The Influence Codes

PART ONE:

The New Rules of Influence

The Influence Codes

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Introduction

Much like charisma or talent, Influence is one of those things that we seem to recognise the very moment when we see it. It's very much like the 'X-factor' that judges on the TV are searching for, when they hope to discover the talented soul who is destined to become the next big thing.

As a result, Influence is a concept that we seem to grasp very easily. So much so, that the marketing world talks about it freely and easily. After all, isn't that the role of marketing? To influence people towards choosing our products, services or brands?

Given how pervasive influence is in the discourse of marketing, you could be forgiven for thinking that it is a topic that is not only well-understood, but is also applied with clinical precision. However, you couldn't be further from the truth. Sadly, it seems that our industry's lack of knowledge on the subject of influence happens to correspond with a time where marketing efforts have waned significantly in their effectiveness.

Despite an ocean of academic research that has taken place since the 1950's, little work has been done to understand, decode and develop a rigorous framework for the application of influence in the modern context. That's where we come in.

We have commissioned and undertaken a significant program of work to explore this topic.

This is the first of five reports to be released throughout the next 12 months. We'll unpack the 'New Rules of Influence' here, and in coming months will explore what these mean for a range of important categories.

The insights you'll read about here come from a study that ran over many months, with more than 30 in-depth interviews, engagements with over 10,000 Australians, and through analysis of more than 2,000,000 individual data points...the insights have both statistical and impactfulness significance.

Influence is a big topic. Not merely in significance, but also in the many dimensions and facets that have now come to light in how it exists and can be applied in this modern context. It is our hope that this first publication in this influence series can be of great use to the marketing world (and the broader communications industries) to develop better and more effective strategies to influence the outcomes we wish to create.

Influence is a powerful tool, so please...use it responsibly.

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Why focus on influence?
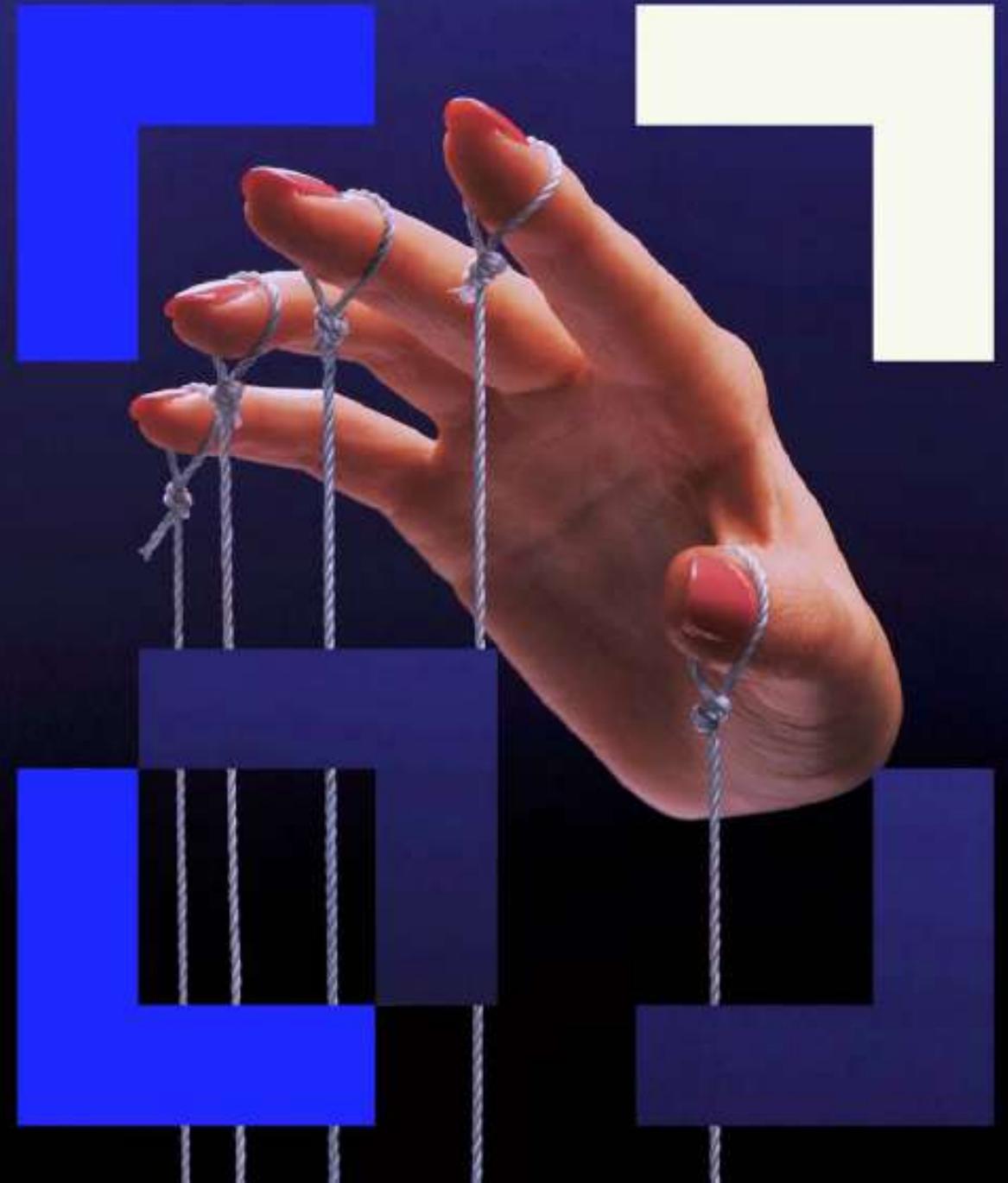
Why influence matters.

Of all the things we could have spent our time investigating, why influence?

Because there is **little else more powerful** in the world of marketing, than the ability to shape and sway people's opinions and to encourage specific types of behaviour.

Whilst many of us often talk about influence, the reality is that **very few of us actually understand it**, and even less know how to wield it.

Influence, in its core, is about connection and impact - how messages resonate, how brands become interwoven with personal identities, and how choices are guided by subtle cues in the environment. But despite its omnipresence in our strategies and campaigns, a profound understanding of how to effectively harness and wield this tool remains elusive.

Without a deep, actionable comprehension of influence, we risk not only the potency of our marketing efforts but also the ability to connect meaningfully with our audiences.

Influence is the most powerful tool to shape and sway behaviour, with an ocean of academic research into how it works.

Forms of Power

— French and Raven; 1959

Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion

— Caldini; 2006

Theory X and Theory Y

— McGregor; 1960

Contingency Theory and Expectation Theory

— Woodward; 1965

Yale Attitude Change Approach

— Hovland; 1953

Sociology of Social Influence

— Gass; 2015

Sociology of Social Influence

— O'Keefe; 2016

Choices, Values and Frames

— Tversky and Kahneman 1984

Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theory

— Burns; 1978

The Amplification Hypothesis

— Clarkson, Tormala, Rucker; 2008

Obedience to Authority

— Stanley Milgrim; 1974

Conversion Theory

— Chryssochoou, Volpato; 2004

Predictably Irrational

— Ariely; 2008

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Despite influence being researched widely, the results have never been compiled into an actionable framework for marketers.

"We can be blind to the obvious, and we are also blind to our blindness."
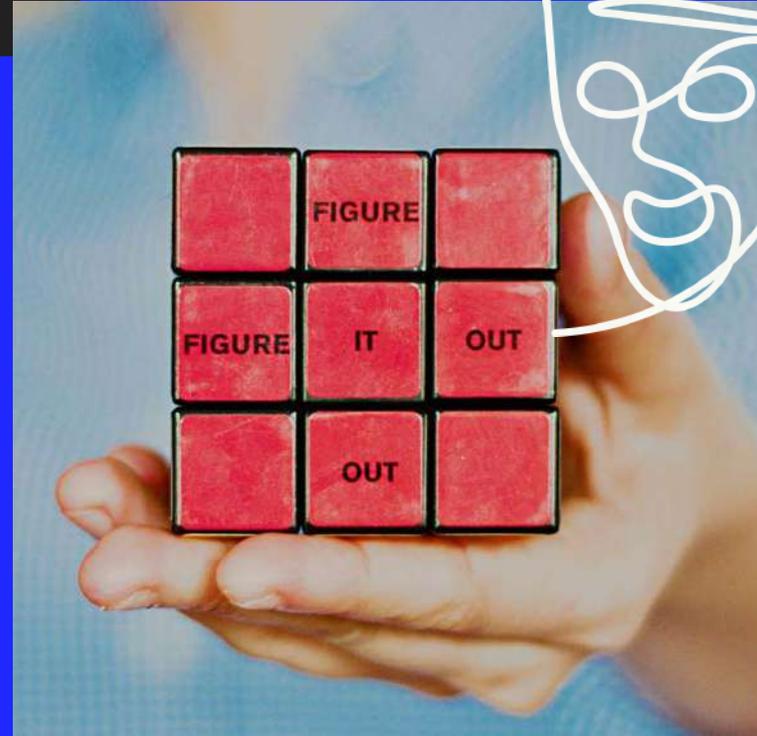
— Daniel Kahneman

For over 70 years there has been a huge body of academic research done to better understand the psychology and sociology of influence.
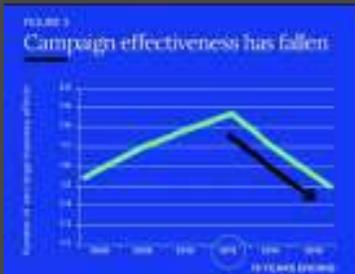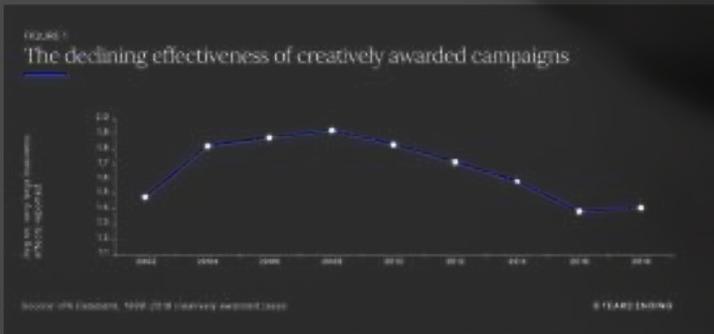
The history of influence is broad and intimidating 'night-stand' reading.

However, there has been little work done to reconcile the ocean of academia into a current and applicable understanding of how influence works in the modern age. Until now.

The problem with influence today.

Our limited understanding of influence means we're collectively less effective at marketing & communication.

Our partial grasp of the concept of influence directly correlates with a notable decline in marketing effectiveness.

Over the years, the potency of advertising to drive sales has diminished significantly, with a recent meta-analysis from the University of Oxford's Said Business School revealing that the sales response to advertising is nearly half of what it was three decades ago. This analysis, which synthesised data from 807 independent studies, underscores a worrying trend: as our understanding of influence remains superficial, our marketing strategies lose their impact.

