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A Newsletter from

ARTICLE GROUP

# Human Conditions

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and so-bad-it's-good side of creativity

## We famously love a mess.

In the curious spectacle that is modern television (and we use that phrase broadly, because who really watches live TV anymore?), it's possible to throw oneself into tears, enlightenment, joy, suspense, and belonging all within moments of one another, all with a single click. And sometimes, it's possible to find oneself ensnared in a piece of content so devoid of merit altogether that it elicits visceral outrage. Paradoxically, this very outrage compels people to consume it further.

The term hate-watching is often used to describe a shortlist of questionable content: Emily in Paris; Smash; Sharknado; the RHO franchise, depending on who you are as a person. There's also the social media hate-follow, which elicits its own perverse satisfaction. And if you can hate together with a big group of other haters, it's nothing short of cathartic.

When we asked AG-ers if they participate in this phenomenon, answers ranged from "Duh," to "Only with Hallmark Christmas movies," to "No, definitely not, but now that I think about it, I read a newsletter every month that someone I went to college writes and it's so bad I subscribe just to cringe." Bingo.

During the solitude of the first month of the pandemic lockdown, many of us (64 million worldwide, to be exact) found bizarre companionship with Joe Exotic, and then again with Joe Exotic memes. Tiger King brought both necessary escape and an opportunity to rag on a phenomenon across political, religious, cultural, and demographic lines. At a time when humanity needed it most, we could all collectively agree to despise something about a big cat zoo in Oklahoma.

Physiologically, hating makes us feel good. And when we feel strong emotions, hating included, we emit neurotransmitters. In the absence of any actual threat (unless you feel threatened by Emily Cooper's clashing patterns, especially in Season 2, for which you would be justified), these neurotransmitters are typically dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin — a.k .a. happy feelings. It's weirdly uplifting, hating.

So. If part of our job as marketers is to tap into what rallies us around a specific idea or emotion, is there something to be learned here? Can the power of the collective hate-watch or hate-follow be harnessed in a way that doesn't harm society or tank a brand's reputation?

For Valentine's Day this year, the Nebraska Humane Society offered to write an ex's name on their poop bags for a small donation. The Bronx Zoo has a wildly successful annual campaign to name a cockroach after someone who deserves it. Both initiatives capture the very real experience of spite, uniting us—on a day meant for gushing—with the acknowledgment that some people are just terrible (or terrible for us, at least). That's a start.

There was Burger King's "Whopper Detour" campaign, where customers could buy a Whopper for 1 cent if they placed their in-order app while inside or near a McDonald's, that famously drove 1 million BK app downloads in just a few days. It not only capitalized on the rivalry between the two fast-food giants but rallied customers in a shared, cheeky disdain for the other. In-group camaraderie can stem from both brand love and (perhaps more powerfully) brand hate.

The marriage of contempt and fascination is one that marketers could stand to think about more. It's this dichotomy that creates a semblance of "authenticity" we're constantly being told audiences need. In an age where brands are tripping over themselves to be the most sustainable, the most trustworthy, the most insert positive adjective here, it's easy for consumers to become numb to a constant barrage of moral superiority. Imagine a 7-figure pharmaceutical campaign that openly acknowledged the absurdity of its premise. Or a series of car commercials that actually leaned into the cringe that is a series of car commercials.

It's hard to write about this type of consumption without acknowledging the two types of haters: those who are in on the collective fun because it's fun, and those who are actually hateful. Much of how we consume media today opens the door to a sewer of harassment and misinformation, which we're not suggesting we add to with some flip marketing. There are people who view the world as inherently repulsive, and we'd like not to give them any more air.

At the time of writing, Love is Blind Season 6 is in full swing, as is their Cupcake wine collab, their gold-plated Netflix shop, and the watch parties packing bars during off hours. A show where people try and find a soulmate without ever laying eyes on them — only to discover upon first sight that their beloved looks exactly like the kind of person who would willingly lock themselves in a pod on television — isn't here for love. It's here for money. And yet, we watch. We binge. We hate, and we love every minute of it. In fact, we wouldn't miss it for the world.

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**Not subscribed to this newsletter? Lame.**

Let's **fix that**.