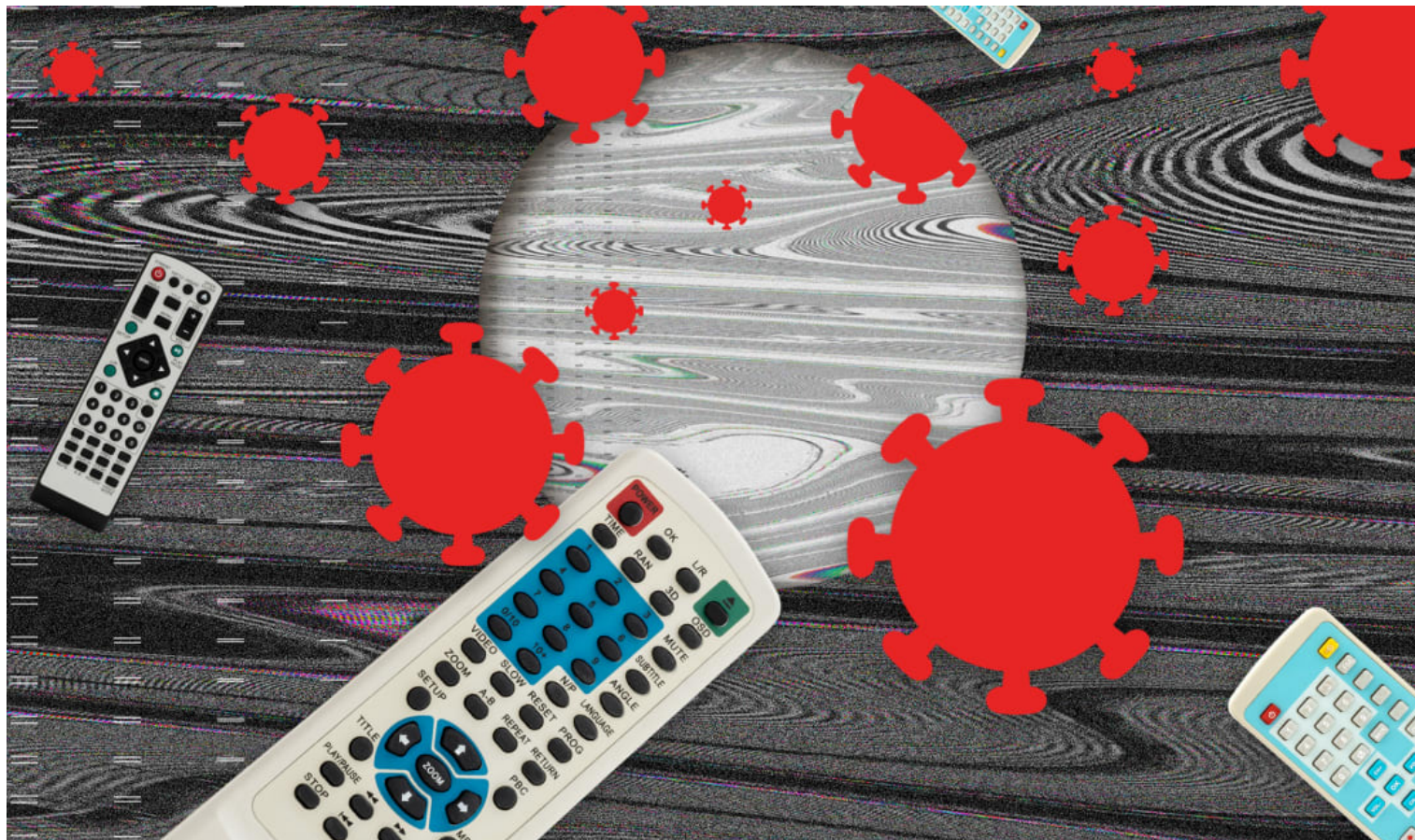




12-23-20 | 6:00 AM

How Burger King, Nike, and Patagonia made great advertising for an awful year

These are the 10 best ads of 2020.



