

TBWA\INDIA

CULTURAL
TRIGGERS
COVID-19
SPECIAL
EDITION



WHAT'S THIS? DOES IT MATTER? AND TO WHOM?

Backslash is a proprietary TBWA discipline that highlights the latest shifts in culture (news, events, initiatives, trending hashtags, inventions, brands' communications).

We call them "Triggers", because they trigger something in culture. They are often a pre-requisite for emerging cultural trends. The emergence of a new trend is something we call "Edges" as they aren't necessarily established yet, but are definitely emerging and growing.

A Trigger; for example is: "Women are now allowed to enter the Sabarimala temple". In turn, this informs the rise of the Edge: "Fempowerment" in the country.

In light of COVID-19, culture is shifting in every direction. This is being fed by consumers' needs, governments' reactions and brands' initiatives.

Triggers are everywhere, shaping Edges.

This document brings you the latest COVID-19 Triggers in the India, the Edges they shape and their implications for brands and industries.

This document helps you to:

- **Understand the culture that is surrounding us in COVID-19 era.**
- **Identify opportunities amongst the darkest news.**
- **Jump into cultural conversations and be part of a global phenomenon.**
- **Capitalise on this unique opportunity. (If done right.)**

This document is for the curious.

All marketers – from the anxious to the opportunist. Any advertiser looking for insights. Anyone who likes to read into what's happening. If you've got it, it's for you.

THE TRIGGER

Lockdown updates? Tune in tomorrow

India announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, overnight. We woke up to new confinement laws and gradually came to terms with them. Everyday there is a new development and people need to be kept in the loop with all such socio-political movements. It started with keeping a 1.5m distance from people, to working from home, to malls shutting their doors, to a complete lockdown. Media and the Government is constantly trying to reach out to the citizens to improve overall awareness around the subject inspite of low media penetration in rural areas. People are using Arogya Setu, the government's new COVID tracker app for timely and authentic updates on the lockdown directly from the government.

EDGES



Polarization

We're living in a world of extremes. With the rise of polarized camps, the middle ground has eroded. It's Good vs. Evil out there. Think smaller, more tribal, more radical. Or break the filter bubble, embrace your critics, and champion the grey area.

WHAT IF

Indian citizens break the law without even realising they're doing so?

Government launches apps to centralise information in every sector?

Useful links: [The New York Times](#)



THE TRIGGER

Big Brother is watching you: COVID-19 edition

Coronavirus has entered India's law books. Any person suffering from COVID-19 & transmitting the disease deliberately can be slapped with a fine or be punishable by imprisonment. Sec 144 has been imposed across various districts which prohibits the public gathering of more than 4 people. The Indian government has also launched an app that uses mobile phone location and Bluetooth data to provide information on whether citizen have been within 6 feet of a person infected with COVID-19. The government has adopted Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 & is taking extensive measures in making our health a priority.

WHAT IF

This becomes the norm for all diseases and illnesses?

This is the start of a long-term measure to stop any sort of contagion?

EDGES



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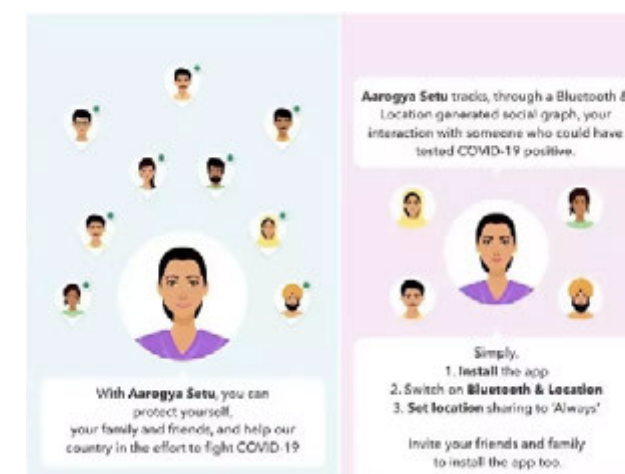


Survivalism

Today, disaster feels imminent. Climate anxiety, looming financial crises, and political instability is driving consumers to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Now drastic problems require even more drastic solutions.

Useful links:

[Time Of India](#); [Outlook India](#)



THE TRIGGER

India tracks down fake corona news

The Indian Government has set a WhatsApp chatbot called 'MyGov Corona Helpdesk' to track fake news on COVID 19. The government has taken it upon themselves to break through all the fake news and tell people what's going on rather than leaving it up to the media. India doesn't want to leave their numbers in somebody else's hands and wants to spread the right news in a the fake news era.

