

## THEME 02

# Crisis practices

CONSUMER  
PRACTICESTECHNOLOGICAL  
INNOVATIONCORONA  
CRISIS

As a consequence of the corona crisis, we're developing all kinds of new practices to replace our old ways, which, for the time being at least, are no longer viable. These are often practices that were already popular in certain circles, but are only now becoming mainstream. The question is whether these new practices, which often take place in the digital realm, will last or be quickly discarded once the crisis is over. This will largely depend on whether we'll think of them as inferior substitutes or come to see their value.

## Our observations

- A number of online services have seen their number of users skyrocket as a consequence of the corona crisis. It's highly likely that services such as Zoom, for teleconferencing, and Houseparty, for catching up with loved ones or throwing a small party, will go down in history as the apps of the corona crisis.
- Social media platform [TikTok](#) was already extremely popular among young people and, thanks to the corona crisis, has gained even more users and become the platform for making and sharing quarantine videos. Use of educational app [Squola](#) increased so quickly after schools closed that its servers were unable to accommodate all the extra traffic.
- The use of e-commerce has also, understandably, increased considerably as a substitute for closed physical stores. [Meal](#) and [meal kit](#) delivery have taken flight, replacing eating out, and are framed as a way of supporting local restaurants and food producers.
- Musicians and other artists that cannot give live concerts now are going online en masse. An intriguing example of this is YouTube star and live musician [Marc Rebillet](#), who replaced his four cancelled concerts in Australia with live shows on YouTube, reaching a far greater audience (more than a hundred thousand viewers) than he would have with his live concerts. Similarly, various yoga courses, boot camps, church services and even the AA's addiction treatment are now provided online.
- We've written before about young people's online practices and the ways they find [meaningful experiences](#) in environments such as Fortnite and Roblox. Gen Z is often seen as the first generation of "digital natives", people who never experienced the pre-digital age. Nevertheless, there are [older generations](#) that have worked with digital technology nearly their entire lives, even if they use it less and, especially, differently.
- Not all practices that are gaining popularity are digital. As a consequence of gyms closing, hordes of people have taken to [exercising](#) inside as well as outside (often supported by an app), to kill time, people are [baking](#) again, and we might see large numbers of people going camping this summer if we still can't go on holiday abroad by then.



## Connecting the dots

Because of the corona crisis and the limited lockdown we're in, we're eager to find new means and ways to continue with our daily lives as best we can. This is giving rise to new practices. It started with the elbow tap instead of a handshake and by now, we're all having video conferences, being homeschooled and having house parties with Houseparty. Many of the apps that have now been discovered by large groups of users, already existed before and were of value in specific niche markets. Apps such as Zoom, Houseparty and Sgula were not developed in response to the crisis but were already seeing their userbase grow, and now that growth is accelerating strongly. It remains to be seen whether these new practices, many of them supported by digital technology, will remain, or whether we'll simply revert back to our old habits as soon as the necessity of these practices is gone.

Some of these crisis practices are indeed perceived as necessary but inferior substitutes, and these will be abandoned as soon as possible. In this light, Houseparty might just turn out to be the tulip bulb or chicory coffee of the corona crisis. However, there will also be practices that we clearly see as adding value and these will stay on. That added value could be, for example, the time we save with videoconferencing, or the far-reaching personalization made possible by [tele-education](#). Furthermore, a lot of people are [grocery-shopping](#) much more efficiently now, because they see the supermarket as a hostile environment that is to be avoided as much as possible, certainly not as a place to linger. And this might just be the stepping stone for a lot of consumers to start shopping for groceries online more often. After all, their new shopping rhythm, including planning ahead one or several weeks, is already similar to the rhythm of ordering groceries online.

Things become more interesting when we consider genuinely new practices that arise from the possibilities, such as time and

technology, offered by the crisis, rather than those that emerge as frenetic surrogates. In this respect, we might follow the lead of young people who have been having (meaningful) experiences in the virtual world for much longer. To many, environments such as Roblox, Fortnite and TikTok are a viable alternative to the playground, the schoolyard and maybe even the club. Notably, these environments are not half-baked attempts at mimicking real life (like Zoom or Houseparty) but offer an entirely singular experience. The question is whether older generations will also develop and embrace these kinds of practices. Ironically, these older generations, specifically older millennials and Gen X members, who grew up with gaming and other (primitive) forms of digital technology, are much more inclined to distinguish between real (physical) and valuable experiences on the one hand, and virtual, thus less meaningful (or even childish) experiences on the other. The corona crisis could lead these generations to also discover value in virtual environments, such as a metaverse, where part of your life is meant to take place, as was the aim of [Second Life](#), and was intriguingly portrayed in the recent film [ReadyPlayerOne](#). New consumer practices arise from a combination of technological possibilities, changing societal norms and individual desires and abilities. A crisis, such as in times of war, functions as a pressure cooker in which developments accelerate while societal norms and personal needs become flightier. Whether this crisis will actually result in new technology will probably depend on how long it lasts, but the aforementioned examples do show that all kinds of norms are, at least temporarily, shifting. It will therefore be interesting to see to what extent existing technology will find new uses due to these changing norms. After all, the technology for virtual reality and video calling has long been available, but adoption was partly hampered by cultural barriers, which are now rapidly being broken.

## Implications

- **A number of new applications and platforms will take flight on a large scale, and this doesn't just include the obvious, apparently most appropriate substitutes for old practices. They could also be games that offer a rich, social experience to older users, or e-commerce platforms that specifically target, for example, elderly users.**
- **In this crisis, our house is where most new practices are developed and, as we noted before, the home will have a multitude of new functions. These will largely (have to) be supported by network technology, smart appliances (e.g. smart sporting equipment) and data-driven platforms. The home itself will also increasingly change shape and come to include, for example, separate, or flexible rooms (e.g. an office also functioning as VR room).**
- **Business models that were previously thought impervious to digital technology, such as yoga studios and conference centers, are now under pressure, as people are realizing that the digital alternative can be (almost) as effective and valuable. It's highly likely that a winner-takes-all dynamic will manifest itself here as well: one good yoga teacher will render all the other ones redundant.**