



# BRAND IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

An Actionable Playbook of Sorts



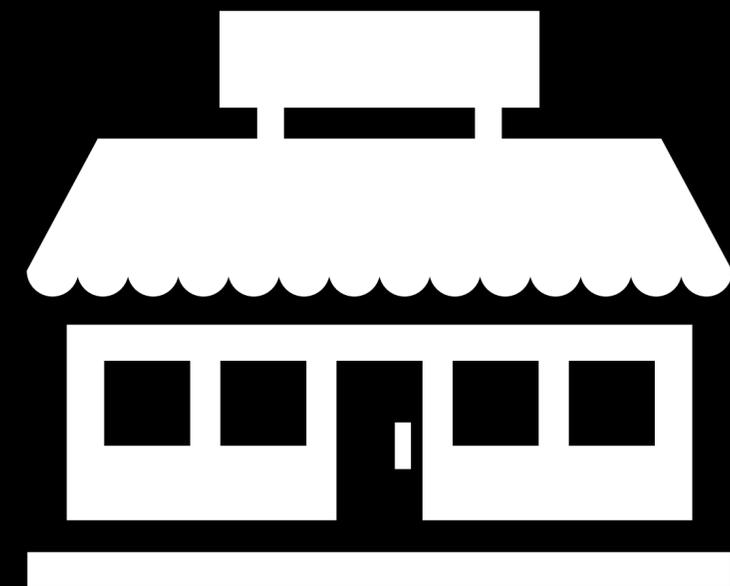
+ BIG PICTURE PERSPECTIVE



Our world has shifted in ways that few could have imagined even two weeks ago. COVID-19 is reverberating into every area of lives, from our families to our communities and businesses. It's challenging the way we work, live, connect and survive in the face of a global pandemic.



It goes without saying that the most critical priorities for businesses amidst this crisis are caring for their staff and ensuring that critical supply chains remain up and running.





That said, as a marketer, it's also important to remember that your brand is a symbol. One that your consumers ascribe meaning to based on what they observe in your behaviour. The actions taken now will determine how you're perceived when this is all behind us.



We've always maintained that a brand's values should be felt and experienced through the behaviours of the organization and people behind it. They are not words to hide behind when the shit hits the fan, but rather something to galvanize and live up to - especially when the going gets tough.





## **"Perfection is the enemy of good..."**

*The reason Johnson & Johnson is one of the most valuable companies in the world is in 1982 they didn't say the poisoning of the Tylenol bottles in the Midwest was an isolated incident.*

*They cleared all the shelves of Tylenol across North America. Was it an overreaction? Yes. Did it assure the health of the public and restore the credibility of the company? Yes and yes.*

*A World Health Organization expert put it well: "If you need to be right before you move, you'll never win. Perfection is the enemy of the good when it comes to emergency management. Speed trumps perfection. The problem right now is everyone is afraid of making a mistake."*

- Scott Galloway

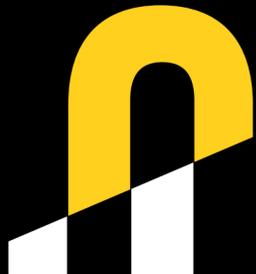


+ BRANDS & COVID

# + ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

We identified a few key probing questions to understand how to help our clients make informed marketing decisions amidst the chaos:

- How has your customer's life changed in the face of COVID19, and what impact has this had on their attitudes and behaviours?
- What are the likely implications on your product and service offering in the coming months?
- Is your marketing adding value for people, acknowledging their new needs or easing their anxiety (vs contributing to it)?
- How should media plans evolve to reflect people's new consumption habits?



# + KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

1. **INSIGHT** Through social listening and up-to-the-minute consumer research, quickly develop a new picture of your customer, their changing needs and attitudes.
2. **AGILITY** By contingency and pivot planning, and employing agile production methods and processes, ensure all marketing activities are flexible and leave room to manoeuvre as needed.
3. **EMPATHY** Offer assistance, reassurance and transparency via proactive value-add content and engaged community management in order to deliver a positive customer experience that people will remember.
4. **FUTURE-PROOFING** Take steps now to ensure that when we arrive at the other side of this, you're positioned to emerge on stronger footing by avoiding the trap of short term-ism.

As we believe to be true at any other time,  
in the context of COVID-19, brands will be  
judged (or cursed) based on what they  
**THINK, DO** and **SAY**.