WHAT IF

Governments, media outlets & tech companies create additional digital trackers for different topics to put a halt to fake news?

Social media platforms create a credibility filter and track fake news spreaders?

Useful link: [Bloomberg Quint](#)



EDGES



Platform Politics

Say goodbye to the Wild West of social technology. It's time for reform. In the fierce battle against misinformation, filter bubbles, and copyright infringement, platforms are under crackdown. And they're adapting their products to help us filter fake news, break free of echo chambers, and fight tech addiction through nudges or curfews. It's the new state of social where ethics, algorithms, ownership, and influence are all under scrutiny. Regulate or be regulated.

THE TRIGGER

The Overworked and the Out-of-work

While some industries have been rocked by the COVID-19 crisis (travel, tourism, entertainment, non-FMCG retailers), other businesses are struggling to keep up (hospitals, e-groceries, e-commerce). For every person who is overworked, there is someone else with little to do but wait. The question of infection or starvation is forcing daily wage earners to take desperate measures. This crisis is a test of many things and one of them is our ability to adapt to this imbalance. The Indian Army is recalling retired medical expertise to fight against COVID 19.

WHAT IF

We create a platform that matches idle talent with industries that need them, to even things up?

Grounded airline staff (who already have basic medical training) could support the strained healthcare system?

Public transport and taxis could support e-commerce platforms to speed up the delivery of essential goods?

Useful link: [The Print](#)



EDGES



Brand Gangs

Competitors, come together. Brands are joining forces around shared industry challenges and good causes where they can have a greater collective impact. 53% of consumers think brands can do more to solve social problems than governments. Imagine what an entire industry could accomplish? 21st-century brands are built on collaboration. Rethink the enemy and gang up for good.



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THE TRIGGER

If you thought you were invisible, think again.

In order to ensure full compliance with the government's message asking people to #StayHome, state police across India has deployed drones to monitor the situation. While Mumbai, Chandigarh & Kerala Police are using drones against curfew violators, Telangana Police is using it for disinfecting contaminated areas and delivering medical supplies.

WHAT IF

The use of drones continues long after COVID-19 is gone?

What does the use of drones in a post COVID world mean for privacy?

Useful link: [Hindustan Times](#)



Other links

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/startups/features/covid-19-in-the-times-of-touch-me-not-environment-drones-are-the-new-best-friends/articleshow/74924233.cms?from=mdr>

EDGES



Helicopter Tech

Everything is watching you. Governments, brands, and devices are turning into "helicopter parents" — or worse, monitoring our every move. Fitbit shares user data with health insurers — and some customers have walked. Colleges vet applicants by stalking social media. Friends track each other through geo-location apps. Soon you won't even be able to poop in private, as smart bathrooms enter the home. With privacy at a premium, new businesses are being born to help users stay stealth or monetize their data.

THE TRIGGER

'Go Corona' is our mantra

Like a popular song, the chant "Go Corona" has been remixed and adapted across India, with many people sharing their own renditions of it in posts across social media. While the mind may boggle as to how people came up with these phrases, these "coroadditions" are certainly bringing a great deal of entertainment value in an otherwise gloomy time.

WHAT IF

Humour replaces preaching once and for all?

Humour becomes the coping mechanisms of today & creativity is the the new language of hope?

Useful link: [Boredpanda](#)



EDGES



Doom Generation

Time to sit back and watch the world burn. Existential dread is no longer the purview of pessimistic intellectuals, it's gone pop cultural. From music, to memes, to marketing, we're surrendering to political, economic and climate instability with a new form of creative, often absurdist, nihilism.

THE TRIGGER

When humanity calls, businesses join forces

While governments worldwide have been providing relief packages to citizens affected by corona, Indian brands are leading the frontline in their own ways. Apollo Hospitals has partnered with Zomato, OYO & others to launch Project Stay I, an initiative to add 5,000 isolation beds with telemedicine, food and supervision. The project is funded by HUL, SBI & Deutsche Bank. Brands joining forces at this crucial hour will be remembered for looking beyond themselves.

WHAT IF

Businesses and brands used COVID-19 to polish their public image and walk the talk of purpose?

Different brands came together and joined efforts to solve problems no government can solve alone?

