

# CREATING CERTAINTY

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How can brands create more certainty in an uncertain world?



Hall & Partners

**THERE'S A  
HEAD  
VOID IN  
THE  
SHOULD**






**RT-SHAPED  
OUR LIVES  
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BE RACING  
TO FILL**









Fifty years ago, the world convened around a pop song. Literally, the world. *All You Need Is Love*, up until 1967 The Beatles' most political statement, was written to commemorate the first ever global satellite link and the subsequent studio performance was watched by more than 400 million people in 25 countries.

It was the kind of feel-good moment that seems a rarity these days. Even the idealistic lyrics feel far removed from our more caustic times. Yet they're as true today as ever – all together now, "*All You Need Is Love...*"

We still need such positivity but, instead, those we look to for leadership feed us a diet of fear, doom, uncertainty, unpredictability and negativity. There's a heart-shaped void in our lives that brands should be racing to fill, showing us why

life is still good, fun is to be had and that love is all we really need.

Not just love. Societal upheaval and disconnection have heightened people's desire to discover a better future lying in wait, to seek escape and find amusement.

Those in high office or with elevated status seem less able to help us achieve those desires, less in tune with the liberating shift in values that have partly been inspired by technology, and less able to accurately predict or manage our futures.

Instead of inspiring us, our leaders are stifled with insecurity. However, there are strategies that brands can employ to help provide that optimism, promote reassurance and create a more certain future that better reflects our ambitions.



**1**

**REASSURANCE**

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Brands need to demonstrate consistency and reassurance. When chaos threatens to engulf and society tires of being sold the new 'new', people find stability in consistency.

Sometimes it feels as if each morning we'll wake to find another petty Presidential tweet seeking to destroy the reputation of a brand or an individual, or another Brexit initiative hitting a dead end. Amid all that confusion, brands can help people and communities find security by re-affirming their key values and exhibiting their customer-centric ethos.

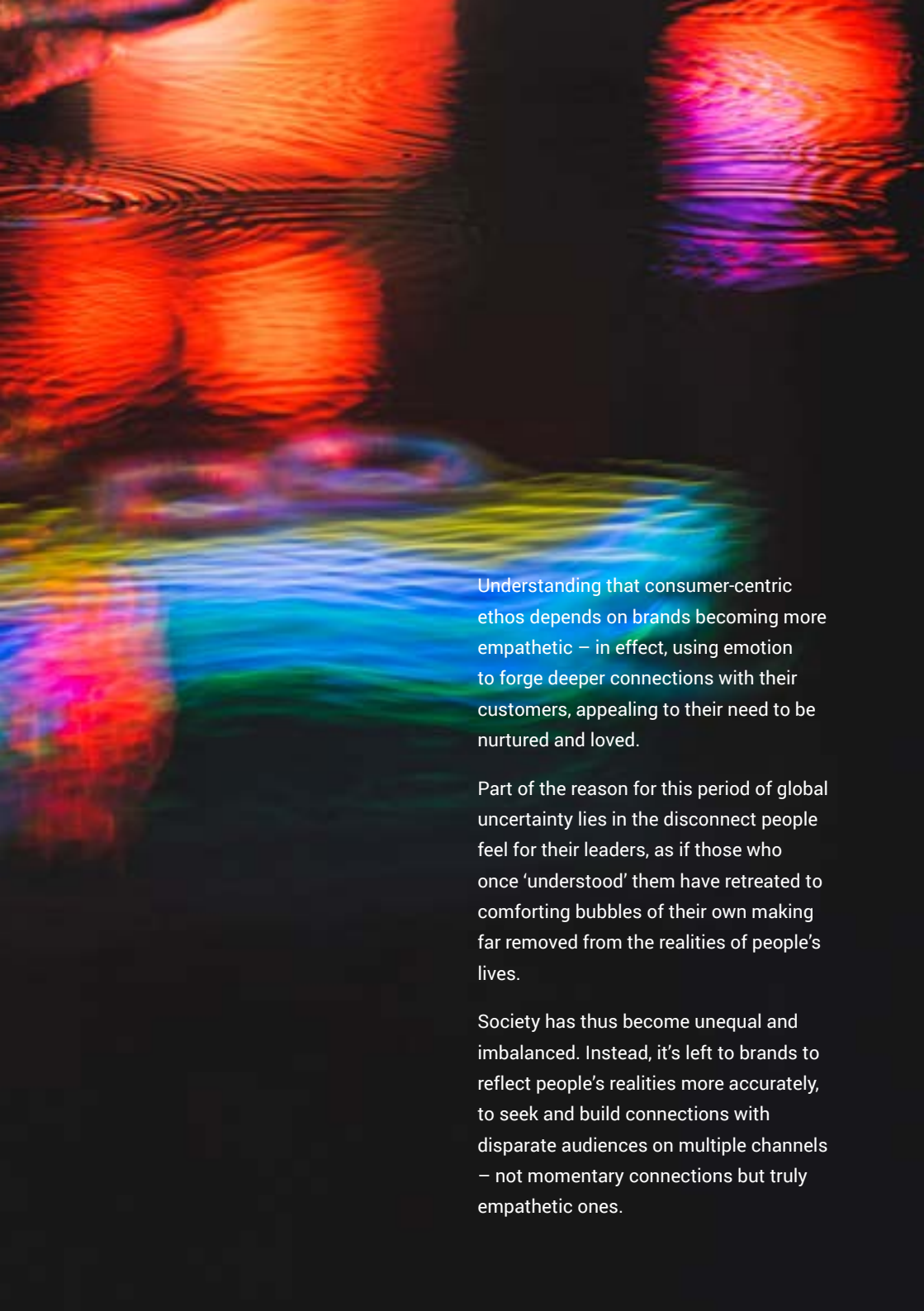
For instance, the most effective car ads of the moment are not those promising endless inventiveness or an adrenaline rush but those, like Volkswagen, that promise steady reassurance – calm, measured and safe. A protective friend.