[Photo: rawpixel ([remote 1](#)) ([remote 2](#)) ([remote 3](#)) ([glitch](#))]





This is a tough mission in the best of times, but 2020 has been a year when a pandemic, a cultural reckoning with systemic racism, and an American presidential election have made our already thin patience with advertising and other brand shenanigans even slimmer. But brands are still a part of our culture, and the best are able to use that status to contribute something meaningful to either the culture, our lives, or both. Or at least make us laugh and temporarily forget the hell of 2020, even if just for 30 seconds at a time.

Here are 10 ads or brand moves that managed to acknowledge and navigate the difficulties of this year, and still make something worthy of your attention.

OCEAN SPRAY/TIKTOK/NATHAN APODACA “GOOD VIBES”



This is a two-brand job that came out of a completely organic viral moment. Now, it's not rocket science for any marketer to see its products used in something exploding into the zeitgeist and saying, “Let's get involved!” But it's a whole other ballgame to actually pull it off without looking like a thirsty (sorry) eyeball chaser. After Nathan Apodaca went viral for riding his skateboard, drinking Ocean Spray, and lip-syncing Fleetwood Mac on TikTok, both Ocean Spray and TikTok managed to **tap into the moment without totally ruining it**, and in fact, made it even more heartwarming and earnest. Something we all needed a lot more of this year.

STEAK-UMMM “MISINFORMATION”



Steak-ummm ✓
@steak_umm



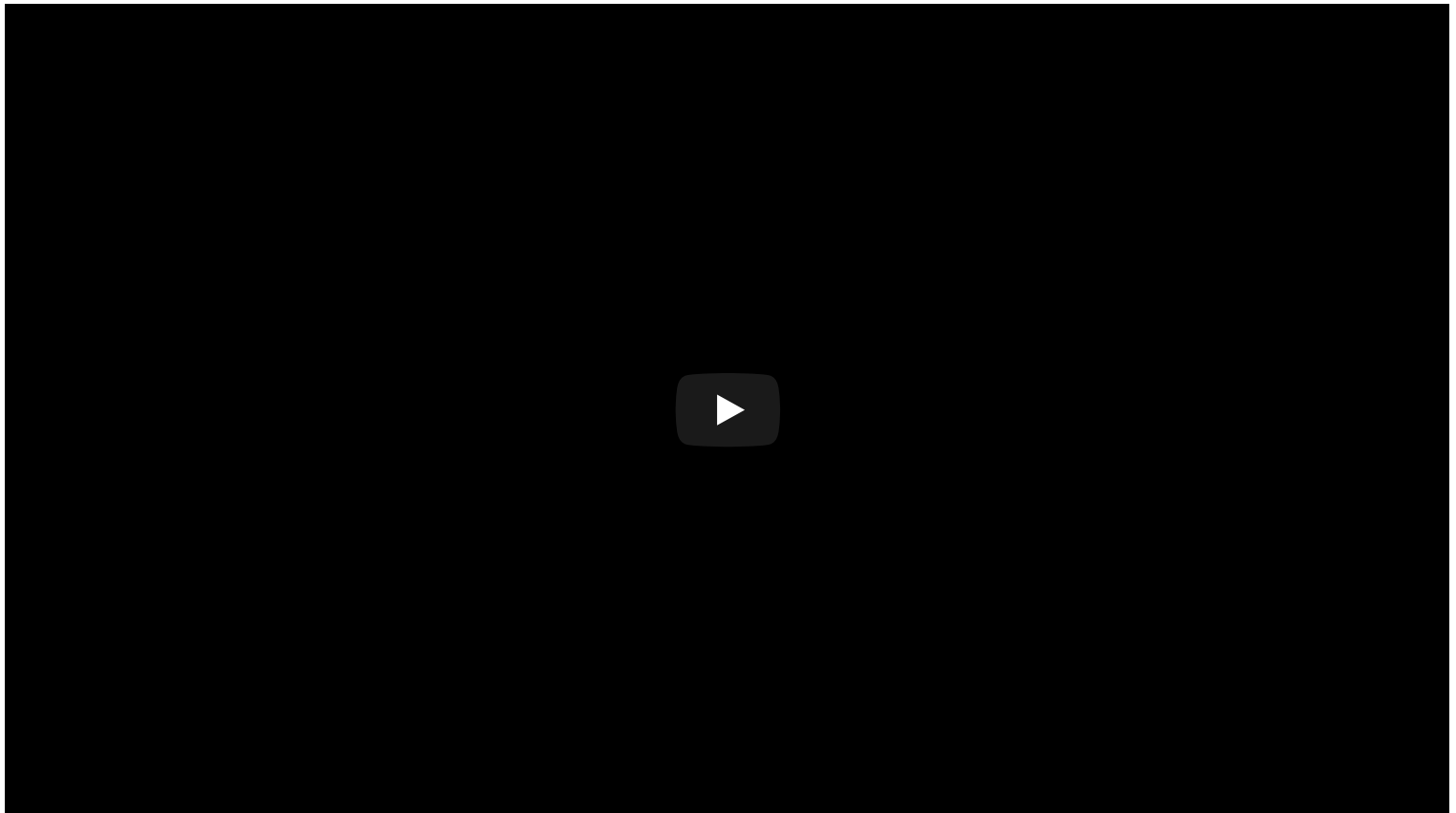
friendly reminder in times of uncertainty and misinformation: anecdotes are not data. (good) data is carefully measured and collected information based on a range of subject-dependent factors, including, but not limited to, controlled variables, analysis, and randomization