Useful links: [Yourstory](#)



Other links

<https://blog.paytm.com/lets-join-hands-to-fight-against-covid-19-spread-in-india-be09a473ef41>

EDGES



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THE TRIGGER

Trains & cricket stadiums are saving lives

Railways & CCI are putting their business assets to better use during the crisis. Stadiums across the country are being converted into quarantine centres and idle train coaches are being turned into isolation wards for COVID affected patients. More and more brands are trying to repurpose their businesses to fight the crisis.

WHAT IF

Businesses become more adaptable to situations that calls for an alternate use of their assets?

Brands discover second lives for their products / assets and diversify post COVID?

Useful links: [Quartz India](#)



EDGES



Second Lives

A waste-not world is inspiring the second lives of places and products. Parking lots by day turn into hotels for the homeless at night. Rental cars become bedrooms for lunch-hour nap time. And leftover food is being reimagined as edible packaging. Businesses have the opportunity to radically remix their real estate for round-the-clock purpose and profit. It's time to ask the question: what is the second life of your product?



Die-Versification

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THE TRIGGER

Social Physical Distancing

People, businesses and even governments rely on global institutions for clear guidance in this confusing and chaotic world. Being lost in translation might directly affect the process of flattening the curve. While majority of India is still deciphering the meaning of "social distancing", the World Health Organization has rephrased it to "physical distancing", for the right reasons. Maintaining social connections while physically distancing from friends, family and colleagues could have a lasting impact on our lives.

WHAT IF

In-person meetings become a premium offering for businesses? Video calls are the norm, and physical meetings come at an extra cost.

Succinct writing and talking-to-camera improve as we rely more on emails, Skype, and FaceTime than on subtle body language and gestures?

Our bodies change due to more sitting and less moving, make-up is adapted to the camera and beauty norms get redefined.

Useful link: [The National](#)

Coronavirus: why global health chiefs are calling for 'social distancing' term to be dropped

The World Health Organization says the term implies a complete disconnection with others, and relationships remain key to people's mental well-being.



EDGES



Empathy Age

Welcome to the Interpersonal Economy. In a more interconnected world where one country's crisis impacts us all, and where many human skills can be automated, empathy is the new currency. Kindness now beats honesty and vulnerability is the new relatability.



IRL

It's time to get real. In a lonelier, more automated world, we seek real-life, human experiences. Experts say we're starting to build deeper relationships with a smaller number of people we can actually stay in touch with IRL. Brands can respond to our need for deeper, real-life, person-to-person connection.

THE TRIGGER

Coronxiety

Social distancing, uncertainty about the future, health worries, an economic downturn, rising coronavirus cases and deaths – they are all causing a lot of stress and anxiety. The BMC has partnered with clinical psychologists & psychiatrists from Mpower to launch a 24/7 toll-free helpline number called 'BMC-Mpower 1on1'. This is expected to expand the conversations around mental health.

WHAT IF

By the time we get over the COVID-19 pandemic, we're at the edge of a mental health crisis?

Mental health becomes part of medical insurance plans, beyond the COVID-19 situation?

Governments and businesses give free mental health consultations to all employees?

Useful link: [BusinessLine](#)



EDGES



Anxiety Index

It's the era of shared despair. Modern activism birthed infinite issues for us to care about, now we have anxiety about all of them. From Eco-Anxiety to Gentrification Anxiety to FOBO, there's a new rolodex of maladies, each getting a classification of their own. Millennials are the most anxious generation — but we're all on the spectrum. Anxiety is both burden and badge of honour. Businesses will be born to both manage and champion our anxious state.



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THE TRIGGER

Will religious celebrations ever be the same again?

Religion in India is all about togetherness. People come together to celebrate & pray. But the lockdown has put a hold on all religious gatherings. Large public gatherings were called off on the occasion of Ram Navami to ensure social distancing. District Magistrates have urged people to offer Friday namaz from home. Even Easter mass is set to be said online. How can holy tradition engraved in human contact survive in the wake of COVID-19, where physical contact has become a taboo and social distancing has become the norm?

WHAT IF

Will 1000 year old traditions change forever because of COVID-19?

What if togetherness finds a new meaning in Indian religion?

Useful links: [India Today](#)



EDGES



iReligion

Religion is getting a facelift. With the help of VR, apps, and pop culture at large, institutions around the globe are injecting modern sensibility into ancient tradition. From the Hajj to the rosary, religion unites with technology in order to modernise and bring in younger worshippers. Instead of people finding their faith, it's finding them.

THE TRIGGER

Riding solo? It's now the norm.

