

CARAT

Designing for People

How rElevaNt iS

ByRon Sharp

iN 2020?

a dentsu company





How relevant is Byron Sharp in 2020?

A decade after Byron Sharp's 'How Brands Grow' was first published, seismic shifts in consumer behaviour and expectations mean we need to reconsider the rhetoric. The pandemic has highlighted how some of Byron Sharp's *Laws of Growth* are critical for brand survival. At the same time, 2020 has also demonstrated where adaption to the rulebook is required to survive. As we close 2020 and enter into 2021, it is time to step back and reconsider how to apply the theory, where it's relevant and where it needs to change.



The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have created new category entry moments and moods.

Byron Sharp focuses on making the brand easy to buy, by paying attention to category entry: the why, when, where, 'with whom' and 'with what' of category purchase. He proves that brands grow when they forge a connection in people's minds so, when they think of entering a category, they think of a specific brand. He makes it all sound so simple: *'make your brand easier to access in consumers memory in more situations & for more consumers'*¹.

COVID-19 has prompted various new *Category Entry Points* for established brands. Take chocolate, sweets and snacks which have shifted from impulse on a commute, to a moment of escape in the isolation of lockdown. In the first week of lockdown, there was a slight increase in at-home snacking between 5-10%, by week five this had risen to 50% as consumers became accustomed to snack more at home.² The same can be said for hot drinks, pre-COVID 46% of consumers brought coffee in a coffee shop on their commute, now just 27% plan to visit coffee shops³. This shift has led to a boom in at-home coffee consumption, from Instant Coffee to high-end Capsule Machines to Alternative Milks.

Category entry points are not just about linking your brand to the moment, but to how people feel in these moments. For example, snacking takes on more of an emotional role as people are snacking for comfort and connection. Same with coffee, our research has shown that a homemade cup of coffee has become more meaningful and appreciated in lockdown; and that it could signal everything from *'now it is the start of the working day'* to *'don't talk to me right now'*.

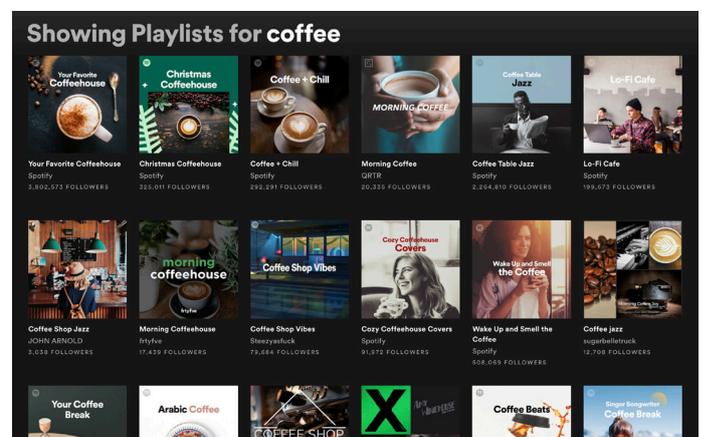
The pandemic has also unlocked new category entry moods. To win in previously functional food categories now requires not just consideration of who is entering the category and why – but also how the consumer feels. In lockdown, people downloaded coffee shop playlists in record numbers to recreate the ambient relationship with take out coffee at home.