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At a time early on in the pandemic when brands were trying to figure out how to initially deal with it all, an unlikely source of reason emerged. The absurdity of a frozen meat Twitter account offering real, concrete advice on media consumption was a breath of fresh air. It's not an ad in the traditional sense, but social voice is certainly a valuable part of any brand's advertising overall. Nathan Allebach, of the agency Allebach Communications, has been the human behind Steak-Umm's social media since 2015, and [told Fast Company in April](#), "It's a weird situation for brands to be in right now, to not be overtly advertising their products, while also trying to add PSAs, but not wanting to be bland about it. It's just been a process of seeing where the country and the world is at and trying to see if we can interject some thoughtful commentary into the mix."

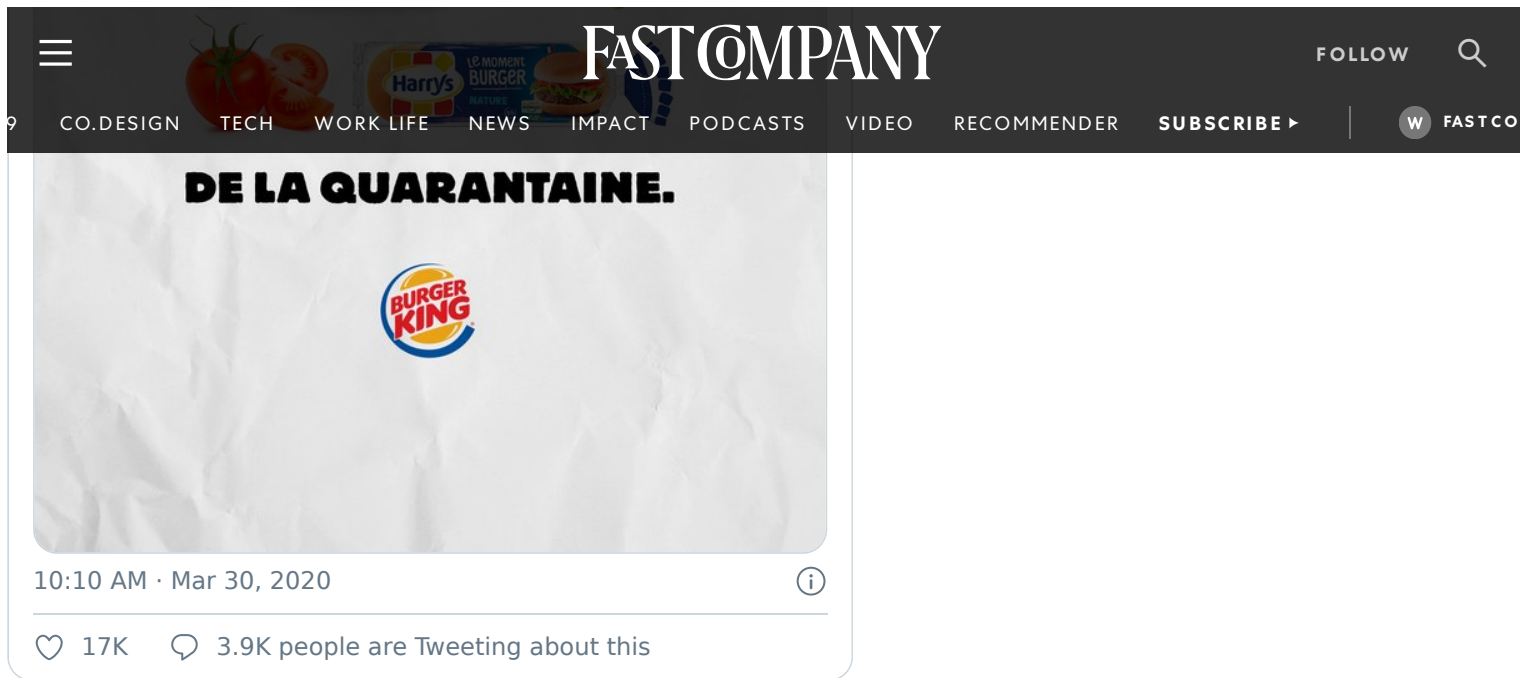
NIKE "YOU CAN'T STOP US"