In line with the continued efforts across the country to curb the spread of the virus, major transport companies have temporarily suspended their shared ride service. The popular share-a-taxi and share autos are also being avoided by people to maintain social distancing.

WHAT IF

This has a longer lasting impact on share cab and share auto services?

Some people stop ride-sharing for good, and carbon emissions increase?

There is social havoc between those who remain adamant on sharing rides, and those who don't?

Useful links:
[TechCrunch](#); [Outlook India](#)



EDGES



Soloism

The "Aloneness Economy" is commercial white space. Singletons are the fastest-growing households globally. Things we used to do together, like dining, travel, and work, we now do solo. Big-box quantities are out, branding for an audience of one is in.



Polarization

We're living in a world of extremes. With the rise of polarized camps, the middle ground has eroded. It's Good vs. Evil out there. Think smaller, more tribal, more radical. Or break the filter bubble, embrace your critics, and champion the grey area.

THE TRIGGER

Planes aren't flying

India has suspended all inbound and outbound passenger flights till the 14th of April to curb the spread of the virus. Only cargo and emergency evacuation flights are exempted. AirAsia, Vistara, Indigo, SpiceJet and GoAir have already announced their revival and have opened bookings for flights post the suspension date subject to any change announced by the aviation regulation.

WHAT IF

Physical travelling turns into VR traveling?

Brands find ways to offer an escape while people have never felt more stuck at home?

Useful links: [Live Mint](#)



EDGES



Travel Right

Destinations have decided they've had enough. From flight-shaming and overtourism laws, to taxes on international air travel, we're taking action to deal with the damage of thoughtless travel. With new ecotourism and micro-travel movements, consumers and businesses are working together to establish a new moral compass. Don't just travel light; travel right.



AI-ify

Getting the AI treatment is now a verb. As AI-algorithms give jobs to entire industries a makeover, we're calling it the process of AI-ification. Humans will have to fight for their privacy and rethink their skill set, or risk losing it to the machines. But it's not all doom and gloom. More and more, we will welcome AI-ified convenience and entertainment. And truly human capabilities such as empathy will chart a new way forward for business and citizens alike.

THE TRIGGER

Stay Home and Party

NH7 converted living rooms into arenas by letting people enjoy the music festival through a virtual experience. Book my show too has aligned a number of artists to host live events that can be streamed at home. All though events are cancelled, entertainment hasn't shut shop and is continuing through live streaming, for people to enjoy at the comfort of their homes.

WHAT IF

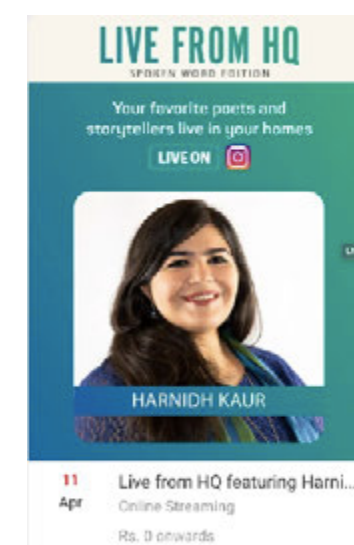
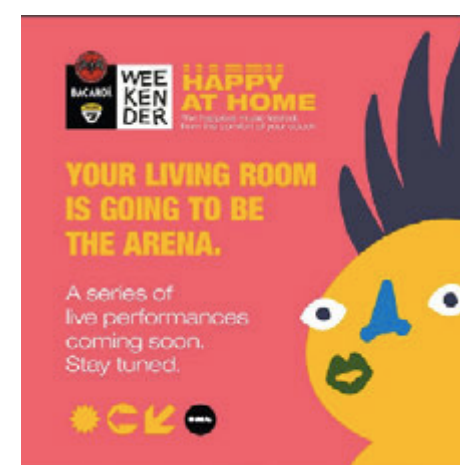
Home parties become a new revenue stream for clubs?

This brings business opportunities and recognition to artists who previously only played in their bedrooms?

Live music is the new premium of music streaming?

Useful links:

[BookMyShow](#); [Instagram](#)



EDGES



Bedroom Pop

The teenage bedroom is the new hotbed of creativity. From the DIY bedroom music genre, to pyjamas as millennial fashion, and decor-inspired new subcultures like "VSCO Girls." Both a TikTok portal to the world and a private space anxious youth are retreating to, staying in is officially the new going out. Self-care start-ups like "Girls' Night In" are capitalising on the "Homebody Economy."