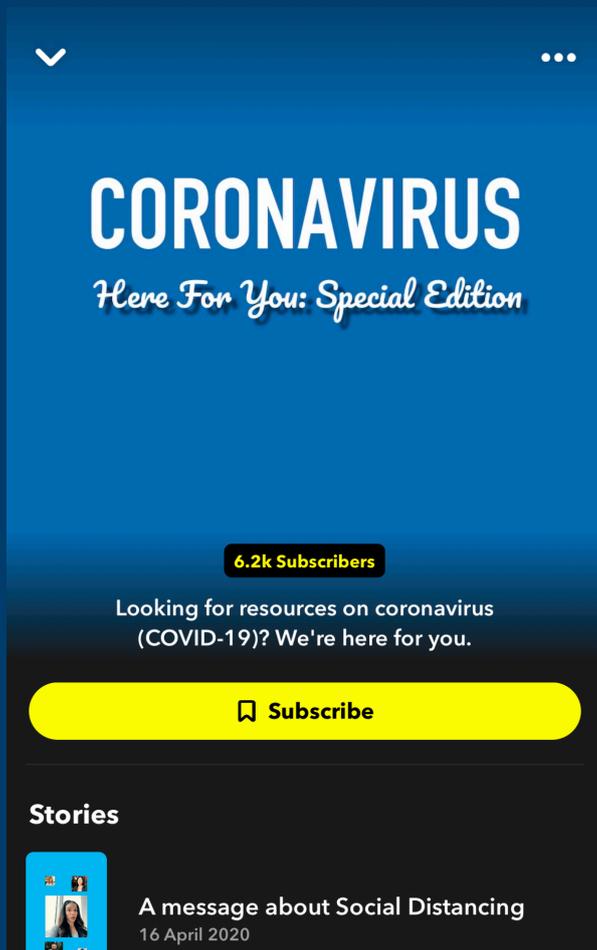
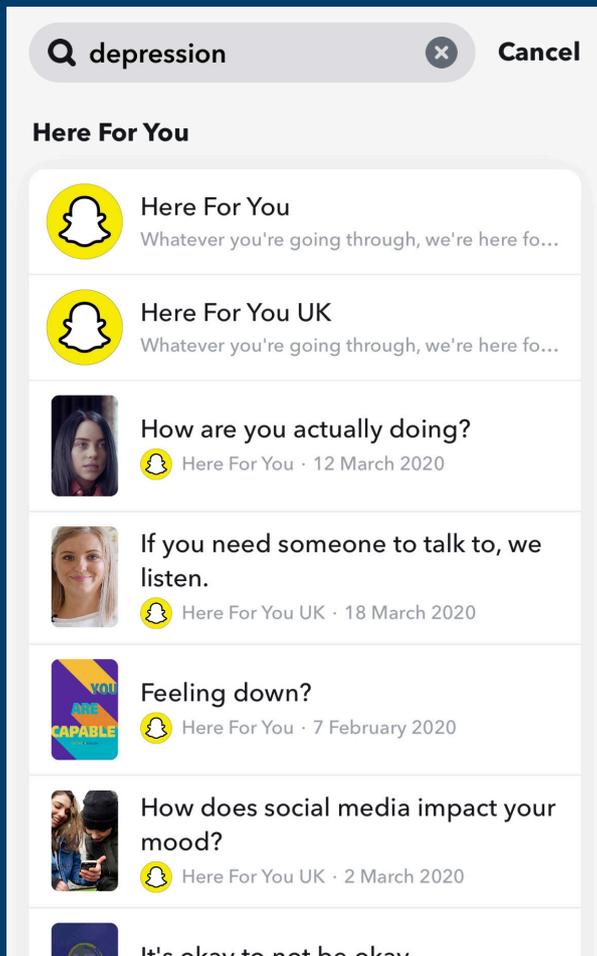
The heightened mood is true of many categories.

1 Byron Sharp – How Brands Grow, 2010
2 Kantar – 10 thoughts on COVID-19 and its impact on purchase and consumption behaviour, April 2020
3 CCS Recontact – 2020

The move to working from home created a heightened consciousness around what homes looked like, especially as the backdrop on a work Zoom call. IKEA leant into this by creating free Zoom backgrounds to download. Even if consumers couldn't physically go to an IKEA store, the backgrounds provided a classic category entry point: forging a connection between the IKEA brand and demonstrating their transformative home improvement.

Wherever you look, the pandemic has created a plethora of new category entry points – both emotional and rational. Growth can be found by combining Sharp's existing theory with the new realities – engaging in both the moment and in the mood to win.





The pandemic has heightened expectations; brands must prove their worth to consumers.

Byron Sharp believes that brand purpose is neither needed nor helpful. He argues that more brands get brand purpose wrong than right (e.g. Kendall Jenner and Pepsi). *'It is clear to see that many brands exist and thrive with a distinctive market positioning strategy. Think Marmite. Great brand. No purpose'*⁴.

However, the global pandemic has heightened expectations from consumers, transforming the role of purpose from rhetoric to tangible and welcome action. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, 74% of consumers said, *'companies placing profits before people during the COVID-19 crisis will lose my trust forever'*⁵. While 24% stated they had started using a new brand because of *'the compassionate way they responded to the virus outbreak'*⁶. As we move beyond 2020, consumers will expect more and ask, *'what did you / will you do to help?'*.

During the lockdown, Snapchat developers Snap Inc. didn't just push out rhetoric surrounding mental health, they created the 'Here for you' a service offering education and support around everything from anxiety to depression to grief. If users typed in "depression", then Snap served up content from specialists about how to manage different types of depression in digestible 10-second clips. Snap also pushed out special editions of 'Here for You' including one specifically educating about Coronavirus⁷.