The implications of this trend are profound. If we do not deepen our understanding of how influence truly works and fail to adapt our strategies accordingly, we risk a further decline in marketing effectiveness.

The reduction in traditional authority & influence is affecting far more than just marketing communications.

> "*I think the people of this country have had enough of experts with organisations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong.*"
>
> — Michael Gove, 2016

This is not only a problem for selling products and services, but we're also seeing this play out in wider society.

There has been a marked decline in the effectiveness of communications for public health, and political communications from traditional sources.

This is best understood through the examples of the rise of populist parties throughout the Western Political world, who reject traditional sources of academic, economic, and medical expertise.

We're also seeing this through the widespread adoption of anti-vaccine beliefs by many.

For instance, despite overwhelming scientific evidence supporting the safety and efficacy of vaccines, a significant segment of the population remains skeptical.

Recent surveys indicate that approximately 23% of Australians express hesitancy towards routine vaccinations, citing distrust in traditional health advisories and pharmaceutical companies.

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Anti-establishment sentiment is on the rise across the western world.

32% of European voters cast their ballots for anti-establishment parties, compared with 20% in the early 2000s and 12% in the early 1990s.

— PopuList, 2023

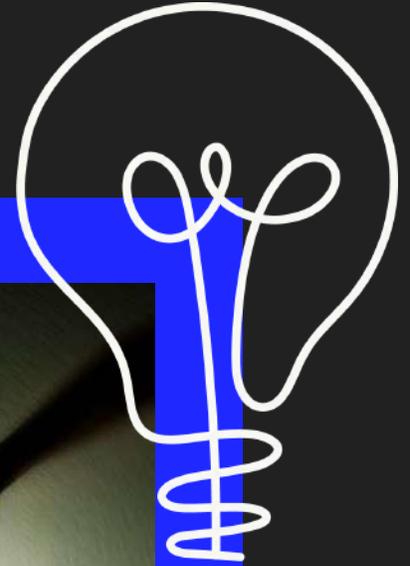74 million Americans voted for Donald Trump at in the 2020 election.

— 2020 US election results

The proportion of Australians who agree vaccines are safe has fallen to 77% in 2023, from 90% in 2015.

— Vaccine Confidence Project, 2024

Let's start with how influence *used* to work.

The
Influence
Codes

Historically, influence flowed down from the top, delivering privileged information and creating authority.
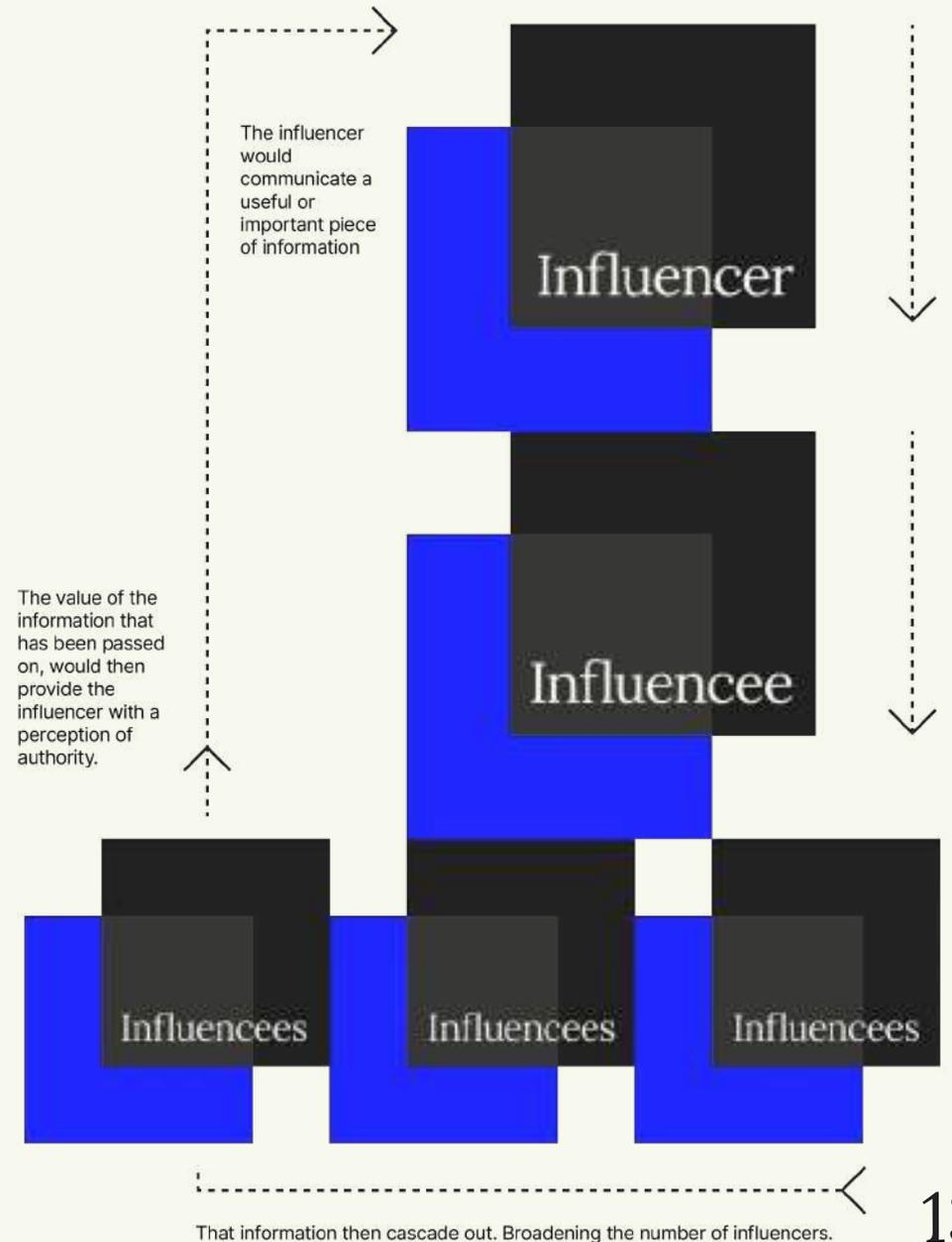
Throughout human history, information would tend to **flow from the top down**, delivering influence as it cascaded through.

A person would communicate something of importance or usefulness and it would affect the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of those it was communicated to.

In times where there was only limited information available, individuals in positions of authority, owing to their expertise or status, held great power to shape public opinion and behaviour. This model was predicated on the belief that those with authority or specialised knowledge were the most qualified to guide the wider community.

The general public, typically lacking access to diverse information sources or avenues to express alternative viewpoints, usually accepted the information presented to them. The educational and communication frameworks of the era emphasised respect for authority and a tendency to receive rather than generate knowledge, creating a direct flow of influence from those at the top to the broader population.

Additionally, if the information was useful and valuable, the authority of the original influencer would be further enhanced.

The influencer would communicate a useful or important piece of information

The value of the information that has been passed on, would then provide the influencer with a perception of authority.

Influencer

Influencee

Influencees   Influencees   Influencees

That information then cascade out. Broadening the number of influencers.

Our *love/hate* relationship with influence.

The Influence Codes

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The concept of influence often carries a negative connotation...

Yet it remains an integral part of our decision-making process. While individuals may express aversion to feeling manipulated or overly influenced, their actions often tell a different story. Deep down, we are all influenced by various signals and cues, whether we acknowledge it or not.

This contradiction stems partly from a lack of self-reflection and an understanding of how external factors shape our preferences and choices.

Many people's self-identity is closely tied to the notion of autonomy in their decision-making. Acknowledging the role of influence can feel like admitting a loss of control,

which conflicts with this sense of self. Yet, in reality, our choices are frequently guided by external influences—be it from peers, media, or cultural norms—that we may not consciously recognise.

Influence is a necessity for us to be able to navigate through life.

The signals we receive that influence our choices are essential at both a sociological and psychological level.

This lack of awareness presents a challenge for marketers. We need to listen to our audiences in order to give them what they say they want. But deliver it in a manner that they don't find manipulative.

Influence is a dirty word: it creates polarisation and cancel culture, so people find safety in staying silent.
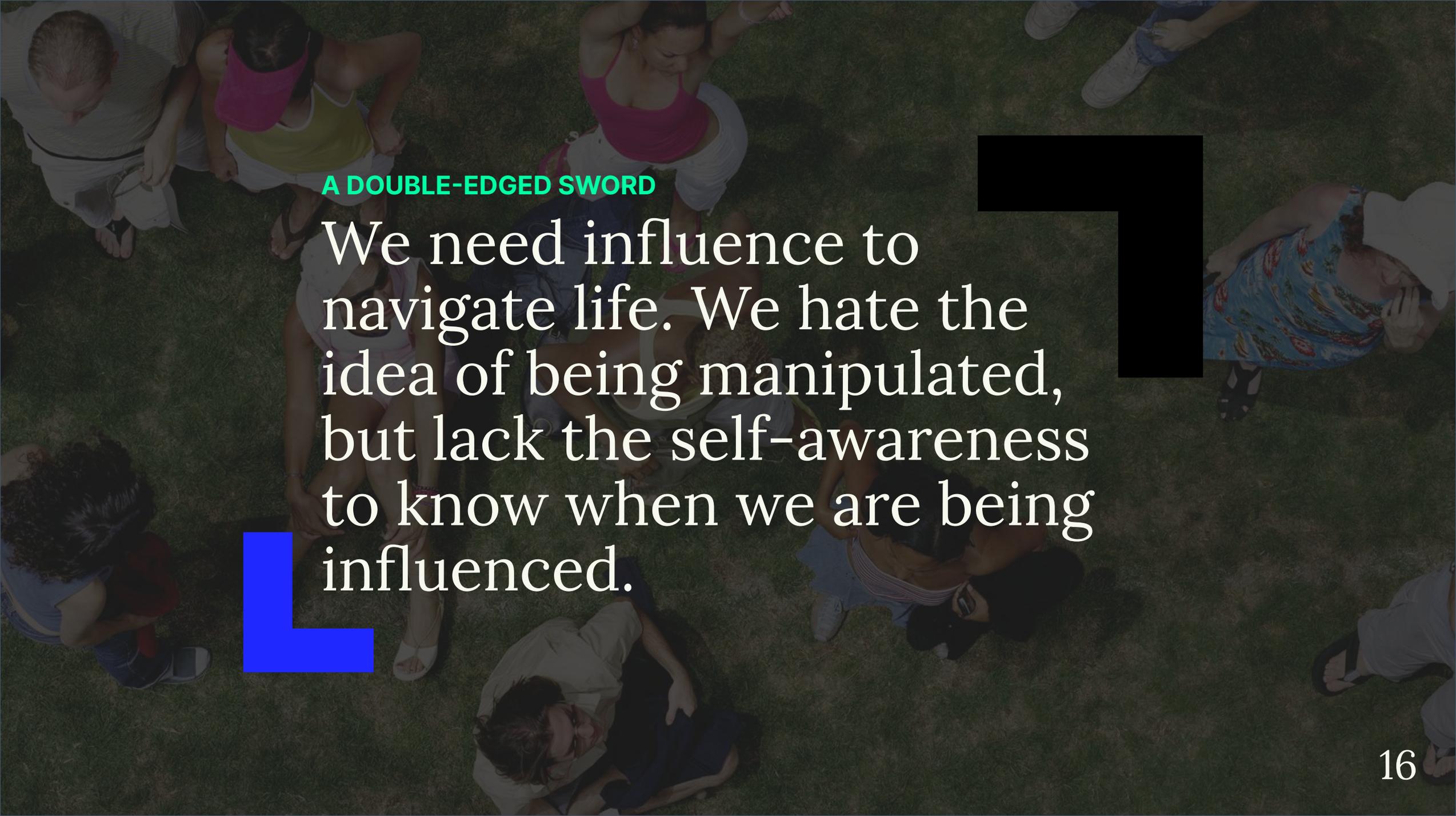
— **Max Kimber**

SC, Barrister and Mediation expert.

