

Gaining a fullmetal heart

 By [Suhana Gordhan](#)

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In my adult life, I have never felt closer to the world than I did in 2020. It was utter chaos. But I believe that 7.8 billion of us finally had something in common - a submicroscopic infectious agent allowed us to share the collective experience of shock, disbelief, fear, ignorance, pain, hope and sheer humanity. And we continue to do so.

The creator of manga series, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, Hiromu Arakawa, said, "It's a cruel and random world, but the chaos is all so beautiful."



Suhana Gordhan executive creative director of the DUKE Group

It's strange to write about advertising trends for 2021 when we've just emerged from a year of chaos. But chaos is perhaps, the only thing we can choose to come to terms with – potentially the one thing that our industry needs more than ever.

For years, creatives have been lamenting the fact that the work we do in advertising is slowly having the life sucked out of it by the order of tiny tick-boxes, big data, global mandates, the all-knowing focus group, heat maps and oh – the holy grail called the “key visual”.

Advertising has become formulaic, safe and boring. Yet, what we've always known about creativity is that it's at its brightest when it is born out of tension. All the greatest stories come from that place far beyond the guard rails and the safety blanket of predictability.

Martin Weigel of W+K Amsterdam and Rob Campbell from R/GA London – joint founders of the School of Strategic Arts – explain that “chaos is the critical element to enable creativity to go to interesting places.” They believe that in a world of parity, we spend too much time honouring best practice and that all best practice does is lead to sameness. Weigel and Campbell say that “in a quest to succeed there has to be a gap for possibility and one of the ingredients to make for possibility is chaos.”

Maybe the trends for 2021 are not trends but rather, tiny prayers to the gods of advertising:

May we forget what we know

The media landscape, they say, is always changing. And here we are again. We're in our homes and sometimes we're outside but then we're in our homes again. Media should be more personal but still never invasive. Everyone's lockdown looks a little different and everyone's mental state is part firm, part fragile. The 8-year-old is online and so is the 80-year-old. We're loving local hard and Netflixing to survive not just to chill. These must make for new storytelling opportunities and new media moments.

May we walk alongside fear

It's scary to launch a new product in these times. It's hard to make brand plans and map out budgets. It's tricky to produce communication in the real world, when we're all skirting around an ear bud up a nose that says 'Positive'. So maybe we don't plan too hard. Maybe we go in small increments, in small numbers. Maybe we're radical instead of cautious. Maybe we produce in 'shoot from the hip' style. Maybe we find fascination in fear and see what innovation it births.

May we learn to trust

Ludicrous – when you can't even trust the air you breathe. But when we're all just trying to keep going and stay alive, surely we can trust each other to do what we do best? Lean on creatives for our well-tuned guts and instincts. Trust us to find an alternative, a strange solution – a possibility in a haystack because that's what we're good at.

May we seek out truth

No one's pure truth lies in an LSM breakdown or in a PowerPoint study of consumer behaviour. Truth lies in contradictions, lived experiences, anomalies, people who beat the odds, surprising things a Muslim and a Jew have in common, awkward conversations, heated dinner-table debates and deep in a comments trail on Insta. These are where our stories are born. And if we're too scared or too lazy to seek out the truth, then our stories will never reach the hearts of the people we serve as advertisers.

May we tell the best damn stories of our lives

Because we've all felt more feelings than we've ever felt. Because we're all learning to live with pain. Because we're finding joy in random things like “You're on mute” jokes and a 70-year-old learning guitar through YouTube. Because we have no idea what's coming. Because we're still here. And that matters.

Covid stole people we loved from us, mid story. We are now all affected even if not infected. This is the pain we *all* live with. Hiromu Arakawa says, “A lesson without pain is meaningless. For you cannot gain anything without sacrificing something else in return, but once you have overcome it and made it your own...you will gain an irreplaceable fullmetal heart.”

I hope that in 2021 and beyond, we will all find footing in our new paradoxes. I hope that will be better humans and better advertisers. May we never doubt creativity again, or the idea that Anchor's Yeast is a precious commodity. May we will finally see that it's our duty as advertisers to be creative, and that we can leave science to the scientists who are saving lives. And I really, really hope that we can gather up enough material to build fullmetal hearts that carry our bravest stories.

ABOUT SUHANA GORDHAN

Suhana Gordhan is the Executive Creative Director of the DUKE Group and has over 15 years' experience in the advertising industry.

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