The role for brand purpose goes beyond Byron Sharp's read of it. Purpose is not Corporate Social Responsibility. Purpose can go wrong, but, when it goes right, it is game-changing for society and a brand. Purpose should be a brand's reason for being, marketers should aim to create a valuable role in people's lives that will lead to good social initiatives.

4 Byron Sharp - The Drum, 2020

5 Edelman Trust Barometer, UK - Spring Update

6 Edelman Trust Barometer, UK - Spring Update

7 [The Verge.com - Snap rolling out 'Here For You' mental health tool early with focus on coronavirus](#)





From here on in, the distinction of assets means both flexibility and inclusivity.

Byron Sharp argues that distinctive assets need to be consistent and instantly recognisable to make a brand easy to notice. With just one red and one yellow circle, we instantly recognise it as Mastercard because we have seen it so consistently across many years of communications.

In 2020 we have seen that brand assets cannot remain as prescribed by Sharp and need to flex with the times.

KFC's challenge to its 'Finger Licking Good' Slogan during the pandemic is an example of how a brand can tweak these assets to ensure they are salient and relevant to the situation⁸. Likewise, NIVEA Men's' BOOM' adaption of their iconic pack was a socially distant way to celebrate their partner Liverpool FC's Premier League title win⁹.



Image: KFC



Image: Posterscope

8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-53901236>

9 <https://www.carat.com/uk/en/news/nivea-men-celebrate-lfc-league-title>





More fundamental, are the cases where a brand's distinctive assets are entrenched in cues of a non-diverse world. In 2020, the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement opened delayed conversations around diversity. This prompted Aunt Jemima¹⁰ and Uncle Ben's¹¹ to pledge to change their branding, name and on-pack characters.



Change is not just about reflecting racial standards, but gender too. In July, Birds Eye announced they would remove their mascot, Captain Birds Eye, replacing him with Captain Charlotte, the first female to advertise the frozen food firm's fish fingers during their 50-year history¹².

While marketers should always flex their assets to be salient, now more than ever, they must question their distinctive assets to reflect inclusion in every element of their communication.

Congratulations



Captain Charlotte!