Influence is a, if not THE, natural human instinct:

We are inherently social creatures, living in a society connected with others... Influence is a far deeper and more powerful driver of behaviour than we recognise.

— **Amanda Gordon**

Adjunct Assoc. Professor in Clinical Psychology, University of Canberra.

...and influencers bear the brunt of this focus.

Ineffective.

81% of us say that 'I don't take recommendations from famous or well-known people' (65% Gen Z, 75%/ 85%/ 94% Gen Y/ X/ Boomers).

— Wave #1 Survey

Despised.

I despise 'influencers' with the heat of a thousand suns. They are a blight. A drain on society. My contempt for them knows no bounds.

— Wave #1 Survey

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A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

We need influence to navigate life. We hate the idea of being manipulated, but lack the self-awareness to know when we are being influenced.

The
'ingredients'
of influence.

The
Influence
Codes

There are four fundamental ingredients of influence.

01

Information

02

Community

03

Authority
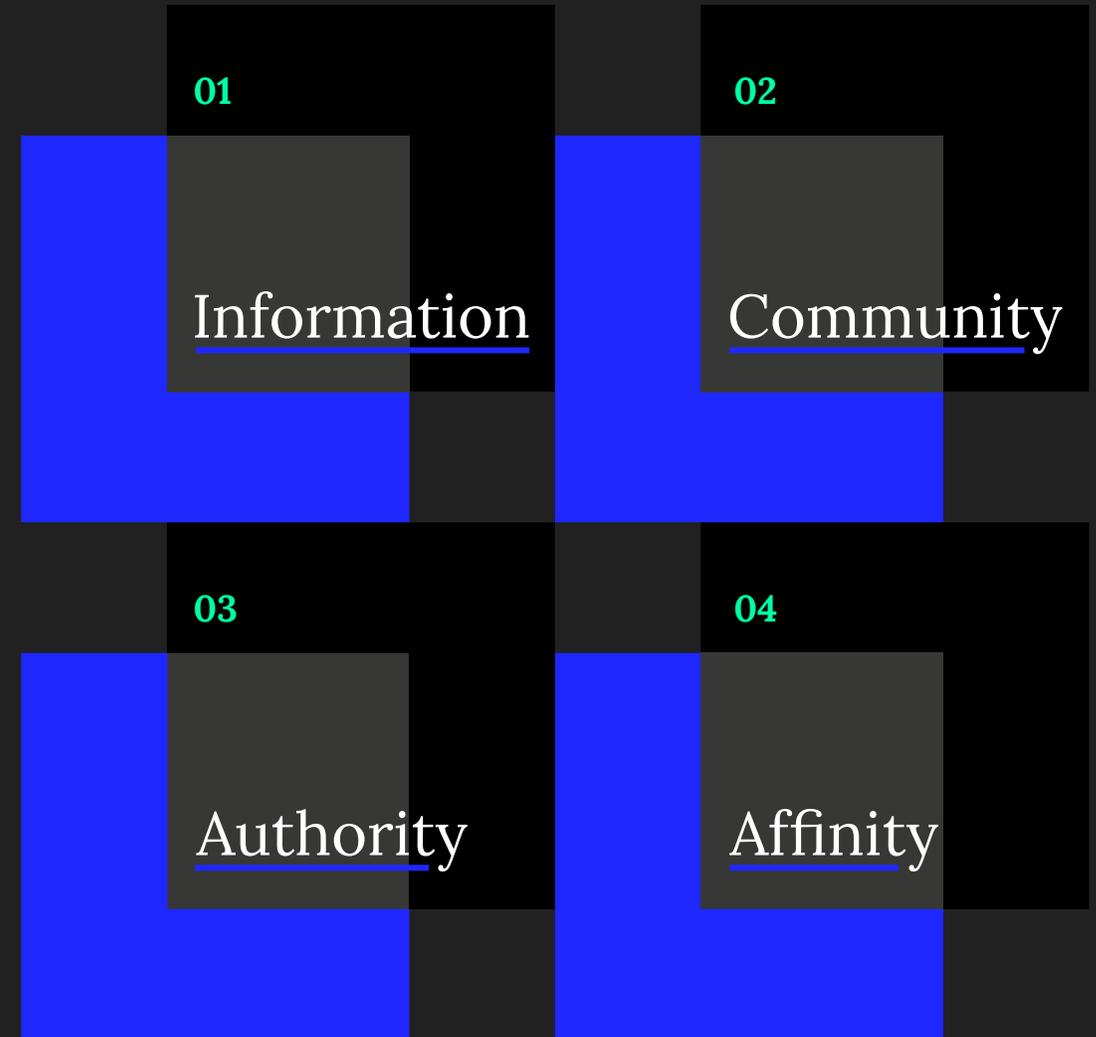
04

Affinity

04

Synthesising the academic work from the 1950's until now, shows that there is a consistent, fundamental set of ingredients for influence.

Historically, Information and authority were the most potent sources of influence. However, there were also two other components.

Community represented what people saw as accepted practices, behaviours and

schools of thought within the groups and communities they were part of. These communities were predominantly geographically defined.

Affinity represented the final ingredient. We would look to our friends and family and those we liked or wanted to be like, to look for the signals we needed to make decisions.

01. Information

Information wields influence by offering pertinent, detailed, and occasionally exclusive facts that guide and shape decisions or viewpoints.
This is composed of:

Comparing options	Demonstration	Benefits	Benchmark	Review	Privileged
Guiding decision-making by highlighting differences between options through comprehensive comparisons.	Influences understanding and preference by showcasing how concepts or products operate in real scenarios.	Promotes decisions by clearly outlining the positive outcomes and advantages of choices.	Shapes expectations and standards by providing comparisons with industry benchmarks.	Builds trust and guides choices by critically assessing and discussing product or service features and performance.	Influences strategies and decisions by providing access to exclusive or confidential information.

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02. Community

Influence within a community is forged through shared values, practices, and collective behaviours, where communal norms and shared endorsements shape individual actions and perspectives.

History	Displayed Actions	Conventions	Hopes & Ambitions	Socially Reviewed
Influences community members based on identity and cohesion by drawing on shared histories and traditions.	Leveraging community norms and influencing collective behaviour through visible and exemplary actions.	Guides communal behaviour and maintains tradition by adhering to established customs.	Influences through motivating and inspiring people based on pursuing shared goals.	Gaining approval or feedback from the community, which impacts and moulds individual and collective actions.

03. Authority

Authority denotes the respect and trust attributed to individuals or entities renowned for their expertise, positions, or depth of knowledge, driving influence through recognised authority and experience.

Experiential

Applies practical experience and firsthand knowledge to effectively guide and influence decisions.

Reviews

Shapes perceptions and influences decisions through securing and leveraging positive evaluations and feedback.

Situational

Directs outcomes and molds opinions by leveraging specialised expertise in specific contexts.

Earned Position

Influential through a status achieved by proven skills and accomplishments.

Endowed Position

Has the ability to influence through relative status through holding an official title, position or credentials.

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04. Affinity

Affinity refers to the personal rapport and likability that heighten the impact of opinions or recommendations from individuals or groups with whom one shares a strong personal connection.

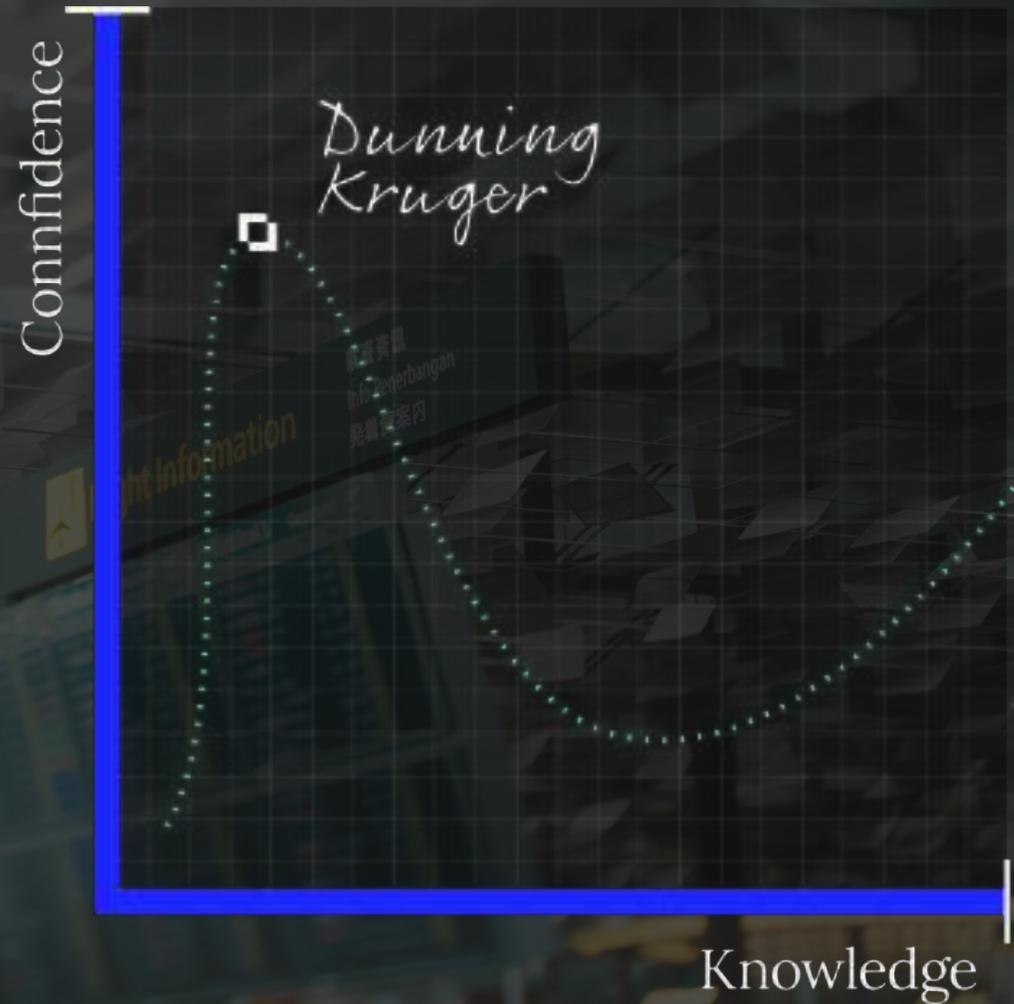| Character	Relatability	Proximity	Authenticity /Reliability	Shared Values	Aspirations	Likeability
Influences through the strength of personal character, which engenders trust and fosters connections.	Builds rapport by resonating with others' experiences and emotions, enhancing the persuasive power of interactions.	Utilises physical or emotional closeness to strengthen influence and deepen connections.	Earns trust and sustains influence by consistently being genuine and dependable.	Amplifies influence by aligning with the values and beliefs of others, creating a strong foundational bond.	Inspires and connects by articulating shared aspirations and driving collective efforts towards common goals.	Increases influence through personal charm and agreeableness, making opinions more persuasive and welcomed.