+

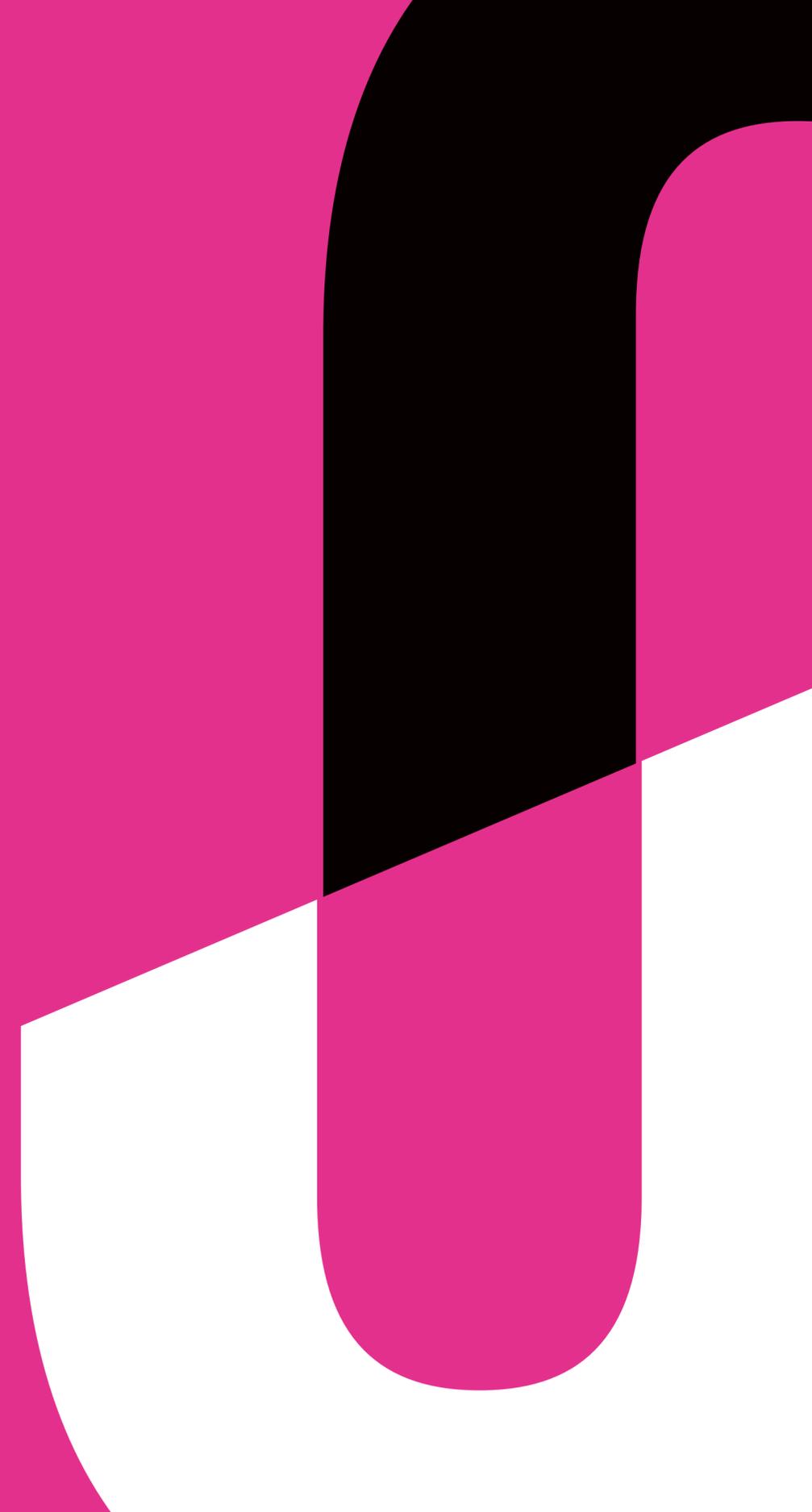
**THINK**

**DO**

**SAY**

# + THINK

Understand how a radically changing environment has impacted your customer and the role of your brand.



# WHAT THE EARLY DATA IS TELLING US

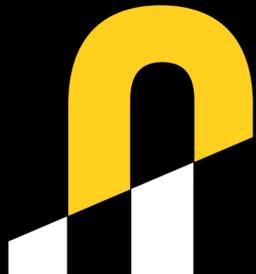
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# + MINDSET SHIFTS

## Coron-anxiety:

- Feelings of financial stress, concern for loved ones and protective behaviour are all rapidly escalating.
- Any notions of scepticism around health risks or desire to return quickly to normalcy are all but erased.
- Social media is already exacerbating our feelings as anxiety rises with every post and push notification.
- The **psychological effects of isolation and stress** will become an important topic over the weeks to come.

*Sources: Angus Reid, The Lancet*



# + BEHAVIOUR SHIFTS

- Based on public health guidance, avoidance of public places has become a priority for almost everyone.
- As more and more Canadians are self isolating, they are finding more ways to stay connected, especially through video calling.
- As a direct effect of isolation, loneliness is becoming an epidemic on its own right.
- The CPG category is already experiencing dramatic swings across many areas with the expectation that some behaviours will become part of a new normal.
- As consumer sentiment sinks, expect sectors like luxury and consumer discretionary to follow China with decline/stagnation.