2

**EMPATHY**





Understanding that consumer-centric ethos depends on brands becoming more empathetic – in effect, using emotion to forge deeper connections with their customers, appealing to their need to be nurtured and loved.

Part of the reason for this period of global uncertainty lies in the disconnect people feel for their leaders, as if those who once ‘understood’ them have retreated to comforting bubbles of their own making far removed from the realities of people’s lives.

Society has thus become unequal and imbalanced. Instead, it’s left to brands to reflect people’s realities more accurately, to seek and build connections with disparate audiences on multiple channels – not momentary connections but truly empathetic ones.

**CLARITY**

**3**

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Next there needs to be a confidence that comes from clarity. One of the reasons trust has plummeted in our institutions – politics and the media in particular – is because there is a lack of leadership and, with it, a clear sense of purpose.

Agendas chop and change with alarming regularity. One day a study says we're heading for business success, the next we're about to plummet off a cliff. Theresa May won't survive the weekend... then suddenly she's stronger than ever. One week Donald Trump won't complete his Presidency... the next he's favourite to run for a second term.

No matter how certain we might be about our values, we need guidance, someone or something to help us navigate through the chaos. There's a vacuum there that

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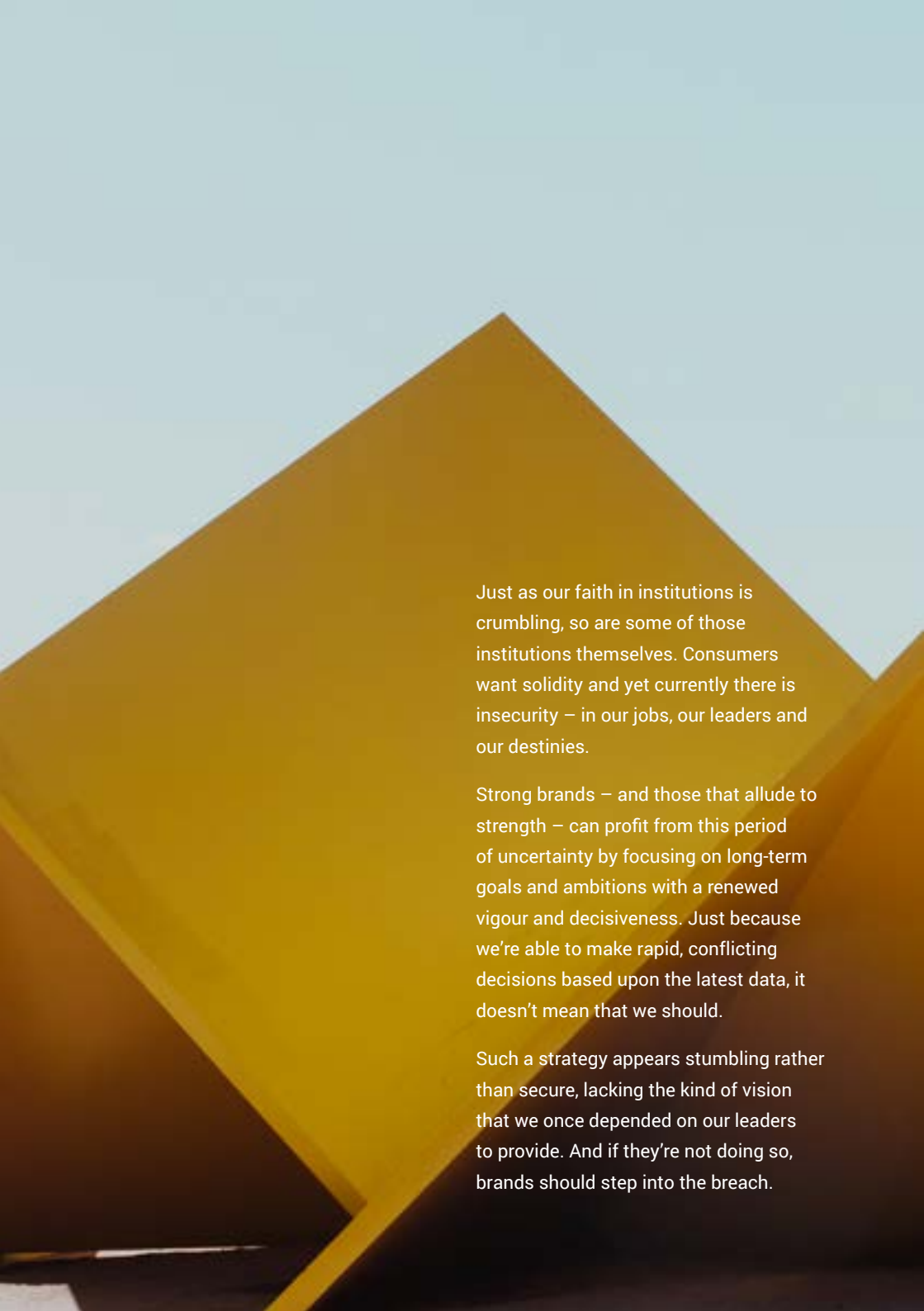
brands can fill, focusing on optimism where there is gloom, providing comfort where there are uncertainties, displaying simplicity of thought, deed and action to rise above the muddled messaging.

