuff, it's not hard and people do in fact get it
- **Communication is different online** - you need to message and manage differently
- **Content is even more of a priority** - but what content, and how it's produced. is more crucial than ever





# Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK

Local organising to support the most vulnerable in our communities

## 2 Community & Collaboration

Positivity can be hard to come by at present, but one indisputable upside to the COVID-19 pandemic has been the scale and speed of collaborative initiatives that have sprung up in response. These include the novel - and in some cases unimagined – ways that people and brands have come together in times of isolation.



# Sharing is caring

From the development of collaboratively-created online resources to help fight the spread of COVID-19, to entire educational programmes being spun up in the virtual worlds of Minecraft and Fortnite, to choirs, clubs, choruses and orchestras moving from physical space to virtual; the need to connect, to form communities and to share experiences has never been more evident.

# Coronavirus Tech Handbook

 Edit this document to make it better 

## Councillors put aside political differences in battle against coronavirus pandemic

News

21st March

### Wirral's party leaders put politics aside to tackle coronavirus



# Better, Together

Not only that, but the current adversity has seen a degree of cross-discipline and cross-party collaboration not witnessed in decades, with the UK's political classes setting aside (some of) their differences as they seek to address the bigger issues facing us. Is this, finally, the moment we can see that long-promised 'kinder, gentler politics'?





wriggle

# Indie Kitty

**Helping indies in uncertain times.**

As Coronavirus grows, the next few months will be a challenging time for small businesses across the UK, and especially in the hospitality sector.

Indie Kitty is a chance for people to give independent businesses extra support in uncertain times by purchasing vouchers which can be redeemed when the Coronavirus crisis passes - helping establishments, like yours, get through the next few months.

The scheme is in operation in Bristol, Bath, Brighton and Hove, Birmingham and Cardiff.

## Love thy neighbour

People restricted to their local areas are becoming more appreciative about what's right on the doorstep. However, at the same time, many local small businesses are suffering. The combined result has been a huge swell in support for businesses by local customers and innovative measures from local businesses to support their communities.



# What this means for you

- **Everyone and every business has a community** - help yours come together
- **Find existing communities and join in** - it's not always right to create your own
- **People will always find a way to connect** - they won't always do it where you expect, or choose, but it will always happen. How can you make that work for you, or support it when and where it happens?
- **Act local** – national brands can benefit by supporting their local communities
- **Now is not the time for rivalry** - which partners, or better still competitors, could you collaborate with for the greater good?





## 3 Humanity

The deeper we get into the pandemic, and the longer global isolation measures are in place, the more people will seek human connection and contact - and a human approach to communications.

# Help don't hijack

We all have received swathes of emails from companies (GDPR be damned!) eager to reassure us that they are there, that they care.

The best examples have demonstrated the voice and / or the ethos of the humans that actually make up the business.

## Edinburgh four star hotel to open it's doors to medical staff during the coronavirus outbreak

An Edinburgh hotel is to offer free accommodation to front line NHS workers hard at work tackling the coronavirus outbreak.



### ■ GREGGS

Greggs said in a statement: "We'll be offering all emergency service personnel and health and social care workers free hot drinks on presentation of their work pass.

"They are doing an amazing job, and this is the least we can do to support them."



I think that the people of Great Britain have had enough of experts with organisations from acronyms saying - from organisations with acronyms - saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong, because these people - these people - are the same ones who got consistently wrong.

— Michael Gove —

AZ QUOTES



## Meet the experts

The resurgence in the importance of a humanising aspect to communications can be seen in the re-emergence of 'experts', giving a face to difficult-to-communicate advice and reminding us of the difference that personal delivery can make to reassure and explain key messages.