Nike was one of the first brands to recognize the new reality of COVID-19, when it posted an ad [asking people to stay home](#) and "Play for the World" by social distancing and isolating to minimize the spread of the virus. It followed up that initial spot in May with [a LeBron-narrated ad](#) that focused on the comeback spirit of sports, in an effort to fight any sense of pandemic fatigue and cynicism after months of no live sports. This one combined the spirit of those previous ads into an epic montage of 53 athletes across 24 sports.

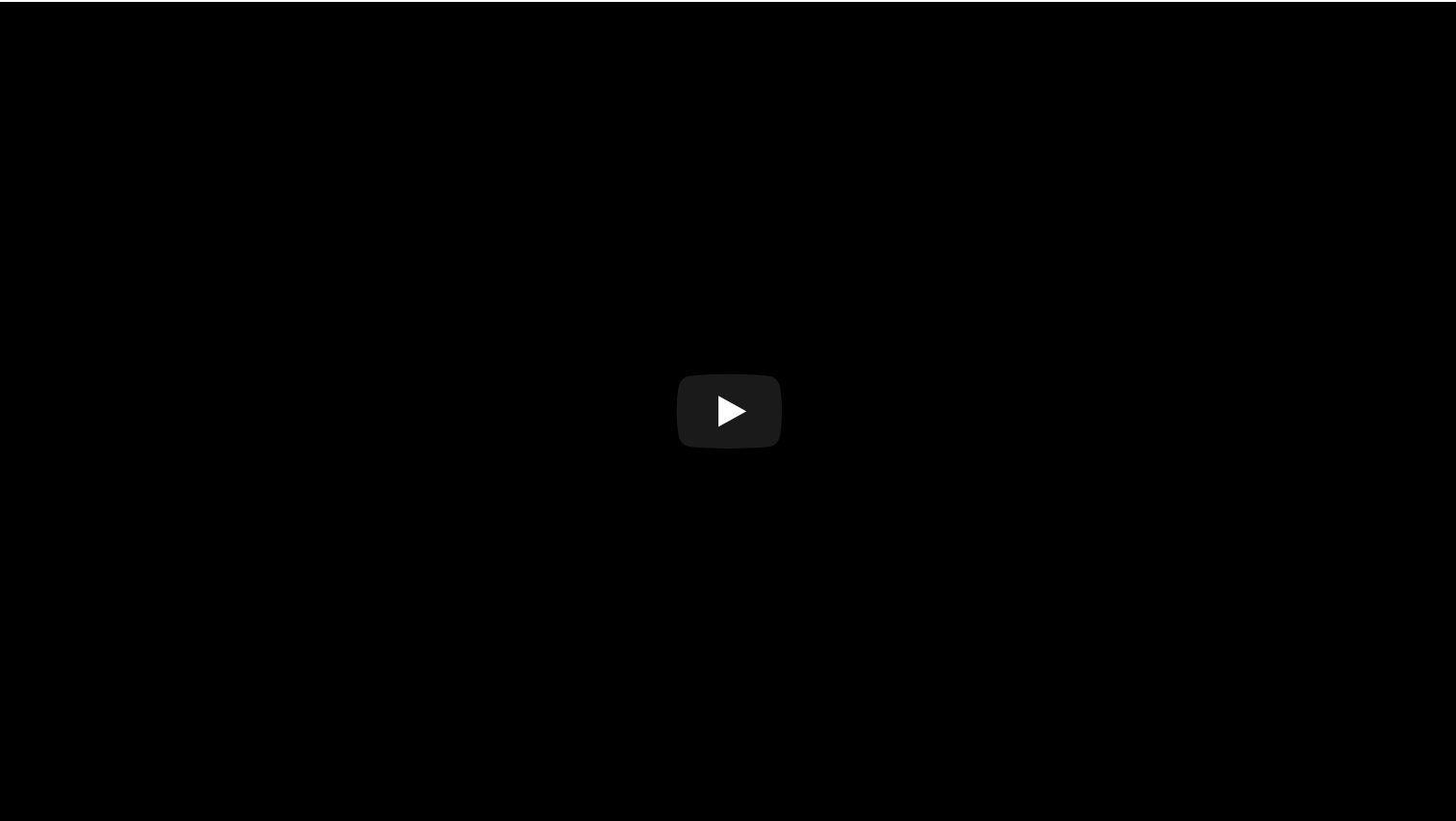
BURGER KING FRANCE "HOMEMADE WHOPPER"