*Sources: Angus Reid, Sparks & Honey*



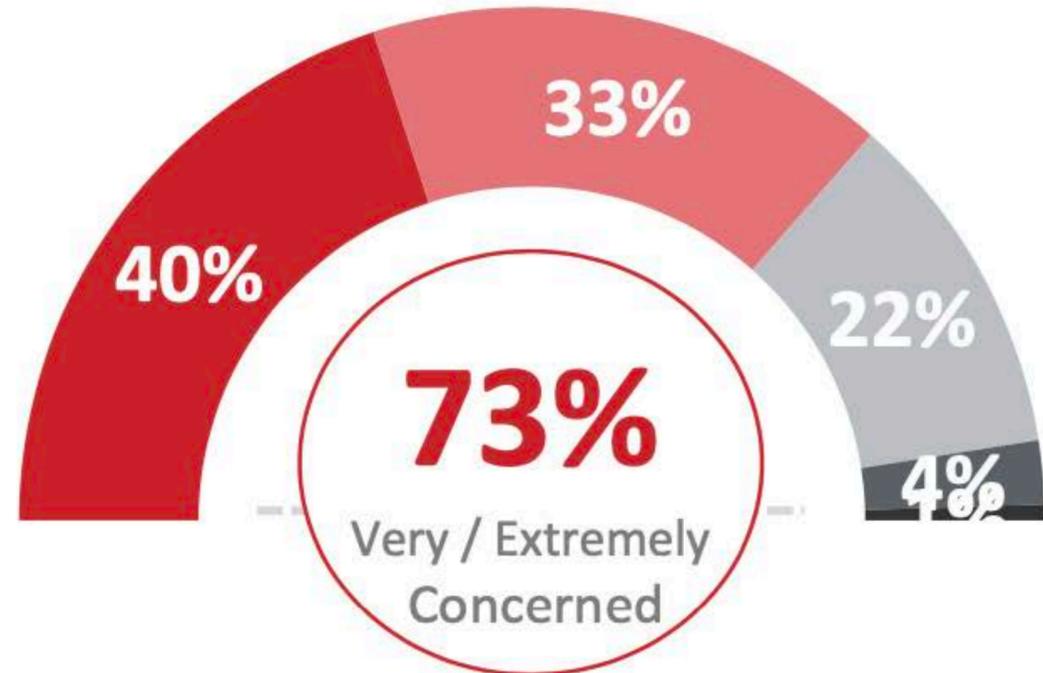
# + TECHNOLOGY SHIFTS

- Social distance and public health recommendations are becoming powerful accelerators for a range of technologies from contactless payments to contactless delivery, any type of cashless method, robotic assistance, voice technologies, and more\*.
- Overall media and content consumption (internet, streaming video, social media and podcasts) are all sharply on the rise as the need for connectivity rises dramatically.
- Technology is also an important part of the fight against the virus with AI leading the way. Both big data and precision data will play a role in preventing more cases and helping us get back to work.