 **Agnese Daverio**  
@gnoffiland



Great website to buy books from [hive.co.uk](https://hive.co.uk) - they are connected with independent book shops in the country which now are in terrible need of support. Share this link far & wide. Boycott [@Waterstones](https://twitter.com/Waterstones), they are treating their staff like cattle. [#waterstones](https://twitter.com/Waterstones)

♡ 198 9:55 AM - Mar 22, 2020



💬 110 people are talking about this

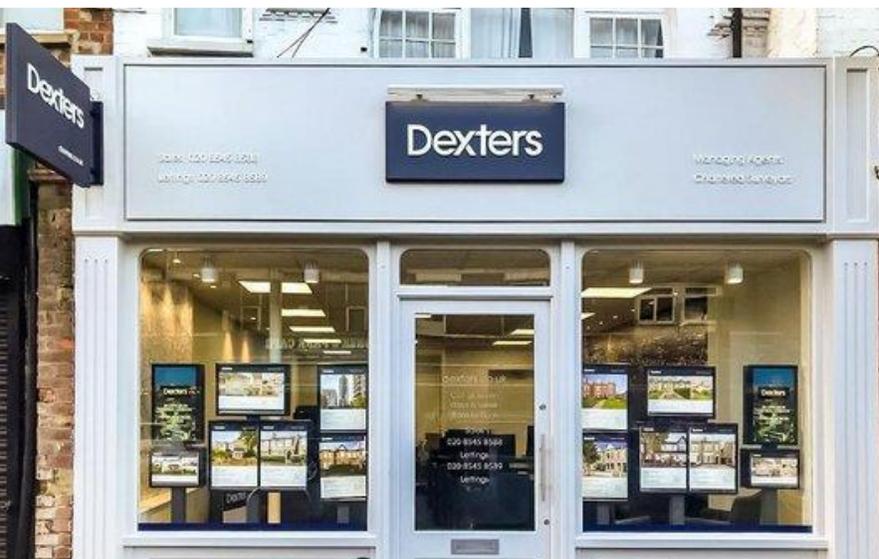


 **Seán Donnelly**  
@Seanog1982



Not impressed that [@VennStRecords](https://twitter.com/VennStRecords) [@NorthcoteRcrds](https://twitter.com/NorthcoteRcrds) have used [#covid19UK](https://twitter.com/covid19UK) as a cheap opportunity to email me to say they've got loads of hand sanitisers and so are business as usual. So much for safe distancing. I won't be back :(

♡ 4:18 PM - Mar 16, 2020



# Personability not profitability

Conversely, there has been a widespread backlash against those brands or people who have been seen to behave in a less-than-human (perhaps 'less than humanitarian') manner.



# What this means for you

- **Now is the time to prove your corporate responsibility** – how can you help and what can you offer?
- **Communications should be open, honest and compassionate in tone** – the current situation is huge and complex; you may not have all the answers right now, but be transparent and take people on the journey with you
- **Put people at the heart of your communications** – whether that's the CEO or your front-line staff, show the faces behind the business to humanise what you say
- **Be flexible with content** – we're all working from home so people don't expect the usual polished, slick content. If anything, slightly more rough and ready content will be more trusted and appreciated

**TimeOut**  
**LONDON**



**CORONAVIRUS**  
**CARNIVOROUS**



Scientists have a hunch that contact with live animals or their dead flesh may be the source of the deadly virus.

Go vegan. | *PETA*

## 4 Brands, Know Your Place

Now more than ever before, it's vitally important that brands and businesses have a clear idea of their place in the global conversation - and, even more crucially, a clear understanding of where they simply do not have a right to intervene.