Die-Versification

"Pivot or die" is less of a strategy and more of an ultimatum. Brands are eking out a new lease on life by diversifying their offerings into entirely new industry sectors. We coin it "Commercial Darwinism."

THE TRIGGER

Balcony Applause and Diyas

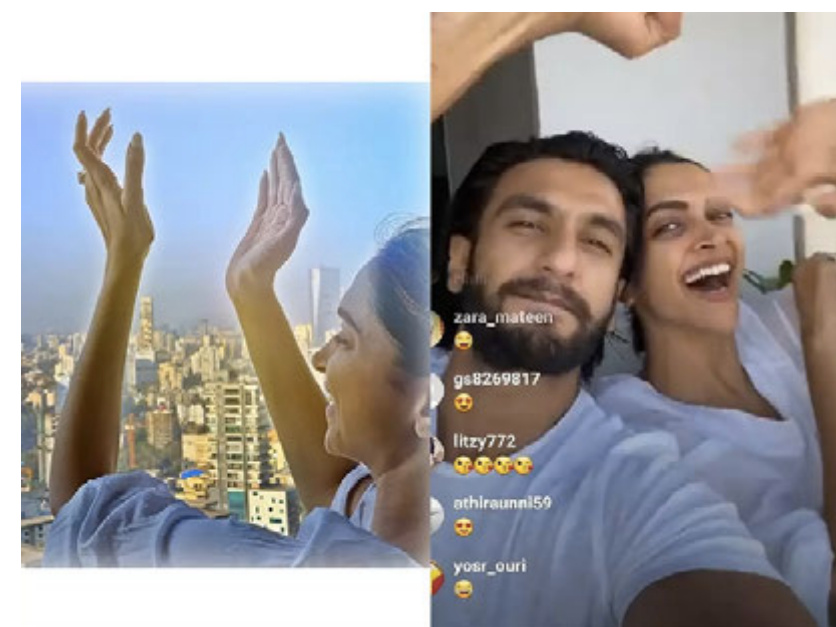
Thousands of people all over the country, collectively applauded by coming out on their balconies/ windows as a sign of gratitude towards those working tirelessly to keep the rest of the country safe and comfortable during the pandemic. The country also collectively lit candles/diyas in solidarity. While these initiatives united people, certain parts of the country also saw people getting carried away and breaking the norms of social distancing.

WHAT IF

This triggers a series of appreciation efforts beyond COVID-19, for the everyday 'unsung' heroes?

We create digital applause – for those who live in apartments without balconies?

Useful link: [DW](#)



EDGES



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Invisible Citizens

Previously ignored populations are coming out of the shadows to become stakeholders in their communities. Migrants, religious and ethnic minorities, senior citizens and ex-cons are growing populations that require new economies and opportunities to accommodate them.

THE TRIGGER

School's Out, Online Learning's In

Schools and other educational institutes are temporarily closed as a precautionary measure against the spread of the virus. Everyone from parents to teachers are trying to get accustom to this change by adopting newer techniques like online modes of teaching and learning. But India still has a large population who don't have the access to such technology.

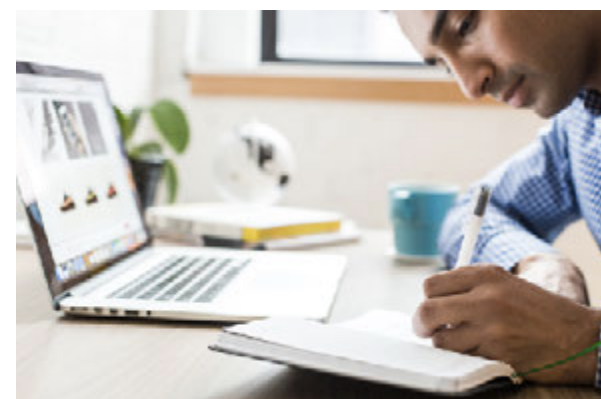
WHAT IF

This is the start of a new modern education system to match the times, that is more flexible with both, time and place?

This will give birth to initiatives that will bridge the digital divide in the country?

Shifting learning to online platforms has an unforeseen impact on children's interpersonal and social skills?

Useful links: [NDTV](#)



EDGES



DIY EDU

Who needs Harvard when you have an Internet connection? YouTube, MasterClass, Code.org and other web based educational tools are supplanting traditional study as a more accessible option for the self-taught students of tomorrow.