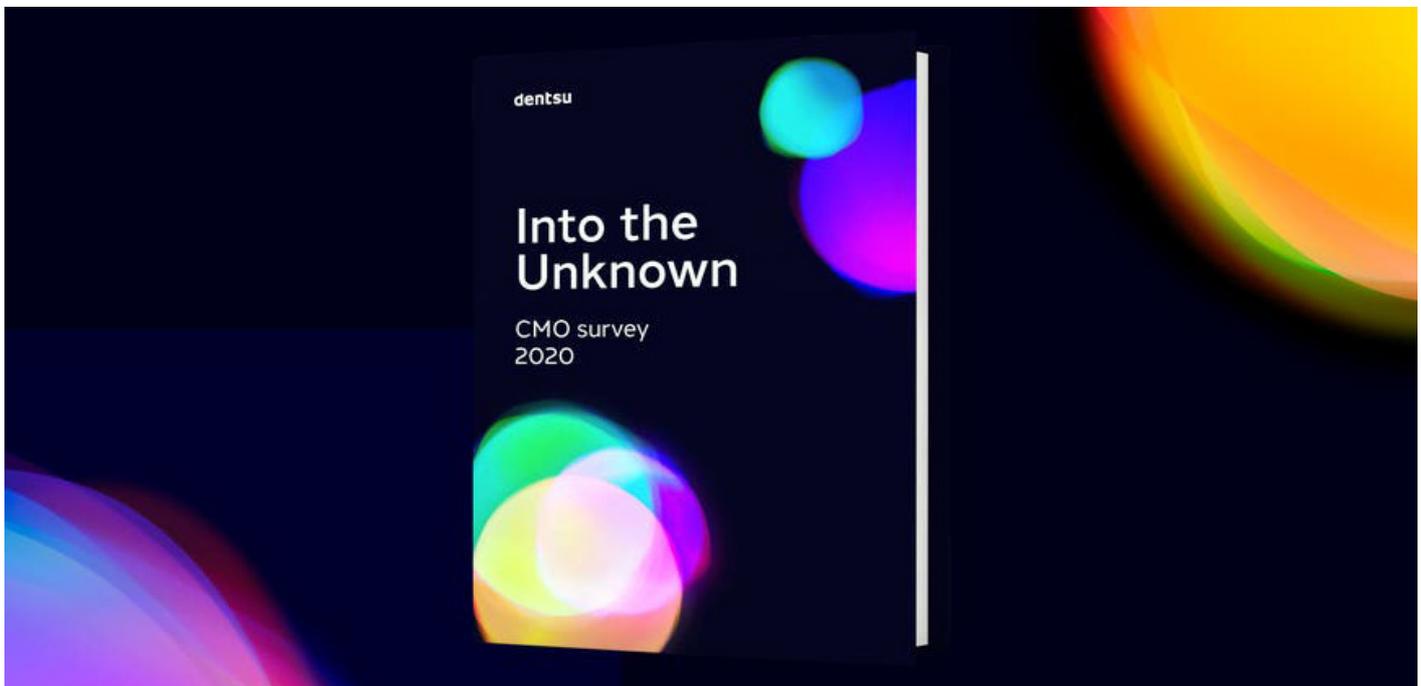
Image: BirdsEye UK, Twitter

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/17/aunt-jemima-products-change-name-image-racial-stereotype>

¹¹ <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-09-23/uncle-bens-name-dropped-from-rice-brand-after-logo-criticised-as-racial-stereotype>

¹² <https://www.famouscampaigns.com/2020/07/a-woman-has-finally-been-appointed-to-hold-the-job-of-captain-birds-eye/>





What worked to drive physical availability in traditional retail isn't guaranteed to work online.

'How Brands Grow' proposes that ensuring a brand is easy to purchase and competitive in a category via physical availability, will win new users. However, marketers often focused on physical stores, not online. The 2019 Dentsu CMO Survey showed 80% of CMOs believed the success of their business would depend on seamlessly delivering customer experience online but, less 50% felt that they are delivering this well at the time¹³. In 2020, Global CPG eCommerce has accelerated seven years in three months¹⁴. This accelerated growth was met with increased expectation, with increased negative reviews across many commerce platforms.

In eCommerce, what worked for traditional retail isn't guaranteed to work online. Brands that leverage opportunities in the sale itself and manage the customer lifecycle effectively will have a clear advantage. To win in eCommerce, marketers need to focus on online availability: meeting consumers where they really are; ensuring relevant visibility when it matters; differentiating products from the competition and building a relationship with the consumer beyond the first sale¹⁵.

2020 has proven that physical availability is more than a tick box exercise of presence, prominence and relevance in a physical store. Ongoing, marketers must ensure their brands are easier than ever to shop seamlessly online.

¹³ <https://www.dentsu.com/cmo-survey-2019>

¹⁴ Driving growth in the new normal - THE INSIGHTS AND SOLUTIONS CPG BRANDS NEED - Facebook

¹⁵ Data Driven Commerce - Winning at commerce in the new digital economy - Iprospect





Image: Kraft Heinz

The lockdown led to a boom of subscription which could trigger a death of repertoire.

Byron Sharp proposes that brands will grow by adding more new users vs getting existing users to buy their brand more. He scientifically proves that this is because a majority of consumers are light users of brands (they buy a brand once or twice a year, flirting across the category as they go) for everything from canned goods to luxury handbags¹⁶.

However, the growth of subscription models could trigger the death of the light and repertoire shopper. The automation of subscription can remove the promiscuous nature from shopping as there is no need to visit the aisle or think about the category. Subscription locks in users who were previously light buyers – or loses them altogether as they subscribe to a competitor – and removes the need for ongoing System 1 decision-making¹⁷. For example, if you subscribe to feminine hygiene products, you will no longer need to enter the femcare aisle in the supermarket or recall the distinctive assets of Tampax.



Image: Dame

During the lockdown, we saw more and more direct to consumer offerings launch into at-home subscriptions, to counter the loss of in-store presence and tie in consumers for the future. Everything from coffee to tampons to baked beans can now be dropped directly onto your doorstep every month.



Image: Pret a Manger

Since the pandemic, we have seen the prevalence of subscription also hit the high street – upping the ante on the traditional model of loyalty schemes. In September 2020, Pret a Manger launched the first coffee subscription model on the high street (£20 a month for unlimited free coffee, with the first month free)¹⁸. A shift from rewarding loyalty to locking consumers into a specific store with a fixed cost.