**IF YOU EVER DREAMED OF PLAYING  
FOR MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD,**

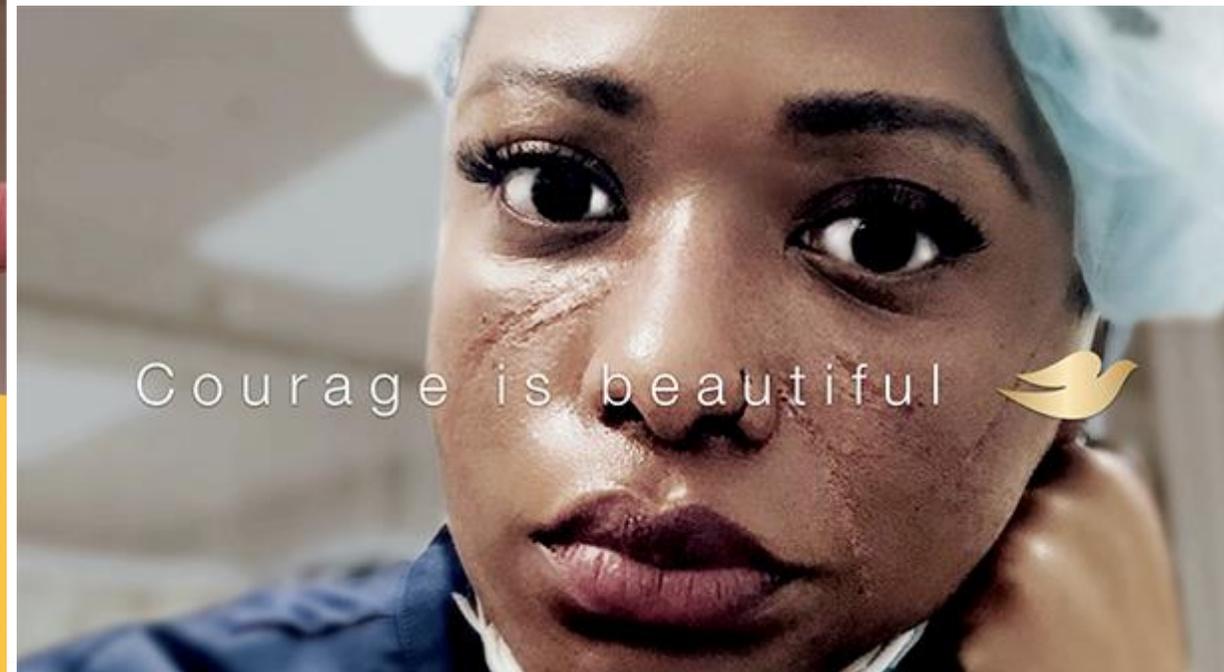
**NOW IS YOUR CHANCE.**

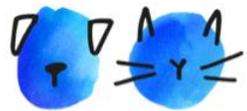
Play inside, play for the world.



## Be true to self

The past month has seen a slew of companies engaging with the pandemic in a variety of ways. What is clear is the importance for brands of having a well-defined and universally-understood set of principles that informs what it is that they can and cannot discuss, what they should and should not talk about, and what their purpose is when it comes to content and communications.





**BATTERSEA**

## **HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR PETS IF YOU'RE ILL OR HAVE TO SELF-ISOLATE DUE TO CORONAVIRUS**

## **Less is more**

In this environment of COVID-19 content saturation, it's more important than ever for brands to remember that they don't always need to have something to say. Restrict communications to issues that feel central to your brand's identity, and where it's possible to genuinely add value to consumers' lives in some way.



# Substance over style

Defining your brand's role and sphere of operations is vital to ensuring that your communications in times of crisis are consistent, make sense for your business and are - most crucially of all - serving a purpose for your audience.

# Coronavirus: Staying safe and informed on Twitter

By Twitter Inc.

Friday, 3 April 2020 [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Share](#)

# What this means for you

- **In times of crisis, never sell.** Communications should focus only on helping your customers, your communities and your employees
- **Be useful** – whether that's providing expert advice or entertaining bored customers stuck in isolation, make sure whatever you communicate is genuinely helping somebody
- **Don't step outside your area of authority** – if you're not a medical business, don't be communicating medical advice. Focus on your brand or business's skills and expertise, and how this relates to the effects of COVID-19
- Most importantly, **if you don't have something useful and new to say, don't say anything**





# 5

## Change and disruption

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers, 'September 11th 2001' was often referred to as 'the day the world changed forever'. Looking back, its long-term impact seems likely to be at least matched by COVID-19.