*\*Source: Sparks & Honey*

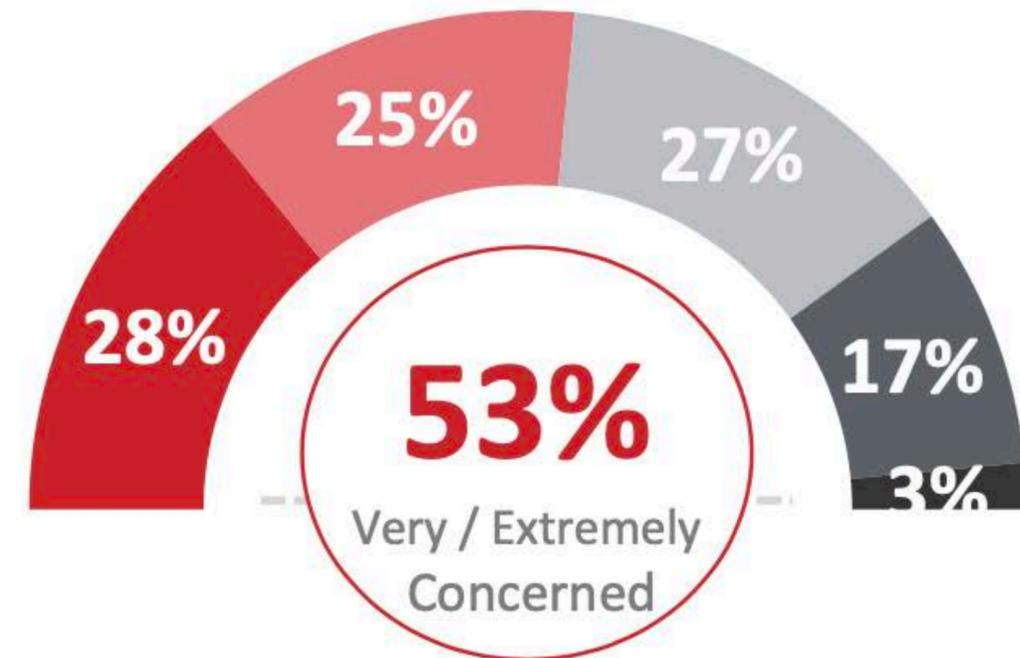
# + FEAR DRIVING SENTIMENT

## Concern about Canadian Economy



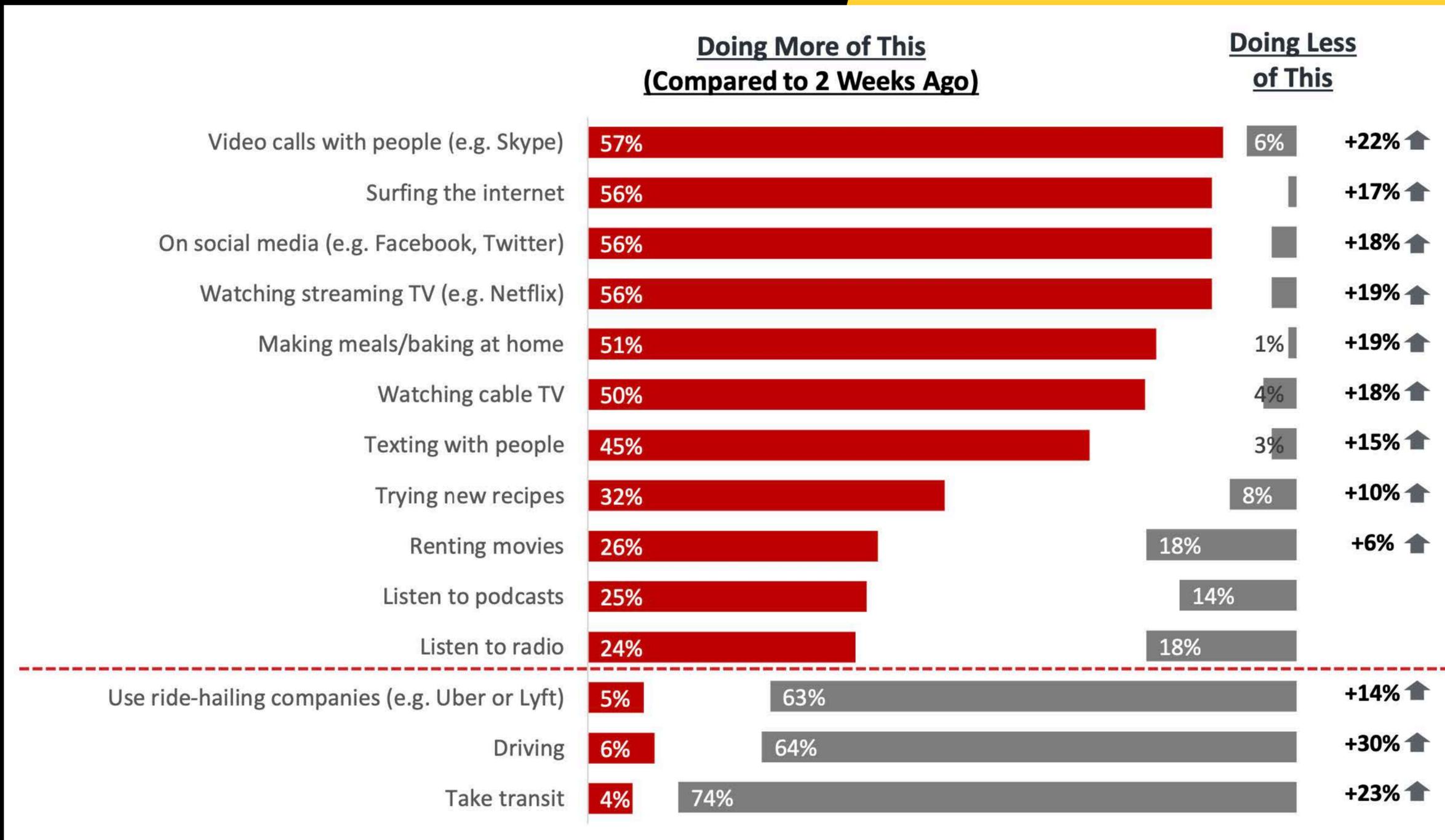
- Extremely concerned
- Very concerned
- Concerned
- Not very concerned
- Not at all concerned

## Concern about Personal Finances



- Extremely concerned
- Very concerned
- Concerned
- Not very concerned
- Not at all concerned