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The forces shaping how we choose.

It's harder for us to make choices with confidence.

We now make over 122 'informed' choices[1] each day.

Those are the ones we actively think about. However, in addition we also make up to 35,000 'remotely conscious' decisions per day.

When we knew less, and had less access to knowledge, we felt more confident in our decision-making. This is what is known as the 'Dunning-Kruger effect'. This means that only novices and experts in any field can have high confidence in their decision-making.

However, given that we are required to make more decisions all the time, we are struggling to do so with any level of confidence. To avoid failure, we are constantly trying to make our choices with a high level of confidence. But given how many decisions we need to make, and how much information we need to make them, it's increasingly hard for us to do so with high confidence. To find the right information and then process it so we can make good decisions, is increasingly exhausting.

Confidence

Dunning Kruger

Knowledge

As our access to information increases, our confidence in decision making is declining.

There are four seismic shifts impacting how we make decisions.

Making decisions is hard. It's mentally taxing, and as a result we've relied upon influence signals to help us choose how to behave and act. But those signals of influence have looked different over time.

The system for how influence previously worked has been irrevocably disrupted. There have been some key cultural and environmental shifts that define the modern context, and these shifts have substantially affected the way influence now works.

SHIFT 01

Information scarcity to information overload

SHIFT 02

Culture codes to codeless culture

SHIFT 03

Institutional faith to institutional distrust

SHIFT 04

From limited choice to endless choice

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We've moved from a world where information is scarce, to one where we're overloaded with it.

The first major shift is from a world where information was **scarce**... to a world where information is so prevalent that we are **overloaded** by it.

The shift to an era of information abundance marks a profound change in our engagement with, understanding, and valuation of knowledge. Previously, information was a rare commodity, accessible mainly through specific channels like print media, broadcast news, or academic institutions, bestowing considerable influence on the gatekeepers of this information, such as journalists, scholars, and experts.

Now, in stark contrast, the advent of digital technology and the internet has catalysed an information explosion. We are inundated with a constant stream of data, opinions, facts, and news across diverse platforms, from social media and blogs to online news outlets and forums. This flood of information means we are perpetually bombarded with content from a multitude of sources, varying widely in credibility.

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| How we're experiencing this shift...

Decision Overload

The abundance of information can lead to analysis paralysis, where the sheer volume of available data complicates informed decision-making. This abundance can cause confusion and fatigue as individuals struggle to determine which information is pertinent, accurate, or significant.

Dilution of Authority

In times of information scarcity, credible sources were highly valued. Today, with an array of voices and perspectives at our disposal, the influence of traditional information custodians is diminished. People can select information sources that align with their own biases, creating echo chambers and segmented realities.

Heightened Skepticism

The vast availability of information, along with prominent instances of misinformation, has fostered increased public scepticism. There's growing doubt about the veracity and reliability of encountered information, which can erode trust in institutions, the media, and even science.

Knowledge, Democratised

Positively, the information surge has democratised knowledge, broadening access to education and self-directed learning. Individuals can delve into areas of interest, pursue self-education, and access diverse viewpoints and expertise.

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CASE STUDY: INFORMATION SCARCITY TO INFORMATION OVERLOAD

By way of an example let's consider what information you may have had available were you to want to know how to get your baby to sleep during different points of time in the last 100 years.

As the landscape of information has dramatically expanded from a few trusted sources in the 1930s to over a billion search results today, our brains remain wired for a simpler era, struggling to sift through this vast array of data. There's more need to cut through the clutter than any time in the past.

1930

In the 1930's, there may be 3 or 4 channels of advice: Your parents, a midwife, a local matriarch or friends.
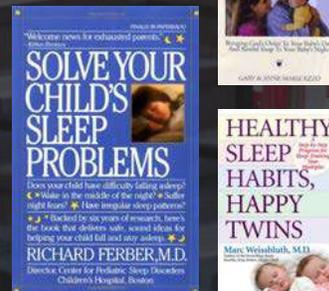
1946

In 1946, Dr Benjamin Spock's book arrived, providing a new opinion. An authoritative, medical opinion that became hugely popular...and influential.

1980

In the 1980's a swathe of new books and opinions arrived from other Doctors, and groups like Tresillian began to become popular.

2000

By the 2000's the number of 'Mommyblogs' explode. By the 2010's there are millions of voices and opinions in the baby sleep discourse.

TODAY

Today there are over a billion search results for the topic.

The amount of information we're exposed to has grown exponentially over the past century.

IMPLICATION

With a surplus of information and authoritative voices... we don't know who or what to listen to.

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From
Culture
Codes

To
Codeless
Culture

What was once clear and apparent in culture is now far less obvious.

SHIFT 02

Culture codes to codeless culture

The transition from defined cultural codes to a more ambiguous, codeless culture represents a significant societal shift. Historically, our lives were predominantly local, with cultural norms and values clearly defined within geographical and social boundaries. These cultural codes provided a framework for behavior, decision-making, and identity, offering clear signals on how to act, think, and interact within a given community.

In contrast, today's globalised world, propelled by digital connectivity, has eroded these geographical and cultural boundaries, leading to a more fluid and less defined cultural landscape.
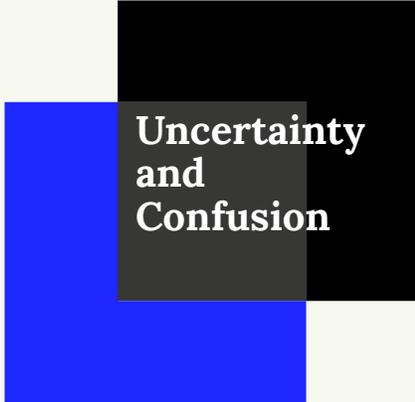
The proliferation of digital platforms and the ease of global communication have exposed individuals to a myriad of cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles, diluting the once clear-cut cultural codes. As a result, people now navigate a more complex cultural terrain where traditional norms are continuously challenged, and new ones are constantly evolving.

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| How we're experiencing this shift...

Individualism and Diversity

In the absence of rigid cultural codes, there's a greater emphasis on individual choice and expression, fostering diversity but also creating challenges in finding common ground.

Uncertainty and Confusion

Without clear cultural signposts, individuals may experience uncertainty in social interactions and decision-making, leading to confusion and a sense of disorientation.

Adaptability and Innovation

A codeless culture encourages adaptability and innovation, as individuals and organisations are no longer constrained by traditional norms and can experiment with new ideas and approaches.

Fragmented and Polarised

The lack of shared cultural codes can lead to fragmentation, as people align with niche groups that share their values and beliefs, potentially leading to polarisation within society.

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Globalisation has impacted *cultural identity*

Pre-Globalisation Era (Early 20th Century)

In the early 20th century, cultural identities were predominantly shaped by geographical and national boundaries. Interaction was mostly confined within one's own cultural group, with limited exposure to external cultures, accessed mainly through literature, travel, or second-hand narratives. This period fostered a deep sense of cultural unity and identity but also harboured a limited understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, occasionally leading to stereotypes or ethnocentrism.

Following Period: Globalisation Era (Late 20th - Early 21st Century)

The advent of globalisation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries opened up a vast exposure to diverse cultures, facilitated by advances in media, technology, and greater mobility. This era encouraged an enriching cultural exchange, enhancing inclusive and multifaceted cultural identities. However, it also posed challenges such as the erosion of distinct cultural markers and issues of cultural appropriation, where elements from minority cultures are adopted by dominant ones without appropriate respect or context.

Globalisation has impacted *family identity* too

Previous Period: Traditional Family Era (Mid 20th Century)

During the mid-20th century, the nuclear family model, comprising two parents and their children, was the norm, often reinforcing traditional gender roles. This model provided stability and was heavily supported by societal norms and legal frameworks. Nonetheless, this rigidity often sidelined non-traditional family setups like single-parent or blended families, creating stigmas and a lack of support for diverse family dynamics.

Following Period: Modern Family Era (Early 21st Century)

The early 21st century has seen an acceptance and recognition of a broad spectrum of family structures, including single-parent families, blended families, same-sex parent families, and non-monogamous relationships. This shift reflects a more inclusive view of family, granting people the freedom to form family units that align with their personal preferences and needs. While this inclusivity is a celebration of personal choice and diversity, it also brings forth complexities in legal, social, and interpersonal realms, as traditional frameworks adapt to these evolving family constructs.

Our identity used to be shaped by geography, but now it's shaped by whatever we want it to be.

IMPLICATION

In an increasingly codeless culture, the signals we previously used to navigate life are less clear, and less visible.

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SHIFT 03

From
Institutional
Faith

To
Institutional
Distrust

We were a culture of institutional faith, but that culture has been replaced with one of distrust.

SHIFT 03

Institutional faith to institutional distrust

The rise in institutional distrust is having a profound impact on how consumers make decisions.

Traditionally, institutions like governments, educational bodies, religious organisations, and corporations held a position of trust and authority in society. This trust was predicated on the belief that these institutions acted in the public's best interest, guiding societal norms, enforcing rules, and providing stability and security.

Over recent decades, numerous scandals, failures, and instances of corruption have gradually eroded public trust in these once-revered institutions. High-profile cases of misconduct, alongside a more informed and questioning populace empowered by digital media, have shifted the narrative. The result is a pervasive sense of scepticism and distrust toward institutions that were once considered pillars of society.

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| How we're experiencing this shift...