Banks have cottoned on to this approach in recent times, in particular Barclays which has returned to a simpler way of looking at our finances, and Lloyds which sees banking as a lifestyle rather than a pure transaction.

**4**

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**SECURITY**



Just as our faith in institutions is crumbling, so are some of those institutions themselves. Consumers want solidity and yet currently there is insecurity – in our jobs, our leaders and our destinies.

Strong brands – and those that allude to strength – can profit from this period of uncertainty by focusing on long-term goals and ambitions with a renewed vigour and decisiveness. Just because we're able to make rapid, conflicting decisions based upon the latest data, it doesn't mean that we should.

Such a strategy appears stumbling rather than secure, lacking the kind of vision that we once depended on our leaders to provide. And if they're not doing so, brands should step into the breach.

**POSITIVITY**

**5**

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A brand also needs to be able to channel the inner values of positivity that most people share. A need to feel liberated and enlightened, the joy of excitement and achievement, a playfulness that provides a momentary escape from the worries of now, the hopefulness of being rewarded rather than penalised, a glass half-full pride in what one believes, does and represents rather than one emptied of inspiration.

It's not simply about single ads or campaigns that stress these values. It's about conveying how these values form the bedrock of a brand and help it steer a course through times of turbulence, when doubt and doom seem to be the pervading emotions.

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**ACTION**



Finally, it's not sufficient for brands to say these things, they need to demonstrate them too in a tangible and authentic way. It's why, broadly, people's faith in their leaders has been dented in such a polarising manner – leaders say one thing and do another, or make promises without ever coming close to delivering them.

The best brands take decisive action aligned with their brand values, so reinforcing their messaging and attempting to unify audiences. Neither overtly political nor risk-averse but looking, hopefully, for admiration.

For instance, Airbnb recently followed up its #weaccept brand promise in the US by pledging to set aside housing for more than 100,000 refugees, disaster survivors

and other displaced people around the world who will need short-term accommodation in the next five years. It wasn't just a promise but an action that was built upon its core values, adding to its brand equity and demonstrating relevant vision in a period of vacillating inaction.

Brand action can be a company's great differentiator and emotional driver in times of uncertainty – they can no longer stand aside from the cultural conversations so many of their customers are having, in the same way that political leaders do. It might take time to reach that voice – and it's important not to be tempted by opportunism – but when it's found it can be enormously powerful.

Brands must try to find ways of nurturing and rewarding an empowered if confused consumer, in desperate need of such sustenance. Not by the instantaneous fickleness of a tweet or 'like', or a bot-inspired ad that promises personalisation but too often misses the mark.

We already associate such short-termism with our political leaders. Instead, brands need to commit to something more profound and intuitive by truly knowing the real-world experiences of their audiences.

People want to be acknowledged and not guessed. Valued rather than taken for granted. Led and supported with vision and clarity rather than indecision and vagueness. And above all they want to feel loved, express love and see love. To see the light in the darkness.

The world is infinitely better than the one that stares back at us from the news headlines. That's the world we want to experience and which brands need to celebrate.

**CL  
NEED TO  
THIS  
RATHER**



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**EARLY BRANDS  
EMBRACE  
SOCIETAL CHAOS  
THAN FIGHT OR  
IGNORE IT**

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