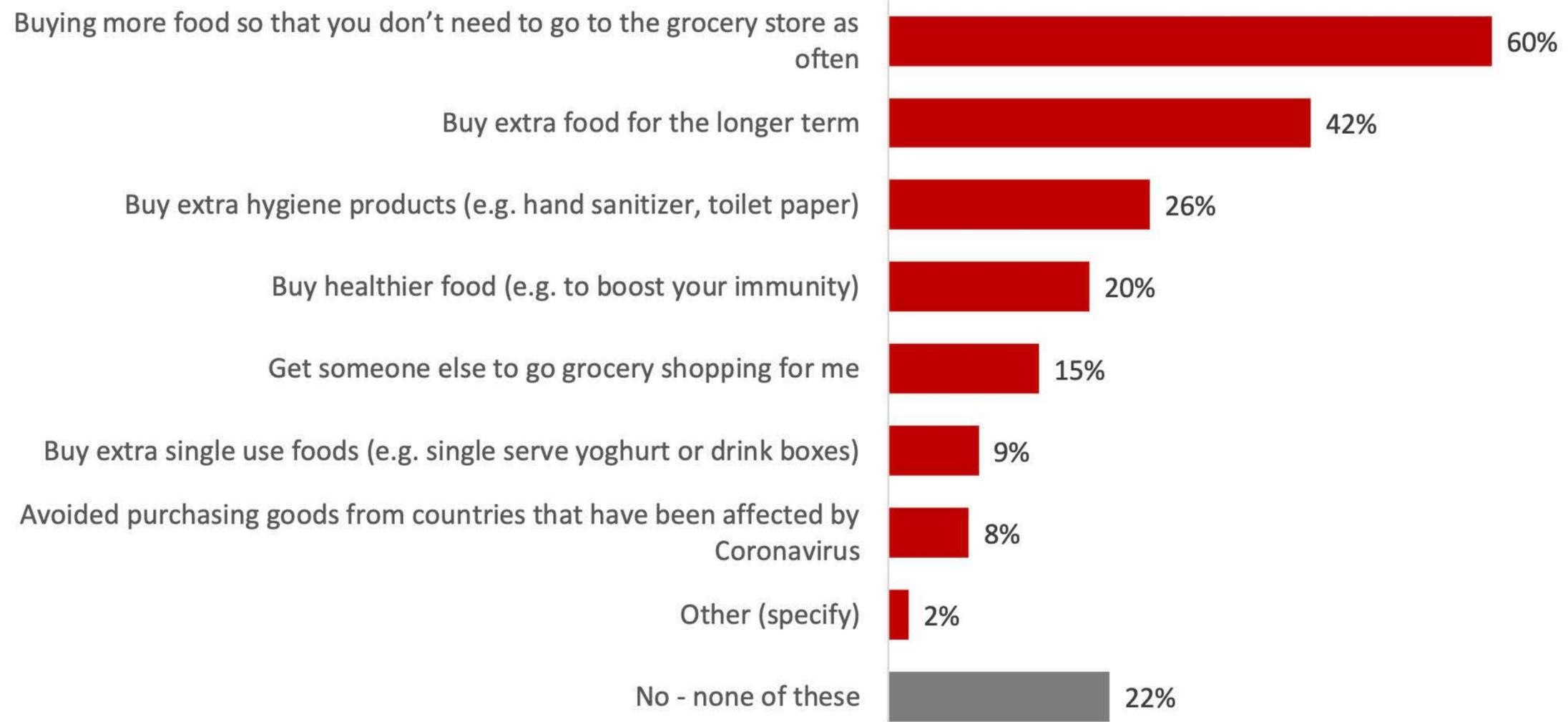
Source: Angus Reid COVID-19 Tracker



Source: Angus Reid COVID-19 Tracker

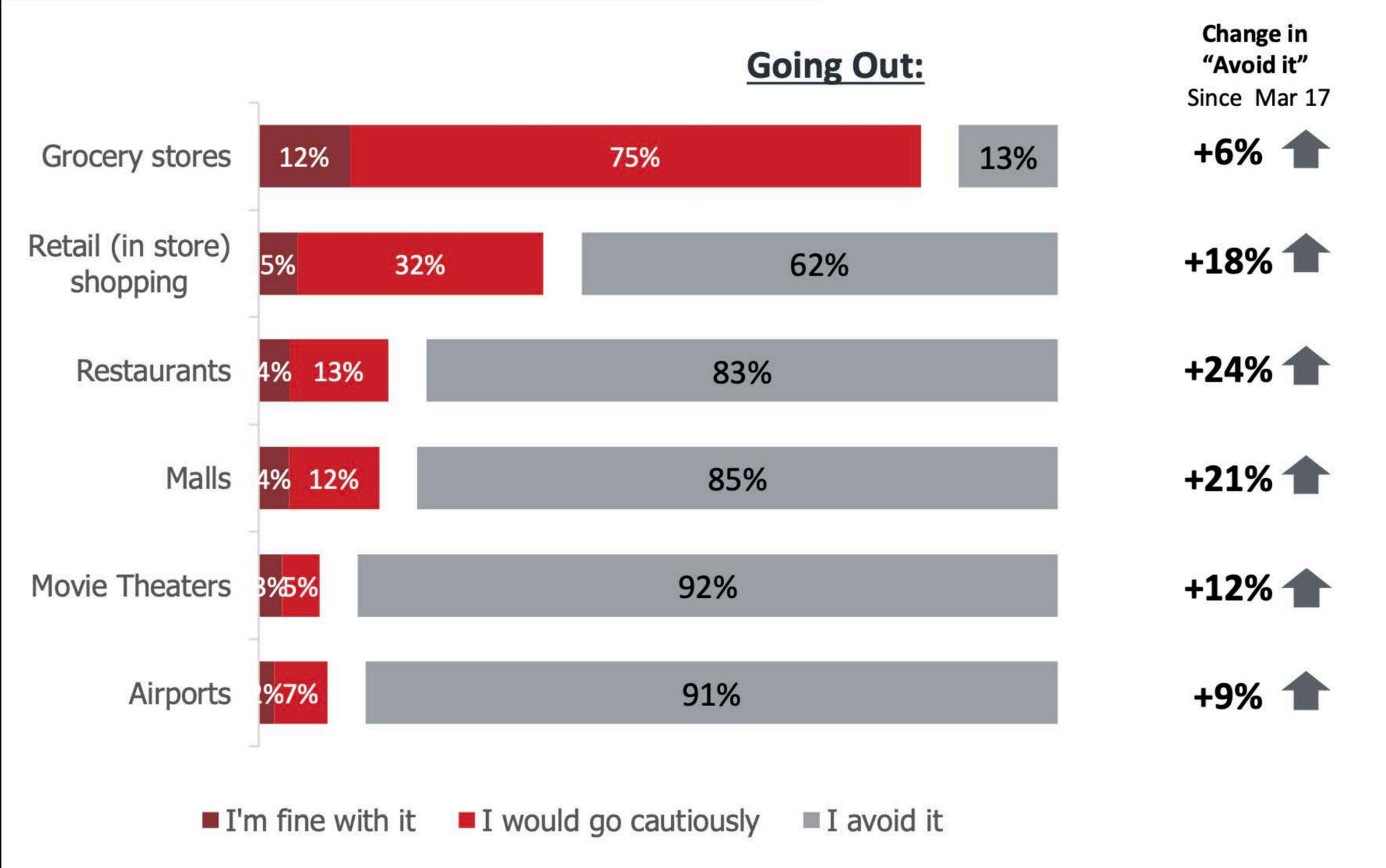


**Doing This**  
**(Within the last 2 Weeks)**



Source: Angus Reid COVID-19 Tracker





Source: Angus Reid COVID-19 Tracker



IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS

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Start by looking at the DNA of your brand, your core product attributes and your cultural authority. Overlay these against their shifting need states to uncover your brand relevance.



# IN A NUT SHELL

Life with social distancing and/or isolation is going to be a lot of things: frustrating, lonely, busy for some, boring for others, etc. Routines, systems and traditions will also shift (virtual drinks, at home exercise). How can your brand help?