Eroded Trust and Cynicism

The decline in institutional trust has fostered a climate of cynicism, where individuals are more likely to question motives and integrity. This scepticism extends beyond institutions to impact other societal facets, including media, science, and even interpersonal relationships.

Empowered Individualism

As trust in institutions wanes, individuals increasingly rely on their own judgment or turn to peer networks and non-traditional sources for guidance and information. This trend amplifies individualism and can both empower personal agency and exacerbate echo chambers.

Brand Challenges and Opportunities

For brands and marketers, the erosion of institutional trust necessitates a shift in strategy. Building brand trust now requires transparency, authenticity, and a demonstrable commitment to ethical principles and social responsibility. Brands must actively work to dismantle cynicism by fostering genuine connections and demonstrating their value and reliability in consumers' lives.

Responsibility and Accountability

In a climate of institutional distrust, there is a heightened demand for responsibility and accountability. Consumers expect brands to not only provide quality products and services but also to act as forces for good, contributing positively to society and addressing the issues their customers care about.

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Institutions of all shapes and sizes are suffering from a decline of trust

GOVERNMENT	FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS	BIG TECH	RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS	HEALTHCARE AND PHARMACEUTICALS	EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
Trust in governments has waned due to corruption, transparency issues, policy failures, and scandals.	The 2008 financial crisis, and 2017 Royal Commission into financial service in Australia have eroded Aussies trust in the sector.	Data breaches, privacy concerns, and ethical issues with AI have fostered distrust in tech companies.	Scandals and misconduct by leaders have led to decreased trust in religious organisations.	Issues like profiteering, the opioid crisis, and vaccine controversies have undermined trust in the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries.	Fraud, admissions scandals, and concerns over value and cost have eroded trust in the education sector.
Only 16% of Americans say they trust the government to do what's right in 2023, compared to 77% in 1964. (Source: Pew Public Trust in Government, 2024)	94% of Australians said that banks don't act in the best interests of their customers (source: ME Bank survey, 2022)	60% of Australians distrust AI (source: Workday Closing the AI Trust Gap Report, 2024)	49% of global citizens believe religious leaders are untrustworthy (source: IPSOS Issues Monitor)	One in four Australians doesn't trust the healthcare system (source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2024)	In 2020 90% of Australian parents thought the country's education system was poor (source: Cluey Aussie Parents Survey, 2020)

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Declining trust is impacting consumers across institutions which impact almost every aspects of their lives.
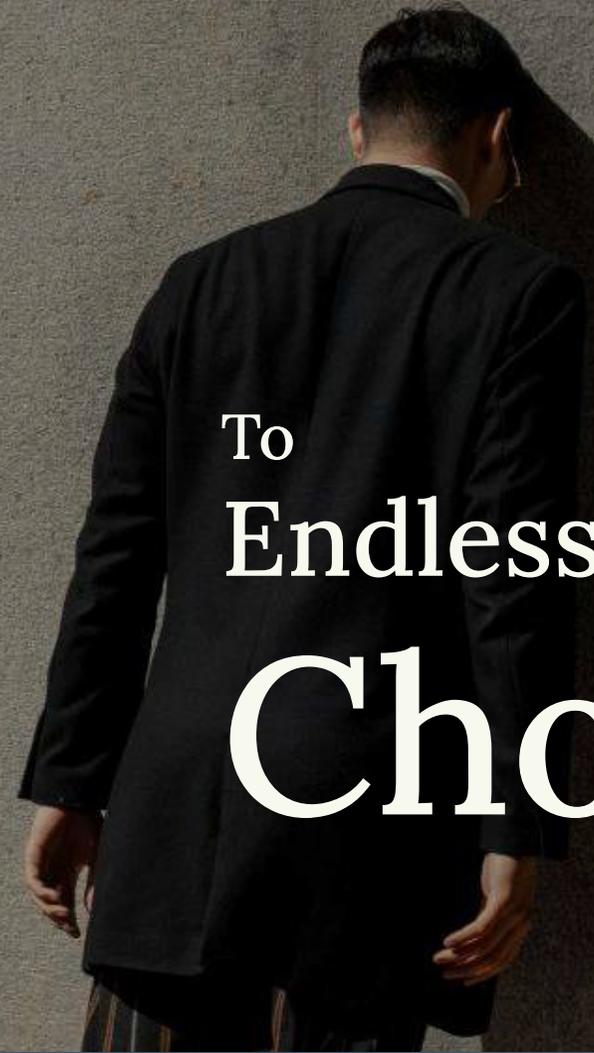
IMPLICATION

In a world where we actively distrust authority, we are now actively seeking our own sources of truth... based on what we believe is valuable and trustworthy.

From
Limited
Choice

To
Endless
Choice

With so much choice, it's become even harder to decide.

SHIFT 04

From limited choice, to endless choice

Possibly the most fundamental factor that's aggravated the context of influence, is the explosion of choice. In 1980, the average supermarket carried about 14,000 products. By 2018, that number had more than doubled.

To satisfy new and changing customer needs, Brands and businesses have worked to provide more options and choices.

However, with so much extra choice, there's more questions, more trade-offs, and more risk of making the wrong choice for customers.

In fact, this paradox of choice is actively serving to make customers more anxious about whether or not they are making good decisions.

Today, we are faced with more questions than ever before. In an effort to find the right answer as fast as possible, we are asking more of our decision-making mind than we have before. And this is putting a crippling load on our brains.

The net result is that we have too much cognitive load...and we simply can't cope.

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How we're experiencing this shift...

Today, we are faced with more questions than ever before. In an effort to find the right answer as fast as possible, we are asking more of our decision-making mind than we have before. And this is putting a crippling load on our brains.

Our environment has changed way faster than our evolutionary biology can keep up with. Yet, in this new decisioning-context, we are asking our brains to adapt in the blink of an eye to changes that would take millions of years of evolution to deliver.

In the current environment, we have too much cognitive load to process. Because we are struggling to cope, the signals of influence that help us to choose are now more important, and potent than ever.

PRODUCTS IN 1980

14,000

PRODUCTS IN 2018

33,000

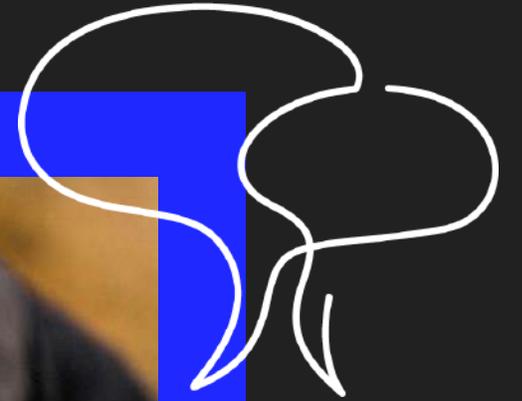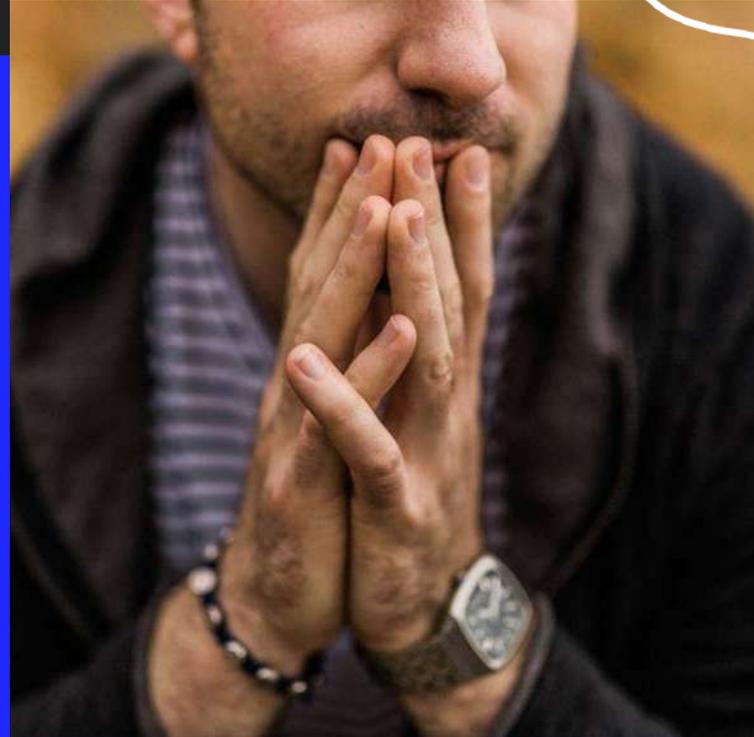With so much choice, it's become even harder to decide.

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We can't evolve fast enough to keep up with the proliferation of choice.

IMPLICATION

With the number of options too vast to litigate logically, we're looking for new shortcuts to ease the decision-making process.

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The result: a new *decision-making* context.

Right now, we feel more stress and uncertainty in our decision-making.

The major shifts in our world have created a new 'cognitive context'.

We live in a world where we have more...

» Stimuli

» Choices

» Disruption

» Loss-aversion

» Risk

» Stress

And at the same time we have less...

» Confidence

» Time

» Trust

» Safety

» Comfort

48

This new cognitive context is having a profound impact on Australians.

MANAGING STRESS

Australians say it's important to *manage your stress levels*

74%

— Source: Kantar Global Monitor, 2023; n=1,150

SUFFER STRESS

Australians say "I *suffer from stress* nowadays", up from 46% in 2019

53%

— Source: Kantar Global Monitor, 2023; n=1,150

NAVIGATE

Australians agree "The world feels *more complicated and harder to navigate* these days"

80%

— Source: Kantar Influence Survey #1; n=2,000

TRUTH

Australians agree "With all the information available today, *the truth is harder to find*"

71%

— Source: Kantar Global Monitor, 2023; n=1,150

FOMO and damage to ego is creating more pressure to make the right decision.

Psychologically, we feel the pain of loss more acutely than the positive feelings of success.
As a result, 'loss-aversion' is a very powerful factor in our decisions. Because we don't want to miss out, and we certainly don't want to make poor choices that could cause us embarrassment or damage our fragile egos. This means that the pressure to make good decisions is increasing.

In the new, higher cognitive load decisioning-context, the increased pressure, coupled with greater uncertainty and doubt has only deepened our need to find influence that can help with our decision- making. If ever there was a time we needed influence in our lives... it is now.

We're not programmed to deal with doubt. Doubt is risk. Whether you're an anti-vaxxer, a radicalised youth or uncertain about what product to buy, it creates cognitive dissonance. In moments of doubt, people seek influence - information from other people.

— Marian-Andrei Rizoui,
Head of UTS Behavioural Sciences Data Lab

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IMPLICATION

Doubt and *uncertainty* further open the door for influence.