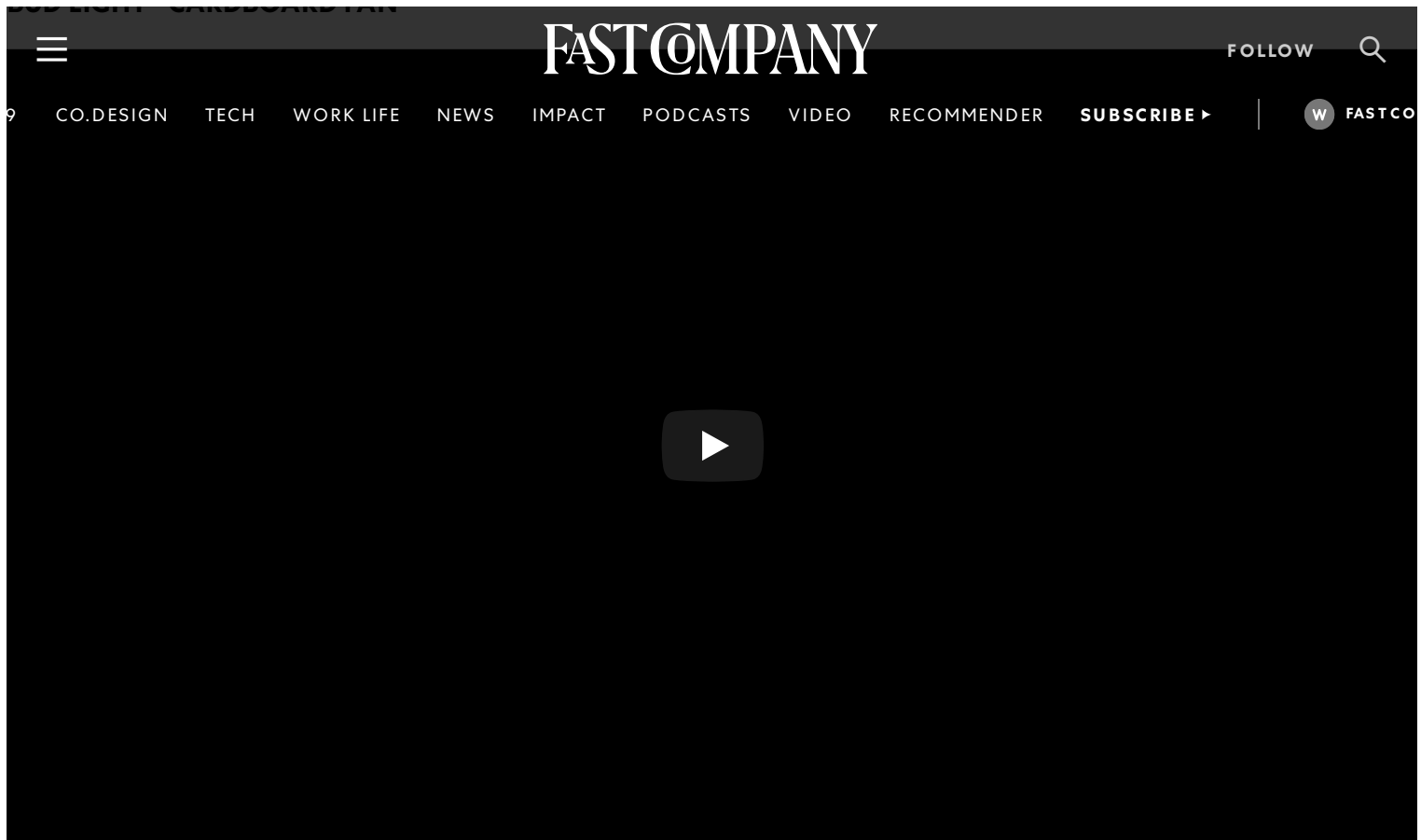


On March 17, France President Emmanuel Macron put the country under a two-week lockdown, with only grocery stores, gas stations, pharmacies, and medical facilities remaining open, which meant a lot fewer people would be going out to eat, even just for fast food. So Burger King improvised and created a stylish recipe poster for the Whopper, lining up grocery store products in order of appearance on the brand’s signature menu item, and giving fans both a welcome distraction and a tasty homemade burger.

KFC UK “KFC IS BACK!”