# EAR TO THE GROUND

More than ever it's critical to be aware of and in tune with what people are saying about your brand. Stay in touch and monitor sentiment. Social listening can be a big help here.



+ DO

Marketing with empathy and  
some thoughts on brand etiquette





# ACTIONS > WORDS

If you have products, services, capacity or even intellectual property that can help during this time, then now is the time to **open source your brand**.

Macro-cultural trends tell us that consumers increasingly understand that no single organization can solve our toughest shared challenges alone. They will embrace brands that innovate, and then share those innovations for the greater good. That's the true meaning of a double bottom line.



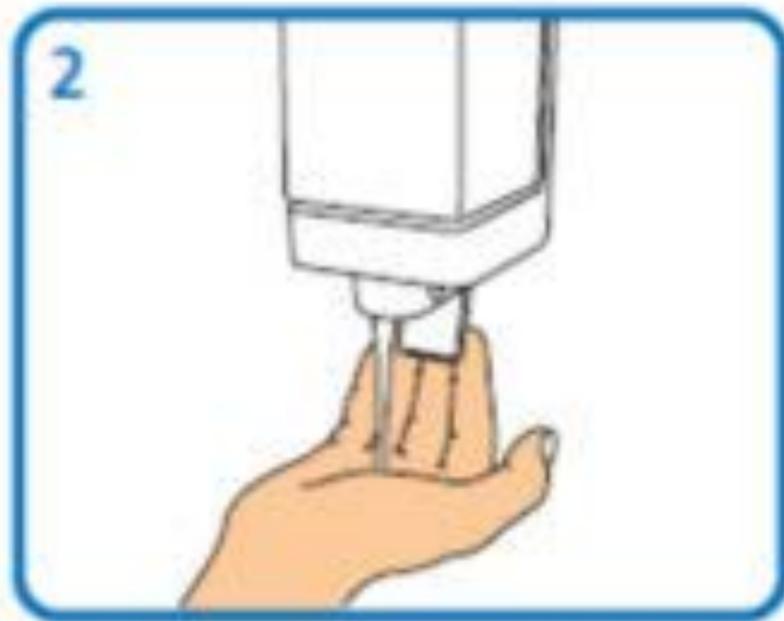
# HELP PEOPLE HELP PEOPLE

We all want to do our part to help during times of crisis - but it's often difficult to know what to do or how. Make it as easy as you can for customers to help.