51

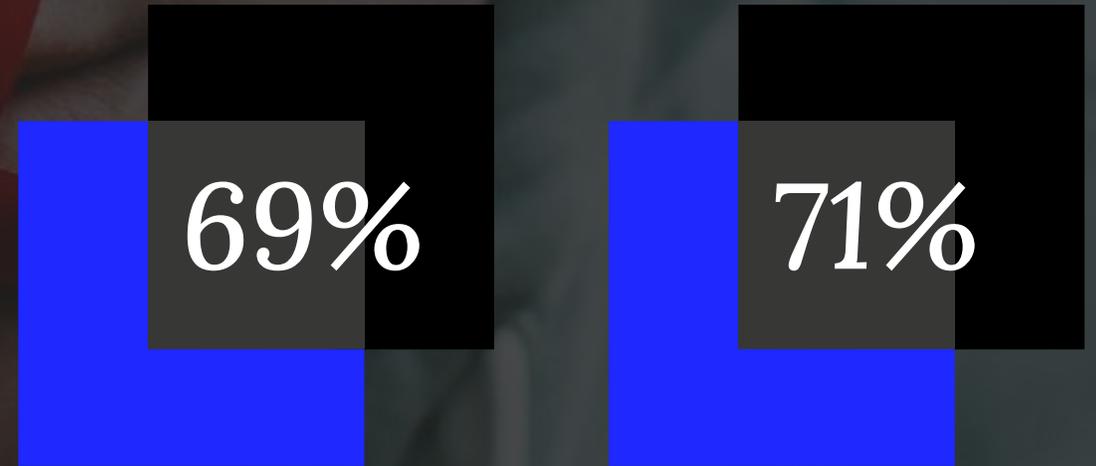# Unfortunately, the old model of influence can't cut it anymore.

Before we establish the rules for the new model of influence, it is important to understand why the old model is failing.

Previously, influence was delivered top down, in a linear 'push' type fashion. And we the public, were willing and compliant towards this model. This meant that with size and scale, communications was a powerful influence tool.

Today however, there is a proliferation of channels, infinite media and a multitude of voices all competing for our attention.

With dwindling institutional faith, and so many potential sources of 'authority' available, audiences now are 'actively cynical' as a default.

This means that not only is the scale that had once delivered success, unachievable in the modern context, but it also is actively distrusted too.

69%

of Australians agree "Institutions (e.g., governments, corporations, religious organisations) always put their own interests first"

— Source: Kantar Influence Survey #1; n=2,000

71%

of Australians agree "Generally, I trust institutions less these days (e.g., governments, corporations, religious organisations)"

— Source: Kantar Influence Survey #1; n=2,000

52

Australians now have an 'actively cynical' mindset.

Consumers are seeking out their own sources of influence to help make decisions.

The list of the top 10 Health and Fitness podcasts in Australia reveals that we have a range of different institutionally and self proclaimed sources of authority.

The diversity in backgrounds—from scientists and doctors to motivational speakers and lifestyle coaches—illustrates the vast array of authorities available to people, who are no longer limited to the local doctor.

To combat the doubt and uncertainty in their lives, the public isn't tuning out...It is tuning in. We are actively seeking out the sources we want to provide us with the guidance we need. Rather than a top-down system, influence now works in reverse. It is a bottom-up process where the influence actively looks for the right kind of signals to help define who they feel is worthy of influencing their decision.

This means we are turning away from the traditional sources of influence, and instead looking in different places.

54

We are now selecting from the bottom-up, who we deem to be influential.

The *new rules* of influence.

The work to define the rules of influence was *both extensive and sophisticated.*

EXTENSIVE:

10,894

Engagements with Australians.

SOPHISTICATED:

12,000

Experiments with Australians.

Covering 30 Expert Interviews, 3 Primary Surveys and 3 Proprietary Datasets, creating over 2 million data points and 14,360 consumer verbatims on influence.

20 scenarios tested with more than 6,000 Australians uncovered how influence actually works, getting beyond conscious biases to reveal it's true dynamics today.

We confirmed that the *old bastions of influence are no longer effective.*

Traditional sources of authority are highly ineffective to influence modern Aussies.

Recognised authority is ineffective

Position power alone is no longer going to cut it when influencing Australians.

Sources that 'hold an official title, position or credentials' are 47% less effective across people's decisioning today, making it the lowest ranking attribute tested.
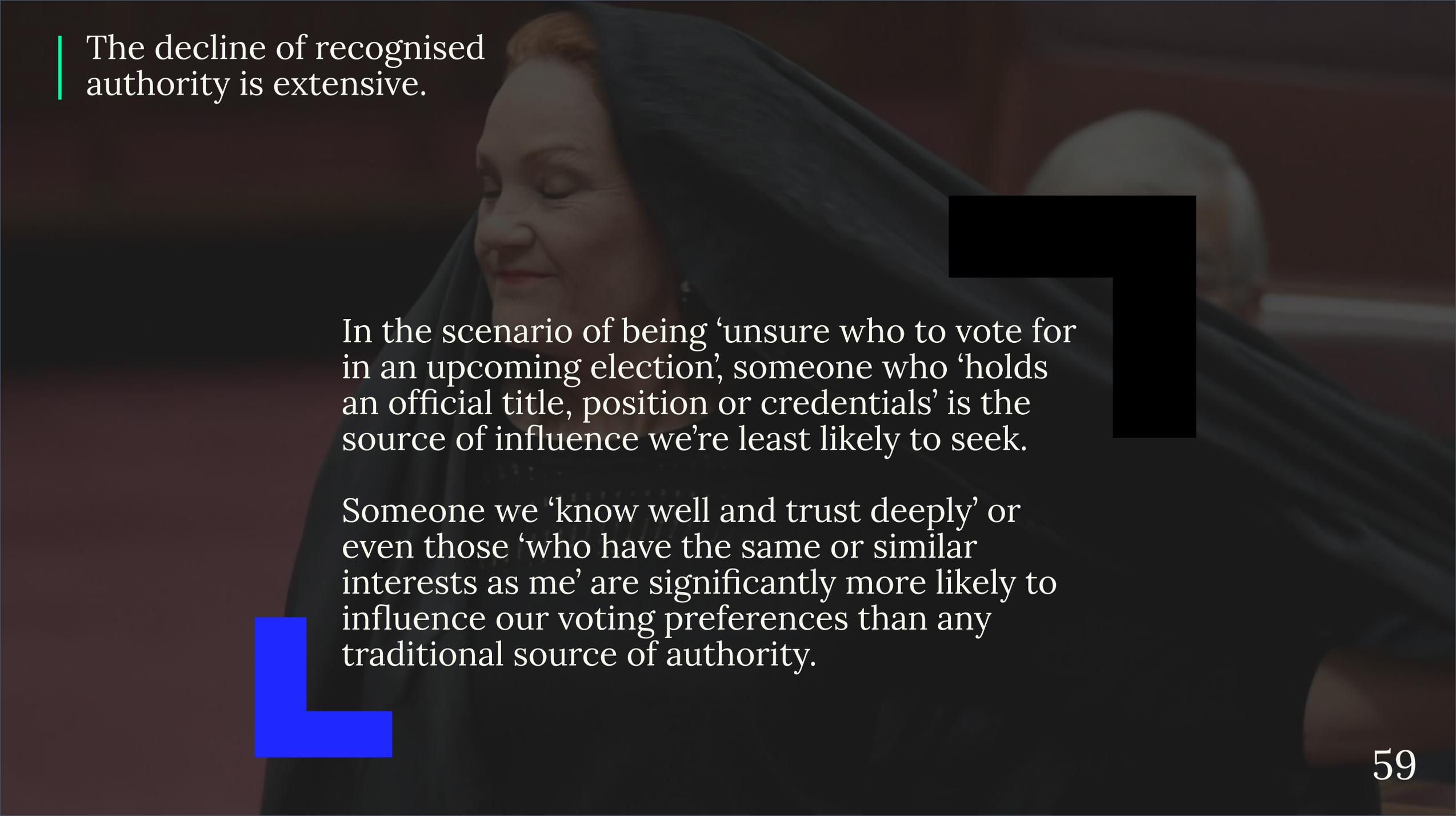
It is also the lowest ranking source of influence in 15 of the 20 specific scenarios tested.

As is the privileged information they hold

Knowing something that others don't is less effective than ever before to motivate others.

Sources that have 'a rare or unique piece of information that isn't commonly known or shared', has an influence index of 75ix making it the 3rd lowest attribute tested.

It was the lowest ranking source information in every scenario, and in the bottom three overall influence attributes in 10 of the 20 scenarios.

The decline of recognised authority is extensive.

In the scenario of being 'unsure who to vote for in an upcoming election', someone who 'holds an official title, position or credentials' is the source of influence we're least likely to seek.

Someone we 'know well and trust deeply' or even those 'who have the same or similar interests as me' are significantly more likely to influence our voting preferences than any traditional source of authority.

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Affinity is the new *'superpower'* of influence

In the midst of the cultural and environmental changes around us, the way we interrogate our decisions is being forced to adapt.

Where once Authority and Information were the most dominant factors driving choice, now Affinity is.

"In this overwhelming media landscape, we look to make meaningful relationships, to create sense in this fucked-up crazy world."

— David Shing, Futurist, Speaker, Creative Director & Entrepreneur

"92% of people would rather be sold to by a friend over an ad. The fact that we would rather people influence us means we aren't doing our job right."

— David Shing

"The day 0 job is to break cynicism before you have the permission to build a community. Everyone knows they are on a sales funnel, purely a metric in the system. Noone wants to be there."