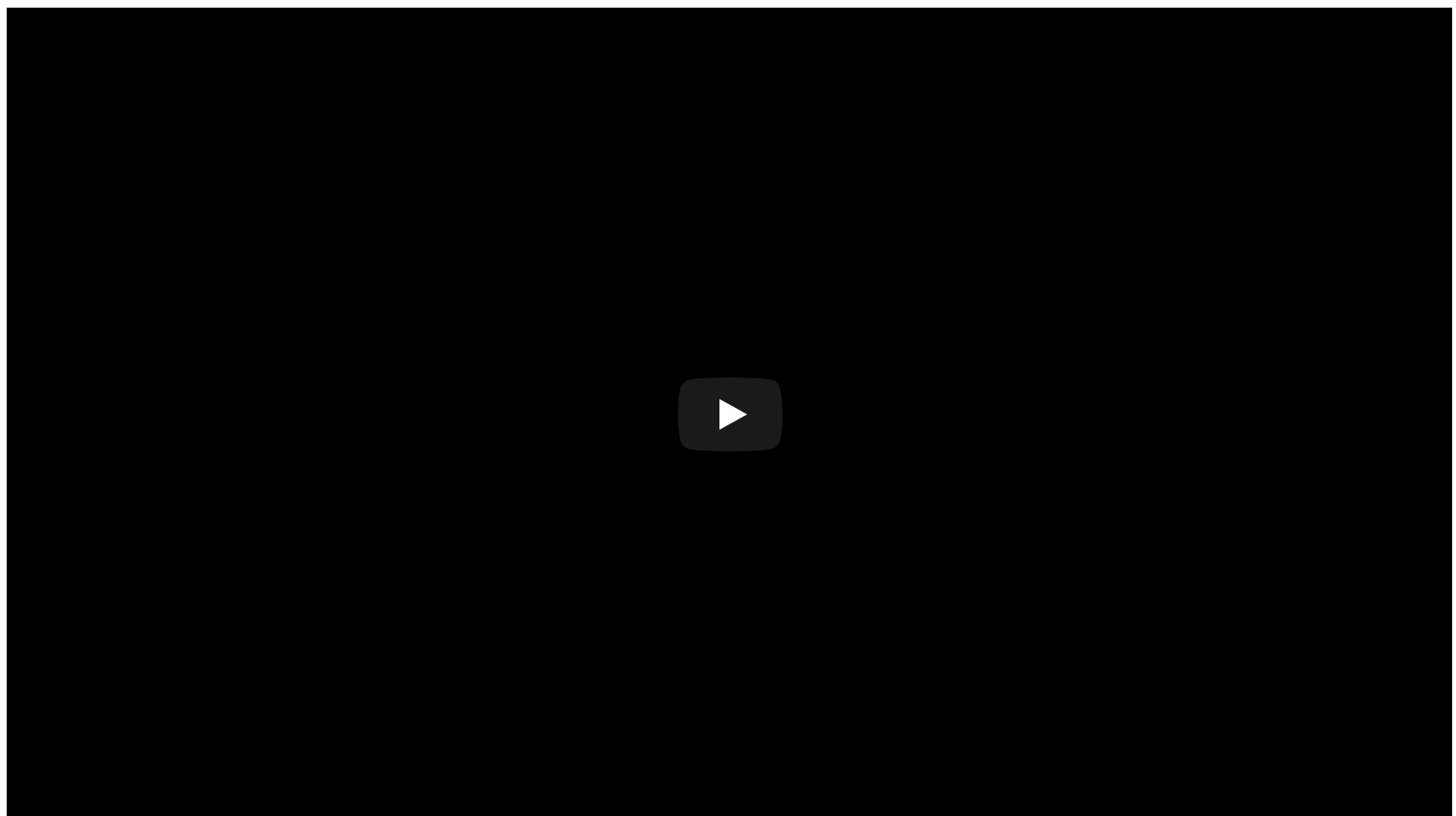


Like Burger King, KFC knew some of its fans were missing its fried chicken and trying to make it at home, to varying degrees of success. So when restrictions eased enough to allow its restaurants to open more widely, the brand’s ad agency Mother London decided the best way to tell people was by celebrating some of these homemade efforts. It was a great way to both celebrate fans’ passion for its products, and get them back in the door.



Funny, engaging, stylish: It's just your classic beer commercial vibe that also happens to creatively acknowledge the super weird reality of sports with no fans.

BEATS BY DRE "YOU LOVE ME"



It's not pandering, it's just a beer commercial, but Beats by Dre's stunning spot does directly, stylishly, and unabashedly address the issue of racism—systemic and otherwise—by tying it to pop culture overall. Since George Floyd was killed by police

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PATAGONIA “VOTE THE ASSHOLES OUT”

Michael Li 李之樸

@mcpli

Patagonia tags have a new message.

5:46 PM · Sep 10, 2020

13.1K

2.3K people are Tweeting about this

Patagonia has long found creative ways to get its message and activism out that don't involve buying traditional ads, from calling the **president a liar**, to donating the **\$10 million** the company netted as a result of Trump's corporate tax cut to environmental causes. But this label on Patagonia's stand-up shorts went viral in September because, in **typical Yvon Chouinard style**, it made its point creatively blunt. And the shorts? **They sold out.**

CADBURY “THIS DOESN'T NEED TO END”

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Here Cadbury took all the silver linings of this past year—phone calls between family and friends, and checking in on neighbors—and poignantly created a spot encouraging these little moments to continue long after the pandemic is over. On the surface it contains the ingredients seen in many of the cliché pandemic ads, like a soft piano score over empty streets, but manages to find a way to feel more hopeful than hokey.

MATCH “MATCH MADE IN HELL”



Back in July, Match Group, which owns Match.com, Tinder, OKCupid, Hinge, and other dating and relationship brands, added Ryan Reynolds to its board of directors. The actor and business owner has been busy this year tailoring his particular style of meta-advertising to a pandemic for [Aviation Gin](#) and [Mint Mobile](#). But this month, his marketing company Maximum Effort launched this new ad presenting a compelling theory of why 2020 has been such an unhinged raging clusterf**k. This year couldn't have asked for a better advertising send-off.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Beer is a staff editor at Fast Company, covering advertising, marketing, and brand creativity. He lives in Toronto. [More](#)

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