¹⁶ Byron Sharp – How Brands Grow

¹⁷ Thinking inside the subscription box: New research on e-commerce consumers – McKinsey

¹⁸ <https://www.pret.co.uk/en-GB/your-pret>



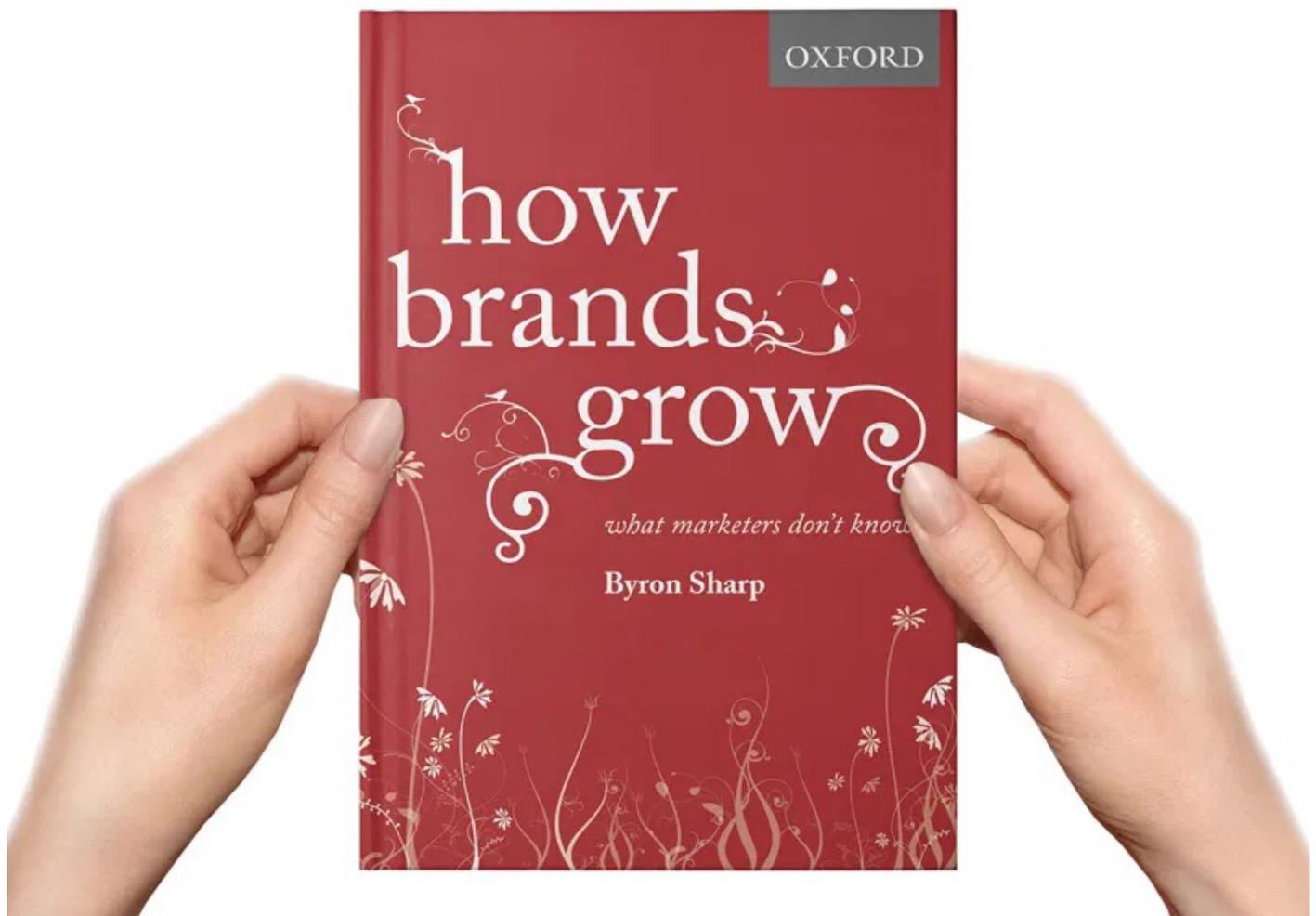
In Conclusion: How Relevant is Byron Sharp in 2020?

More of Byron Sharp's rules are relevant as opposed to irrelevant in 2020. Category entry points may have shifted but uncovering key moments and moods to engage will still unlock brand growth. Ultimately, in a time of uncertainty, brands can provide certainty. Indeed, distinctive, easy to recognise brand assets are even more important in a time of socially distant shopping to drive faster decisioning in-store.

However, in 2020 while concepts work, it is how they are applied that needs to change. What worked to unlock physical availability in traditional retail isn't guaranteed to work online. At the same time, eCommerce subscriptions are triggering the death

of repertoire and challenging the singular concept that growth can only come from light buyers.

Now is a poignant time to take the blinkers off and ensure Byron Sharp's rules aren't blindly applied. Consumers are only going to continue to expect more from brands as a societal force for good both in their distinctive brand assets -which must be flexed to be inclusive- and in the role of purpose in their communications. As such, we urge marketers to dust off the theory, take a step back and with fresh eyes consider how The Laws of Growth may sit differently in the world as it stands today.



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