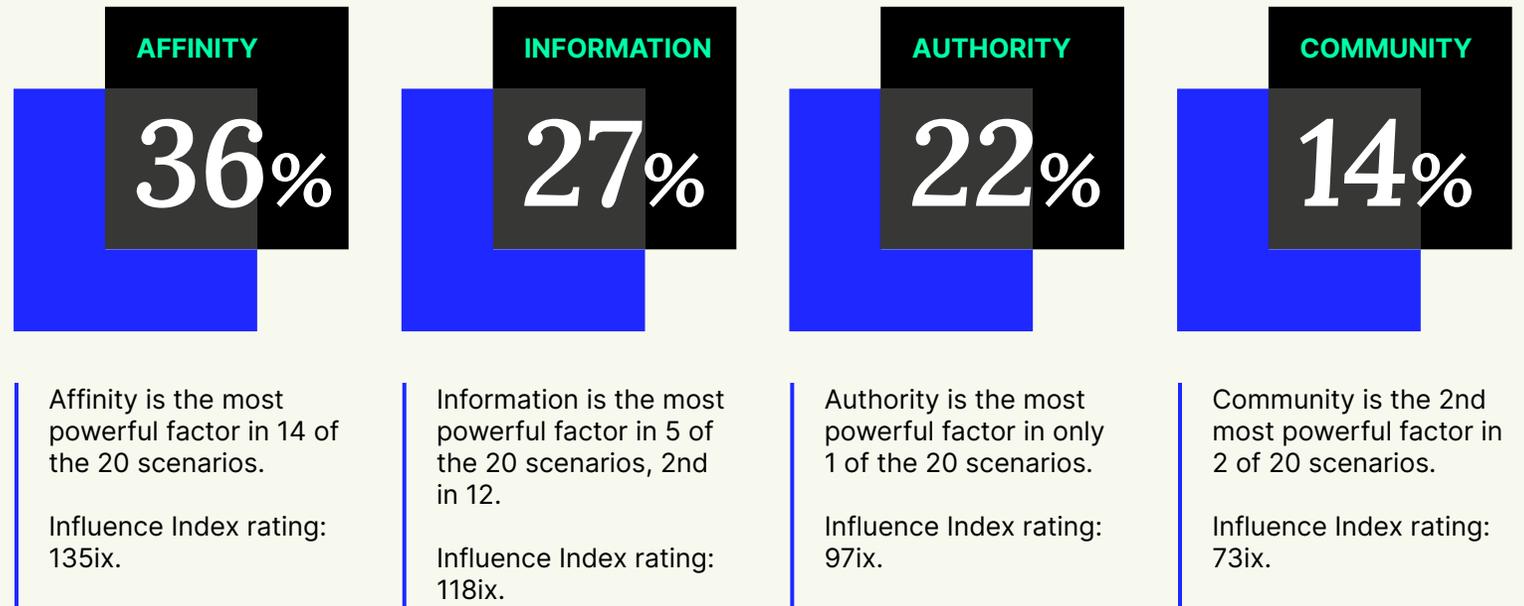— Marty Wirth, Founder & Managing Director at Present Company

It shapes more of our decisions than traditional levers of influence

Across all scenarios, *Affinity is the most important factor* in influencing people's decisions

When we break down the importance of factors of influence towards people's decision making we see that Affinity is by far the most important factor, accounting for 36% of influence.

To make decisions quicker and more easily, affinity has become the dominant factor in choosing which sources we seek out, or permit for influence.

Regardless of geography, gender or age. Affinity is the most potent tool to drive decision-making.

AFFINITY

36%

INFORMATION

27%

AUTHORITY

22%

COMMUNITY

14%

Affinity is the most powerful factor in 14 of the 20 scenarios.

Influence Index rating: 135ix.

Information is the most powerful factor in 5 of the 20 scenarios, 2nd in 12.

Influence Index rating: 118ix.

Authority is the most powerful factor in only 1 of the 20 scenarios.

Influence Index rating: 97ix.

Community is the 2nd most powerful factor in 2 of 20 scenarios.

Influence Index rating: 73ix.

So what creates affinity?

Character

Experience

Relatability

Comparative

Proximity

Do they have my best interests in mind?

Have they experienced the challenge I am facing?

Do they feel like they are the real deal and authentic?

Do they offer a comparative proposition?

Are they living in a world that feels close to my own?

Take the example of the Barefoot investor, Scott Pape. His book was created to help Australians to financially succeed.

He therefore had our best interests at heart = Character.

Scott has a background in finance and secured financial freedom for himself and his own family = Experience.

From regional Victoria, Scott is down to earth and grounded = Relatable.

His book outlined impartial and comparative advice on how to get ahead = Comparative.

And finally, Scott isn't a bazillionaire living in an unreal world of wealth = Proximity.

Unsurprisingly, his books have topped the bestseller list both here and abroad.

62

The three *'super-components'* that cultivate the most influence under the new rules.

What's now most effective is the ability to demonstrate selflessness, actively listening and demonstrating trust.

Proximity

A source that 'I know well and trust deeply' is the fifth most powerful attribute of influence. Proximity to people, not authority over them, is the fundamental foundation for having influence.

Relatability

A source that 'will listen to me, understand me and my circumstances' is the third most powerful. Creating dialogue, not monologue, is key to building influence.

Character

'Offering honest and selfless advice' is the single most powerful influence attribute, ranking top in 15 of the 20 scenarios tested. Speaking to the individual, not as an institution, is the proof point that builds influence over time.

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The Marketer's Guide to Affinity

So how do we become the pied piper for our brands in this new ecology of influence?

The *big reframes*

1. Affinity is *more effective in high cognitive load moments.*

2. Tone is *the great moderator of influence.*

3. Six archetypes of influence can *help maximise influence.*

4. There is a *goldilocks zone* for who we find influential.

5. Community - *building on giants shoulders.*

The
Influence
Codes

Affinity becomes more potent in high cognitive load moments.

At times where cognitive load is at its peak, affinity proves to be the most powerful tool to influence choice.
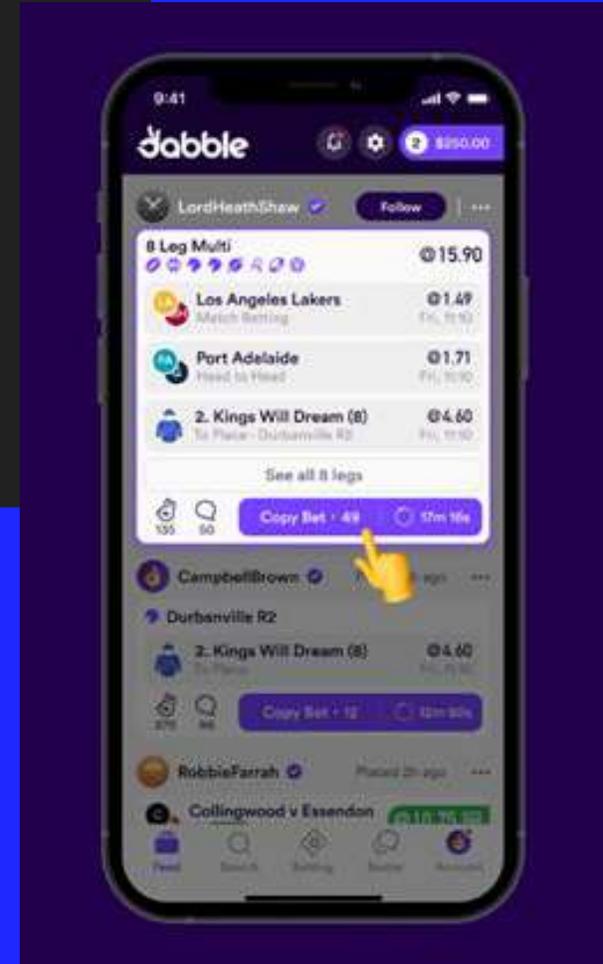
Contrary to marketing theory that suggests the optimal time to build brand preference is during uncluttered and calm moments of high receptivity...the reality is that affinity provides the opportunity to ease a decisioning process precisely at a time of high stress for consumers where receptivity is deemed to be low.

Dabble is mobile wagering app that has cleverly used affinity to drive increased weight of purchase.

The moment of placing a bet creates a lot of pressure. There's multiple variables such as different types of odds, conditions and types of bet you can make. This is then compounded by the risk of monetary loss and potential damage to ego.

In a situation like this, the easiest decision to make, is to make no decision at all...leading to the bet not being placed.

Dabble overcomes this, by allowing you to copy the bets of friends or other punters you follow. By leveraging affinity, Dabble has eased the cognitive load, providing an easier decision to be made, resulting in the bet being made.

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Changes in tone, can build affinity.

Different tones of voice can create affinity.

One of the long-held perceptions in marketing is that brands must maintain absolute rigidity in their tone of voice and communications posture.

Whereas the reality is quite the opposite. Depending on the decisioning context (whether you are trying to create more comfort in a course of action, or trying to create more discomfort in a course of action) different brand postures can be incredibly powerful in growing your brand affinity.

What this means is that you can actively shift and change your brand's tone, depending on what behaviour you are trying to create.
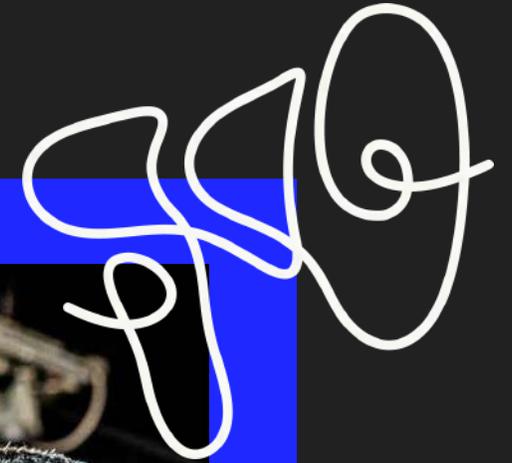
A good example of this is Apple's mother nature communications. Where previously, Apple's approach had been austere and reverent of their products, they now employ a humorous approach to showcase their positive progress towards being a carbon neutral company.

67

Brands *don't need* to maintain a *rigid* tone of voice.

The *archetypes* of influence.

The
Influence
Codes

A variety of brand postures to build affinity.

Depending upon what outcome you are trying to achieve from an influence perspective, a variety of different levers can be used to build affinity amongst your audience.

Increasing the discomfort with the status quo (often the domain of challenger brands) can be achieved best through the adoption of a provocative warrior type of posture.

Donald Trump and his dedication to 'drain the swamp' and to 'make America great again', are an example of a challenger posture that can breed high affinity amongst a disenfranchised cohort who are eager for change.

Consistently, people have greatest affinity with the influence persona that they most identify with.

There are 6 levers to unlock it

THE ROLE OF THE

Disruptive Influence

Warriors who help people fight by giving them more conviction.

THE ROLE OF THE

Visionary Influence

Innovators who help people do more by creating ways forward.

THE ROLE OF THE

Curated Influence

Curators who help people get more by sharing solutions.

THE ROLE OF THE

Transformative Influence

Coaches who help people achieve their personal progress.

THE ROLE OF THE

Motivational Influence

Mentors who help people grow, by recognising them.

THE ROLE OF THE

Associative Influence

Peers who help people contribute by shared understanding.

| The six emerging affinity influence roles

01
DISRUPTIVE
Influence

Warriors who help people fight by giving them more conviction.

EXAMPLES

Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg, Patagonia, Dove, UnderArmour

02
VISIONARY
Influence

Innovators who help people do more by creating ways forward.

EXAMPLES

Elon Musk, Greta Gerwig, WIRED, Uber, Nike

03
CURATED
Influence

Curators who help people get more by sharing solutions.

EXAMPLES

Oprah, Nagi Maehashi ABC, Google, OpenAI

04
TRANSFORMATIVE
Influence

Coaches who help people achieve their personal progress.

EXAMPLES

Scott Pape, Mark Mason, Peloton, Apple, Oatly

05
MOTIVATIONAL
Influence

Mentors who help people grow, by recognising them.

EXAMPLES

Mia Freedman, Andrew Huberman, Strava, Headspace

06
ASSOCIATIVE
Influence

Peers who help people contribute by shared understanding.