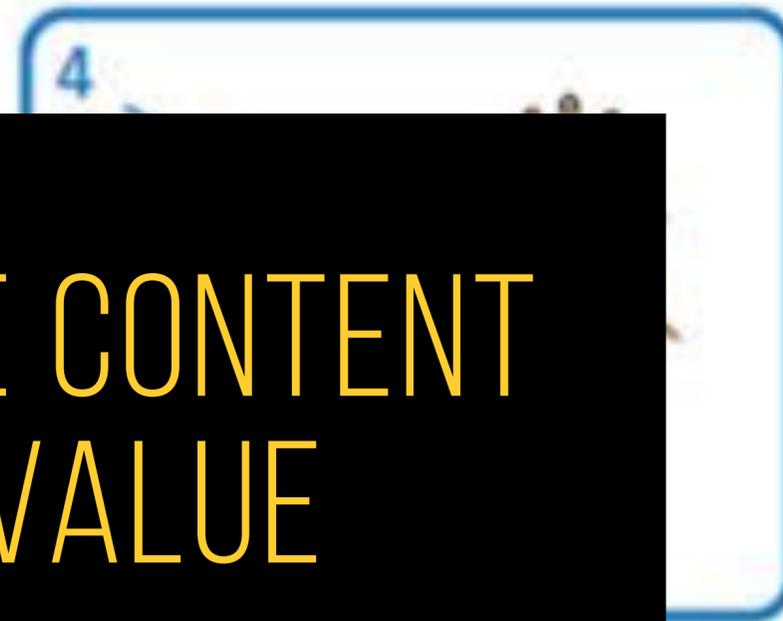
1  
Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?



2  
Caught in a landslide, no escape from reality



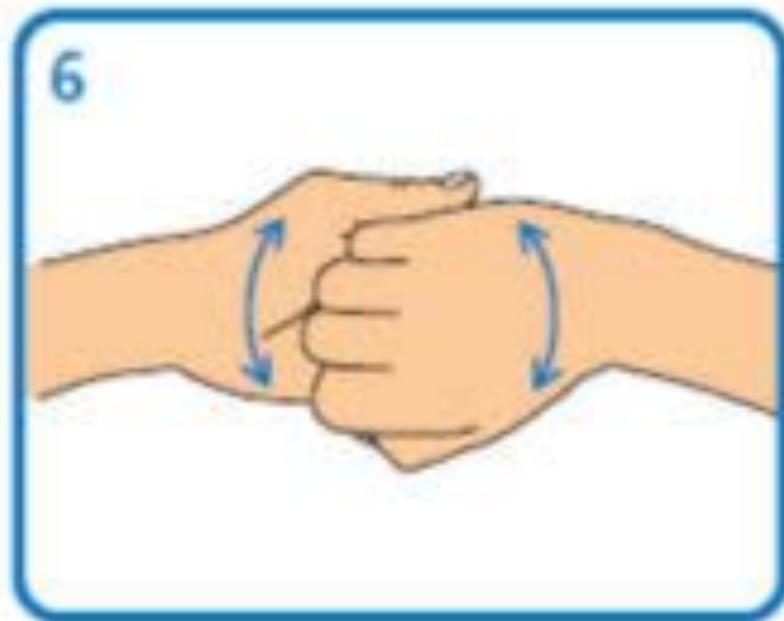
3  
Open yo  
to the



4  
need



5  
Because I'm easy come, easy go, little high, little



6  
Any way the wind blows doesn't really matter to



7  
Mama, just killed a man



Put a gun against his head, pulled my trigger,

# CURATE CONTENT OF VALUE

If you're thinking of sharing COVID-specific utility content, there's a good chance it already exists. Avoid the time and resources needed to build something net new, if your value can be gathering it together for people.





# LOOK AFTER YOUR OWN

Looking after your own people is as important and PR-able as looking after your consumers. Especially if you're a large brand with heightened expectations (and scrutiny).



# Lysol Wipes

Tackle quick cleaning touch-ups and help slow the spread of germs with Lysol Disinfecting Wipes. Strong enough for even the toughest messes, Lysol Disinfecting Wipes can be used on most hard, non-porous surfaces.

In addition to killing 99.9% of bacteria and viruses (†), Lysol Disinfecting Wipes also remove more than 95% of allergens, including pet dander, dust mites, and pollen.

**\$29.99 ea**  
Limit 1 per Family

## + SOME DON'TS

### **Don't appear opportunistic.**

The worst thing a brand can do now is look like they are trying to cash in on the crisis.

### **Don't be tone deaf.**

Assume that people probably (definitely) aren't thinking about your brand right now.

### **Don't go dark.**

Step up and use the power and scale you have for good or consumers are not going to forgive you.

# + SAY

What to say and how to say it  
(without overstepping your bounds).