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THE TRIGGER

Is your Corona body Fat or Fit

Gyms have been added to the long list of events and activities suspended, forcing them to freeze memberships. But gyms are not quite shut down. All major gym brands in India are hosting live training sessions on their social handles. This is enabling people to work out without actually stepping out. Because of the lack of entertainment available and many free hours in their day, people may actually come out of their isolation fitter while others who choose to remain couch potatoes might end up gaining a few kilos.

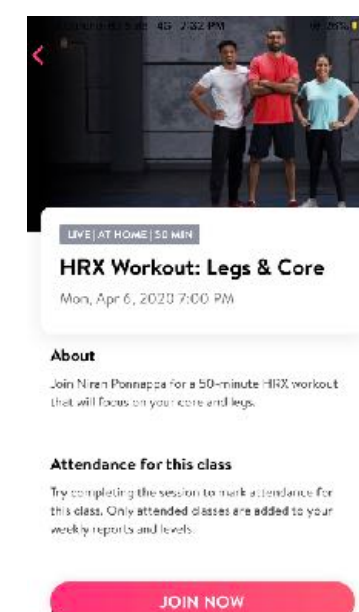
WHAT IF

Is this the end of brick and mortar gyms and personal trainer and coaching sessions as we know them?

What if we redefining "Gym time" in a wellness context, as a personal escape that you can practice from the comfort of your home or anywhere you want?

Useful links:

[Money Control](#); [Outlook India](#)



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THE TRIGGER

Shaving lives?

There has been much speculation on whether men should shave as part of the precautions necessary to avoid catching the virus. For now, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, beards can interfere with the correct use of masks and respirators. It has also recommended 12 styles that are appropriate for the face mask. On the flip side, women are trying newer hairstyles with tips and hacks pouring in from celebrities like Neena Gupta.

WHAT IF

As beards hide under protective masks, this international symbol of masculinity is reconsidered?

The facial hair grooming industry finds opportunities to virus-shield long beards or creates new clean-shaven offerings?

Useful link: [The Economic Times](#)



EDGES



New Masculinity

Beer, bros, and ballers are old masculine tropes. New Masculinity expands the sphere of male archetypes to previously taboo topics and raises the cultural question of what it means to be a man today.



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THE TRIGGER

Retro TV is Back

The TV viewership in India has hit an all time high during the Coronavirus lockdown. India's total TV consumption rose by 37% in the week starting 21st March. Ramayan & Mahabharat the shows that once put the country into a voluntary lockdown, broke TRP records after its re-telecast garnered 170 million views in 4 hours. Social media better watch its back, because TV is not here to play! That being said, advertisers should start reconsidering their plans on how to use this revived medium.

WHAT IF

Marketeers re-look at TV as the new 'unconventional' conventional channel of communication?

People put their health at risk as they turn into permanent couch potatoes?

The tables turn and social media channels start finding solutions to compete with TV?

Useful links:

[BloombergQuint](#); [BusinessStandard](#)



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IPL 2020

The country's most awaited premier league has been suspended until further notice due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The BCCI announced that they will only consider hosting the tournament if the situation around the pandemic improves. The IPL is one of the most anticipated tournament not only for the people but also for brands who pour most of their advertising budget into it.

WHAT IF

IPL 2020 turns from a physical-attendance to an AR- driven digital-attendance extravaganza?

Stadiums become a thing of the past, as live sports gets a new meaning on virtual platforms?

Useful link: [IndiaToday](#)



EDGES



Immersive Entertainment

New forms of interactive entertainment are emerging in the experience economy. ASMR advertising tingles our buying brain, virtual reality is being used to treat anxiety at hospitals, and augmented reality is going mainstream in phones and cars. The travel, art, entertainment, and food industries are investing in Immersive Entertainment to reimagine products and services —fulfilling people's craving for new multi- sensory experiences.

THE TRIGGER

Shopping malls now fit in screens

Digital Mall of Asia by Yokeasia Malls is set to go live in India this year. The virtual mall incorporates visual and sensory elements to offer an immersive, stimulating environment for different categories such as men, women, kids, electronics, home and kitchen, education, financial services, food court, digiplex and online nightclub. This has come at a time when both retailers and consumers are desperate to meet, as social distancing measures have led to a nationwide lockdown. From being open 24/7 to absolute shut down for over a month, retailers in Mumbai will be affected for at least the next two weeks.

WHAT IF

Virtual Mall's as a business model becomes the new norm for brick and mortar shopping destinations?

The "smallest" becomes the new "chest beating" token of pride instead of the "largest" and "biggest"?

Useful links: [The Asian Age](#)



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STAY HOME STAY SAFE

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