# Sacrosanct no more

From the apparent disappearance from the international stage of long-lived organs of international governance, such as NATO; to the discovery that it is possible for logistics and supply chains to be repurposed at pace, it is clear that the potential for widespread, lasting disruption of many of the practices, processes and institutions we have long seen as sacrosanct is high.

# A New World Order?

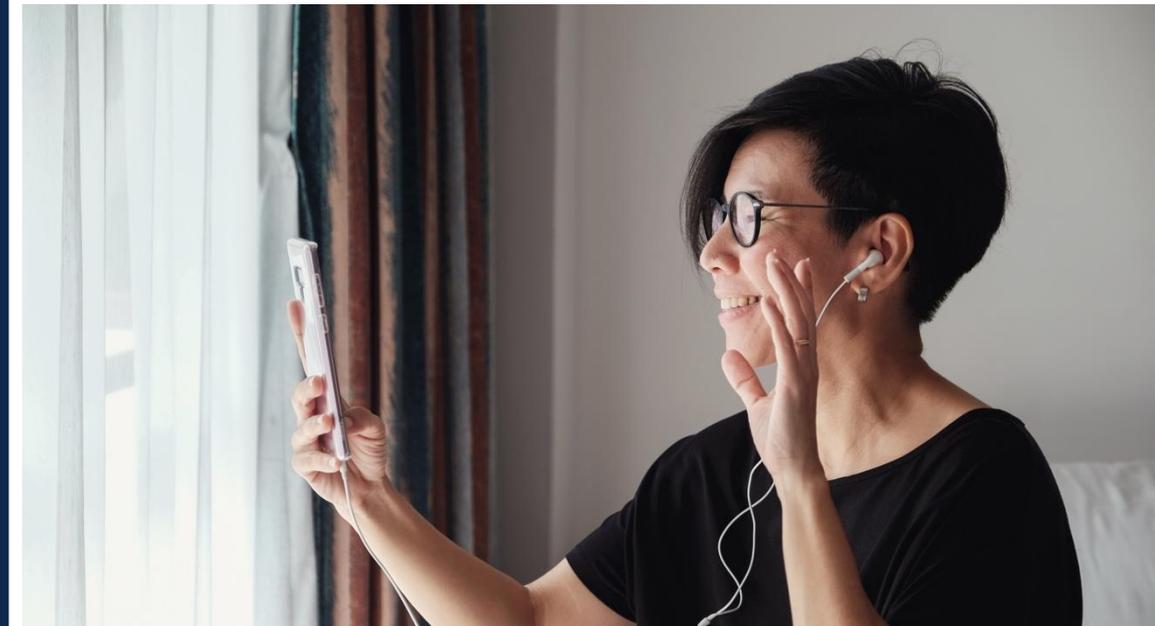
We are a long way from being able to make accurate predictions as to the shape that society and the economy will take as we adjust to a post-pandemic reality.

However, it is certain that there will be huge opportunities as markets re-open and new models of business become apparent, as our changed and changing lifestyles give rise to concomitant changes in supply and demand.



# What this means for you

- **Think carefully** - decisions that companies take now will be what determines their potential two-decade trajectory
- **No industry or business type should stand still** - there are threats and opportunities for all
- **Continually adapt** - regular, smart thinking about how this is playing out is vital if brands and businesses are to mitigate challenges and create advantage
- **Now is the time to think big and bold** – don't be shackled by 'how it's always been'. Now, it's different.



# Let's talk

To find out more about how COVID-19 is impacting communications, or how we can support you during this challenging time, contact Grayling's Insights, Strategy and Creative team: IGNITE.