# SAY IT WITH RELEVANCE

We believe that while brands can play a role amidst a crisis, it doesn't mean you can just show up in their world with your agenda and hope they're going to pay attention. As mentioned in the THINK section, use consumer insights to connect your brand truths with the target's needs to ensure purpose and relevance. Don't piggyback on the conversation without adding value.



# SAY IT WITH CREATIVITY

While there may currently be an inability to shoot on location or in studio to produce content and advertising, the truth is that there are many alternate means of executing high quality assets. Examples include animation, illustration, motion graphics, compositing, stock, UGC and more.





Buffer   
@buffer



Buffer has been fully remote for 9 years now and we have teammates in 19 different countries. If your company is suddenly working remotely and you have questions you'd like answered, feel free to drop them below and we'll do our best to help. ❤️

♡ 346 1:14 PM - Mar 16, 2020



💬 97 people are talking about this



Dear Mr Madden,

I'm very sorry our service isn't running as smoothly as you're used to at the moment. Like all supermarkets, we are working round the clock to keep up with high demand and make sure everyone gets what they need. We may not always get it perfectly right but we are trying our best. Thank you for bearing with us.

I'd also like to take this chance to thank our amazing drivers and warehouse staff who are working tirelessly to deliver groceries to as many people as possible in these uncertain times. Their dedication and hard work is truly amazing.

# SAY IT WITH TRANSPARENCY AND HONESTY

There are more than enough self-important announcements and unwanted emails from many brands right now. Personal messages and a focus on creating positive customer experiences can work when larger public gestures fail.



A close-up photograph of several interlocking metal gears. The gears are made of a light-colored metal, possibly aluminum or steel, and are set against a dark background. The focus is sharp on the central gear, showing its teeth and the circular hole in the center. The lighting creates highlights on the edges of the teeth and the surface of the gears, emphasizing their mechanical nature.

# SAY IT WITH UNITY

This is not the time for competitive claims. On the contrary, it's the time to stand with your competition to show that you're tackling this together and learning from one another.



# The Metropolitan Opera



Nightly Opera Stream: *Siegfried*

## SAY IT IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Reframe your media plans around new consumer realities. Remove OOH and focus on "at home" media instead. As early data shows, digital, mobile and streaming have exploded (for obvious reasons). Look for signals and be ready to adjust to new habits and trends (Video calling, e-gaming etc).



WATCH NOW

Jay Hunter Morris is the young hero Siegfried, the title character of the third installment of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. The





POSITIONING YOURSELF  
+ FOR THE OTHER SIDE



START  
STOP  
ENGINE

For most organizations, marketing is critical to not just building a business but to maintaining one. Turning it off won't just harm short term acquisition, it will seriously affect the health of your brand once we emerge from this sensitive time. Again, it's not about whether you should market or not — it's how you do it.

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# PROTECT YOUR BUDGET

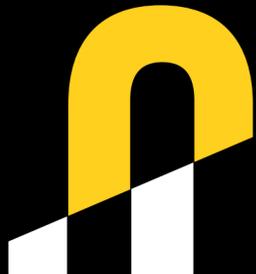
While this may appear self-serving (it's not), brands that reduce their spends during times of adversity often come out the other end weaker. Every business will of course have its own considerations, but history tells us that, generally speaking, healthier marketing budgets facilitate a quicker recovery.



# + THE POTENTIAL COST

- Brands that cut advertising budgets most aggressively took > 5 years to recover\*
- Brands that go dark during recessions suffer significant brand metrics declines\*\*
- Reductions in marketing spend create short-term returns but significant long-term loss\*\*\*

Sources: \*MillwardBrown, \*\*Data2Decisions, \*\*\*Butterfield



# BRAND VS WILD

As a marketer your job is to steward your brand through both periods of opportunity and threat. Strong brands recovered 9x faster than weaker brands following the financial crash of 2008. Don't abandon your brand. It's going to be critical in helping you come back.



Brands that focus on increasing **relative share of voice**, **perceived share of voice** and **product quality perceptions** were more successful in the wake of previous crises.

(Source: Kantar, BrandZ)



# THE NEW NORMAL

Going forward we are likely to look at certain aspects of life as distinctively different pre and post-pandemic.

What could this mean for customers long-term? Permanent shifts in behaviours and attitudes about work? About family? Will they continue to worry more and spend less? We don't know these answers yet. What we do know is that by consistently listening and observing your customers's behaviour, you will be prepared to adapt your activities in light of this.



# + SOURCES

## Consumer Research

Angus Reid - Weekly Monitoring of Canadian Perceptions & Behaviour (COVID 19)

Sparks & Honey - Culture Bites

The Lancet

Kantar

Comscore

## Brand Research

MillwardBrown

Data2Decisions

Kantar, BrandZ

Binet and Field, Selling Creativity Short

## Agency and Thought Leadership Curation

BBH London

Scott Galloway - Prof G Show Episode 1

