

Covid-19 advertising, a video supercut shows it's all the same

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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NEWSWATCH: "Times like these," "more than ever," "home," "family," "here for you," "we've always been there for you," "we may be apart, but we can stay connected," "we'll get through this together". A universal brand message of solidarity, accompanied by sombre piano music and B-roll footage of empty public spaces. It's all the same.

'Microsoft Sam' on YouTube edited a super video of mostly US Covid-19 ads that all use exactly the same tropes in response to the pandemic, to portray this:

He explains his rationale:

“ *Corporate Covid-19 response videos are eerily similar [cue somber piano music].*

When a company or brand releases a coronavirus response ad, they might tell you that we're living in 'uncertain times', but that 'we're here for you'. They may say their top priority is 'people' and 'families' by bringing their services to the 'comfort and safety of your home'. And don't forget: 'we're all in this together'! What's the deal? In reality, many companies have found themselves short on cash, almost overnight. They needed to get a message out - and quick. They asked their teams

to throw something together. Since they can't film a new ad because of social distancing, they compiled old stock B-roll footage and found the most inoffensive royalty-free piano track they could find. This, combined with a decade of marketing trends dictated by focus groups and design-by-committee, released a tsunami of derivative, cliché ads all within a week of one another. It's not a conspiracy - but perhaps a sign that it's time for something new. ”



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Avi Dan, CEO of Avidan Strategies, a consultancy that specialises in advising marketers about optimising agency practices, who wrote a piece on this, as published on *Forbes*, agrees with the YouTuber's sentiment. "There's a lot of sameness in advertising. Perhaps because advertising people are very mobile and move from agency to agency or because they are influenced by the same award shows. Sameness has been a problem for a while and one of the reasons for the decline on Madison Avenue. At times, and especially in recent years since the last recession, it seems that agencies have all lost the desire to innovate and the courage to stand apart."



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He by no means pokes fun at the agencies that produced these ads and acknowledges that it's heroic to put together so fast, especially given the lockdown, and he salutes the companies that actually bought some airtime. However, as we emerge from this nightmare, even if it is to an unappetising new or intermediary normal, he hopes that agencies and clients will remember this video and try to reach beyond the clichés and groupthink, he says.

“ I think that the tendency will be to create more doughy campaigns. Instead, the looming recession dictates creating advertising that actually sells products and services, and the courage to do so with original, bold ideas. I'm not optimistic. Purpose-driven marketing was already a buzzword in 2019 and brands and agencies are likely to cling to it even more heavily post-crisis. We'll see more 'sensitive' advertising, more 'we're all in this together'. That would be a mistake. ”



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Joe Berkowitz, author and editor at *Fast Company* says that brands have settled on the same house-style guidelines right out of the quarantine-gate and are holding onto it for the long haul.

“ Suddenly seeing a lot of pre-roll ads that are like "Sometimes life can get a little dark. Let the new Kia Sorento light the way to a better tomorrow"— Joe Berkowitz (@JoeBerkowitz) [March 25, 2020](#) ”

He noticed the format spring up within the first weeks of most States descending into "shelter-in-place". "I first noticed it around 25 March, as advertisers realised they needed to shift gears – and fast. The coronavirus-era commercial aesthetic soon cemented, though, as more and more advertisers decided it was the only option that made sense right now. A message of togetherness in these unprecedentedly uncertain times, during which each individual apparently needs to know that an ominous conglomerate is 'here', whatever that means for them."

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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