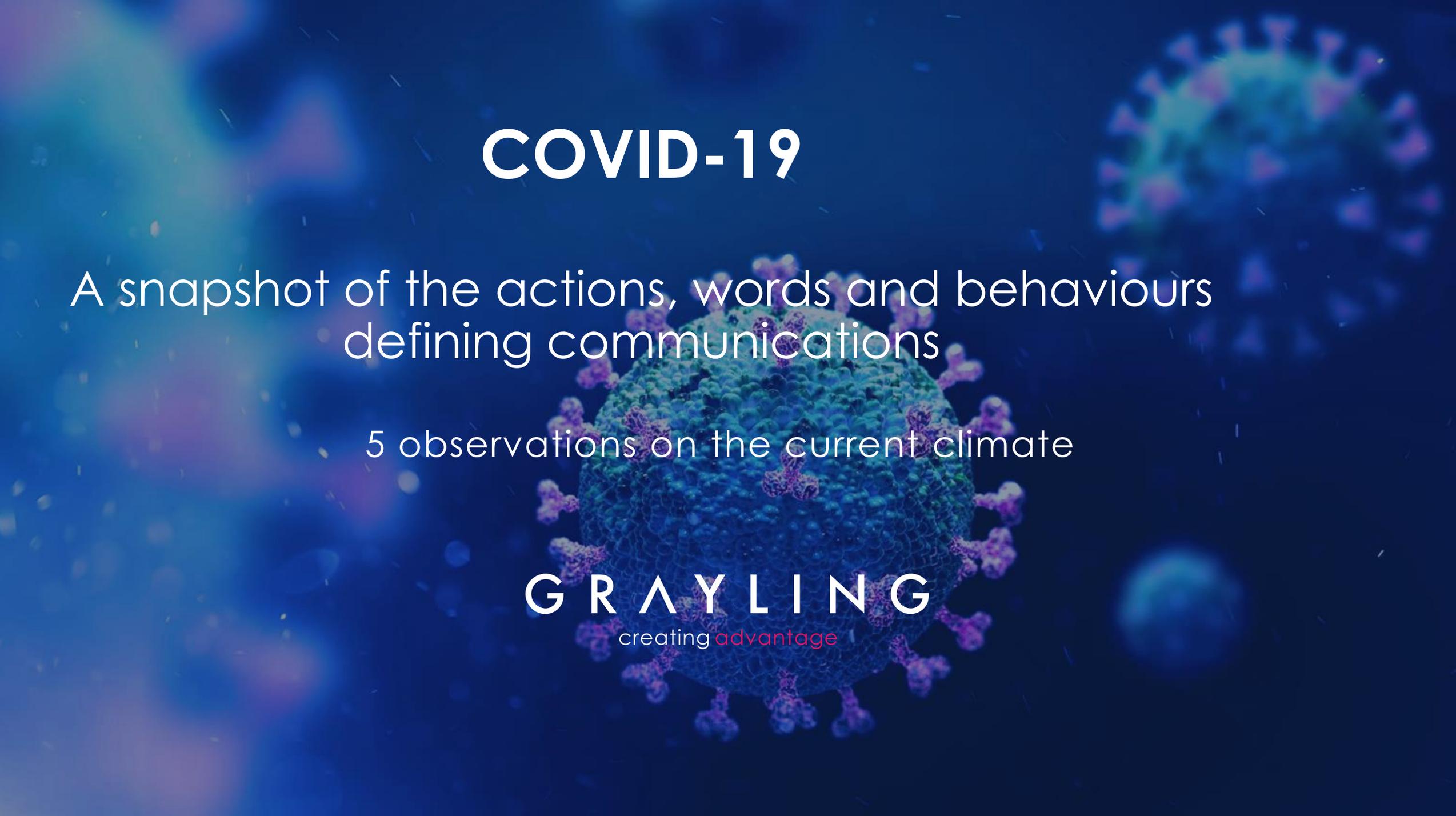
[ignite@grayling.com](mailto:ignite@grayling.com)

## Further reading

Grayling's Daily Political Updates on COVID-19, [available for free here](#)

The Rules of Contagion by Adam Kucharski - exclusive Grayling podcast, available for free to download here. <https://audioboom.com/posts/7549931-adam-kucharski-the-rules-of-contagion>

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