

THE  
NETWORKED  
AGE\_

ISSUE 3

# NERDOGRAM

SEPTEMBER 2021

**ENGINE**  
mhp *mischief*



# ENGAGING THE ANXIOUS

Welcome to the third Networked Age Nerdogram, our monthly email that gathers insights and trends to help communicators navigate a connected world that's increasingly tribal, activist and polarised.

As a combination of geopolitics, climate change and the ongoing pandemic makes life feel especially intense, it is our role as communicators to find new ways to engage struggling audiences. In this Nerdogram, we have looked at the most recent research on audience wants and needs, to help you do just that.

As ever, I'd love to chat, debate or co-create. Do reach out.



**Kate Gomes**, Head of Strategy, ENGINE MHP

# NERDOGRAM

NEED TO KNOWS

# AUTHENTICALLY AUTHENTIC

## A definition of authenticity

We all know that consumers, employees, and stakeholders want brands to be “more authentic”.

And finally, someone has defined what that really means. New research in the [Journal of Marketing](#) highlights six qualities driving perceptions of authenticity: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. But they do stress that the importance of each changes depending on context.

The messages, stories and content that convey accuracy or legitimacy are very different to those that show originality or connectedness. A deeper understanding of audience needs will help us prioritise for better impact.

# PLACES, PEOPLE AND PAST

## Consumers are seeking comfort and reassurance: give it to them

Researchers at [Cornell University](#) and [Vienna University of Economics and Business](#) have shared a study on consumer needs during this challenging time.

They highlight the need for connectedness: to places (locally made or from an identifiable place), people (made by artisans, individuals, or identifiable groups), and past (traditional roots or tangible history). In particular, they note the value of connecting consumers to their childhoods.

These are all “grounded” concepts, which communicators need to highlight and emphasise in their consumer-facing messages. These all call for human-centred stories, with real people and places at their heart.

# RELATING TO RISK

## Age influences risk message receptivity

According to a new study in [Nature](#), there is a need to message risk in different ways to different generations. Where both younger adults and older adults immediately understood risk explained via statistics, this information was retained for much longer by the younger age group.

The study found that a much more effective way to convey risk to older people was to get them to imagine the possible outcomes of risky decisions for them, and those close to them. This is a timely reminder to communicators that we should apply mental ways of conveying the same message to reach our audience.

We know that factors such as age, gender, background, education and others influence message receptivity. Therefore its important we don't message in a "one and done" way, but instead use deep audience understanding to vary messages for maximum reach.

# CUES TO CREDIBILITY

## The mask may be the new marker of credibility

Credibility is a big challenge for everyone seeking to alter others' behaviour, from online influencer to professional politicians.

A recent study in [Applied Psychology](#) highlights the important role of visual cues or markers of credibility. It emphasises that the use of masks drives perceptions of credibility, particularly for those where it was in question. This builds on [existing research](#) on the way use of certain products (from perfume to clothing brands), rapidly drives certain perceptions of the user or wearer.

As communicators we habitually focus on words, forgetting about the importance of visual cues. This was recently exemplified by the Visit Cornwall CEO's interview on Sky, asking people not to visit, with a very different message in the background. It is our role to remind ourselves of the many ways people take in information, and ensure all the messages our audiences receive are self-reinforcing, rather than contradictory or confusing.



# MIND MATTERS

## Make mind-body dissonance to drive creativity

Many in the communications space and beyond, have complained that the limitations and emotional toll of the pandemic have stifled their creativity.

New research published in the [Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin](#) indicates that one way to overcome this is to force mind-body dissonance. For example, writing positively while frowning or assuming a high-power role, with constricted posture. Results showed that doing this delivered more – externally assessed – creativity than mind-body alignment.

This indicates a new route to creativity that doesn't rely on shared spaces or long reflective periods which have been lacking during the pandemic. Instead, they can be utilised individually for brief periods.

# THE RULES OF INFLUENCE

At MHP+Mischief, we apply three simple Rules of Influence - developed with Dr Tali Sharot and UCL's Affective Brain Lab - to think through every challenge. As we go along, we'll show how the Rules play out in the real world. But before we begin, let's quickly recap on what they are:

## **RULE ONE:**

**Who you are is as important as what you do.**

Audiences are tribal and united around shared narratives and values. To engage people, organisations must show they (and the people who run them) share the same values.

## **RULE TWO:**

**Influencers and passions spread ideas**

People follow people like themselves and they respond to passionate voices. Passionate storytellers and emotional stories are more effective.

## **RULE THREE:**

**Arguments are never won, outcomes are**

People will reject challenging arguments, even if they are supported by facts. To persuade people, you can't tell them they're wrong, you have to change the conversation.

## SOME HELPFULL LINKS

To learn more about communicating in a polarised world, download our Guide [here](#).

If you want to know more about any of the insights in this email – or talk to us more about how we think about audiences, please email me at [kate.gomes@mhpc.com](mailto:kate.gomes@mhpc.com)

And don't forget to check out our Networked Age library, including our Guides to 'The New Rules of Influence' and 'Communicating in a Polarised World'.

You can find everything here, including the Nerdogram:  
[mhpc.com/NetworkedAge](http://mhpc.com/NetworkedAge)

## CONTACT

020 3128 8100  
[contactus@mhpc.com](mailto:contactus@mhpc.com)

60 Great Portland Street  
London, W1W 7RT

[mhpc.com](http://mhpc.com)  
 [@mhpc](https://twitter.com/mhpc)

[mischiefpr.com](http://mischiefpr.com)  
 [@mischiefpr](https://twitter.com/mischiefpr)