EXAMPLES

Abbie Chatfield, Jackie O, Maccas, Care/Of

These roles can *change or maintain* existing behaviours

Changing
Behaviour

Maintaining
Behaviour

01	02	03	04	05	06
DISRUPTIVE	VISIONARY	CURATED	TRANSFORMATIVE	MOTIVATIONAL	ASSOCIATIVE
Influence	Influence	Influence	Influence	Influence	Influence
Warriors who help people fight by giving them more conviction.	Innovators who help people do more by creating ways forward.	Curators who help people get more by sharing solutions.	Coaches who help people achieve their personal progress.	Mentors who help people grow, by recognising them.	Peers who help people contribute by shared understanding.

Disruptive Influence helps Overcome Challenges

DISRUPTIVE
Influence

Warriors who help people fight by giving them more conviction

EXAMPLES

Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg, Patagonia, Dove, UnderArmour

Who is it for

14%

Of the population feel strong affinity with Visionary Influence

Use it to connect to groups that feel marginalised, particularly when addressing younger audiences.

Male: **13%**
Female: **15%**

18-24: **18%**   24-35: **19%**
35-44: **17%**   45-54: **8%**
55-65: **14%**   65+: **10%**

Urban: **14%**
Rural: **15%**

How to do it

Seek to Overcome Challenge

When people want autonomy, transparency & ability to right a wrong

Show the determination, resilience and a conviction to challenge existing thinking and create rapid change.

97% say 'Staying true to myself, seeking genuineness'

96% say 'holding others accountable for their actions'

94% say 'having the ability to adapt quickly to changes in my life

Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023

When to use it

1.43x

More influential in changing behaviours over maintaining existing

Show Experiential Authority to highlight existing 'wrongs', & relatability, proximity & character through fighting against these.

Male: **8%**
Female: **11%**

18-24:**13%**   24-35: **14%**
35-44: **15%**   45-54: **6%**
55-65: **5%**   65+: **6%**

Urban: **11%**
Rural: **7%**

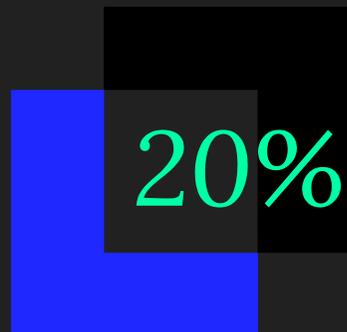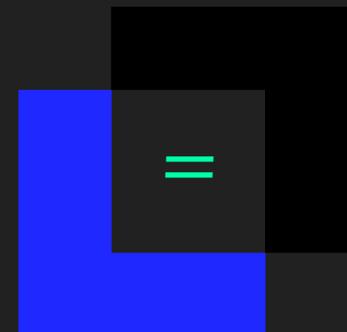# Visionary Influence helps Remove Limitations

Influence

Innovators who help people do more by creating ways forward

EXAMPLES

Elon Musk
Greta Gerwig
WIRED, Nike

Who is it for

20%

Of the population feel strong affinity with Visionary Influence

Use it to connect to audiences seeking greater freedom, particularly males & middle ages.

Male: **23%**
Female: **17%**

18-24: **19%**   24-35: **23%**
35-44: **23%**   45-54: **17%**
55-65: **20%**   65+: **17%**

Urban: **21%**
Rural: **18%**

How to do it

Seek to Remove Limitations

When people seek to discover, learn, achieve goals and stand out

Show imagination, progressiveness & a single-minded conviction in overcoming limitations & constraint.

89% say 'freedom to be unique, stand out from others'

94% say 'discovering and learning new things as often as I can'

81% say 'driven to achieve success of something important in life'

*Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023*

When to use it

=

Equally influential in maintaining & changing existing behaviours

Use Character and Relatability Affinity to demonstrate better alternatives, and Comparative Information to support these.

Male: **20%**
Female: **14%**

18-24: **13%**   24-35: **21%**
35-44: **19%**   45-54: **18%**
55-65: **17%**   65+: **12%**

Urban: **17%**
Rural: **15%**

76

Curated Influence helps Unleash Self-Expression

CURATED
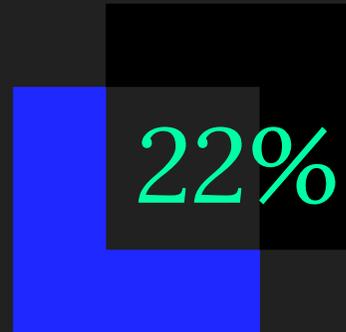
Influence

Curators who help people get more by sharing solutions

EXAMPLES

Oprah, Nagi Maehashi ABC, Google, OpenAI

Who is it for

22%

Of the population feel strong affinity with Curated Influence

Use it to connect to audiences in high-stimulation context, particularly urban & Gens Y & X.

Male: **24%**
Female: **18%**

18-24: **19%**   24-35: **23%**
35-44: **26%**   45-54: **24%**
55-65: **21%**   65+: **21%**

Urban: **24%**
Rural: **19%**

How to do it

Seek to Enhance Self-Expression

When people want simplicity and stimulation to assert & express themselves

Show openness, approachability and a capacity to simplify the complex that enables people to take action.
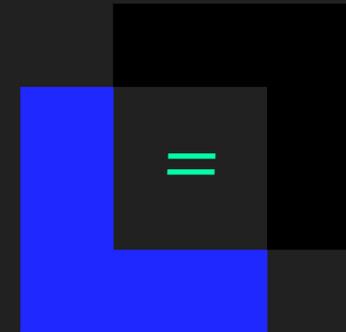
75% say 'wanting to experience other customs and cultures'*

70% say 'more and more, I find I am looking for ways to simplify life'^

86% say expressing my imagination'*

*Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
^Agree Strongly or Agree Slightly
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023

When to use it

=

Influential in maintaining and changing existing behaviours

Use Proximity and Character to create Affinity, supported by Experiential Authority and Comparative Information.

Male: **14%**
Female: **9%**

18-24: **13%**   24-35: **15%**
35-44: **13%**   45-54: **13%**
55-65: **9%**   65+: **8%**

Urban: **12%**
Rural: **11%**

Transformative Influence helps Facilitates Progress

Influence
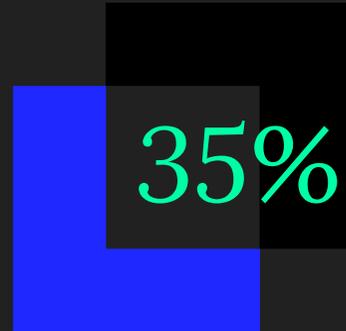
Coaches who help people achieve their personal progress

EXAMPLES

Scott Pape, Mark Mason
Peleton, Apple, Oatly

Who is it for

35%

Of people feel strong affinity to Transformative Influence

Use it to connect to people seeking to gain greater control of aspects of life, across genders & generations.

Male: **32%**
Female: **38%**

18-24: **46%**   24-35: **42%**
35-44: **36%**   45-54: **39%**
55-65: **31%**   65+: **20%**

Urban: **36%**
Rural: **33%**

How to do it

Seek to Give People Greater Control

When people seek progress to goals in order feel in control

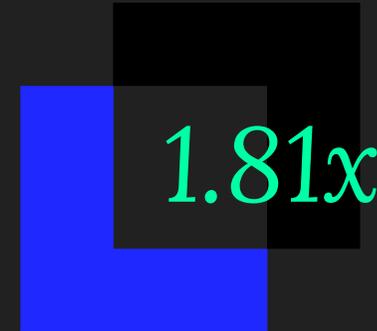Show positivity, practicality and the pathway to progress that empowers people to make best choices for them.

96% say 'prioritising my physical and mental wellbeing'

96% say 'taking steps to ensure my physical safety

94% say 'being focused on the present, living in the moment'

*Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023*

When to use it

1.81x

More influential in changing behaviours than maintaining existing

Amplify Character and Experiential Authority to create Proximity, highlight changes with Comparative Information.

Male: **25%**
Female: **32%**

18-24: **36%**   24-35: **27%**
35-44: **30%**   45-54: **33%**
55-65: **25%**   65+: **25%**

Urban: **29%**
Rural: **30%**

78

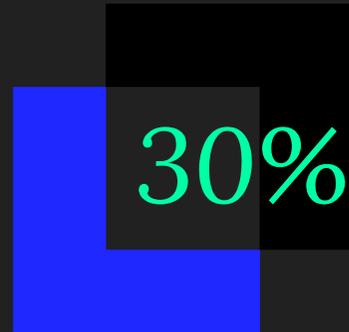# Motivational Influence helps Foster Autonomy

Influence

Mentors who
help people grow,
by recognising
them

Mia Freedman, Andrew
Huberman, Strava,
Headspace

Who is it for

30%

Of the population feel
strong affinity with
Motivational Influencers

Use it to connect to audiences
seeking greater understanding &
relatability, across generations.

Male: **28%**
Female: **31%**

18-24: **28%**	24-35: **31%**
35-44: **27%**	45-54: **29%**
55-65: **29%**	65+: **33%**

Urban: **29%**
Rural: **31%**

How to do it

Seek to Give Positive Perspective

When people seek clarity,
perspective and
prioritisation of goals

Show experience, empathy and
openness to collaboration in order to
signal listening and people-centricity.

87% say 'wanting to live by clear rules and
guidelines'*

61% say 'feeling I can make a difference to the
world around me through the choices I make and
actions that I take'^

79% say 'obedience: doing what is asked of me'*

*Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
^Agree Strongly or Agree Slightly
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023

When to use it

1.25x

More influential in
maintaining behaviours
than changing behaviours

Create affinity through Character, Relatability
and Experiential Authority, Comparative
Information to inform decisions.

Male: **9%**
Female: **8%**

18-24: **9%**	24-35: **9%**
35-44: **9%**	45-54: **8%**
55-65: **8%**	65+: **6%**

Urban: **9%**
Rural: **7%**

Associative Influence helps Build Relationships

ASSOCIATIVE
Influence

Peers who help people contribute by shared understanding

EXAMPLES

Abbie Chatfield, Jackie O, Maccas, Care/Of

Who is it for

46%

Of the population feel strong affinity with Associative Influencers

Use it to connect to people seeking connection, across all generations but particularly Gen X and Boomers.

Male: **42%**
Female: **49%**

18-24: **46%**   24-35: **38%**
35-44: **37%**   45-54: **48%**
55-65: **49%**   65+: **57%**

Urban: **43%**
Rural: **51%**

How to do it

Seek to Create Commonalities

When people seek stronger connection and commonalities with others

Be open, engaging and create commonalities that allow people to feel a sense of connection and reassurance.

97% say 'having deep understanding of other people's feelings & thoughts'

91% say 'maintaining social relationships with friends & family'

91% say 'seeking to connect with real people in everything I do'

Extremely or Very or Somewhat Important
Nat Rep population, Kantar Global Monitor 2023

When to use it

1.52x

More influential in maintaining existing behaviours than changing

Use Relatability, Proximity and Character to create affinity, supported by Experiential Authority to subtly guide decision making.
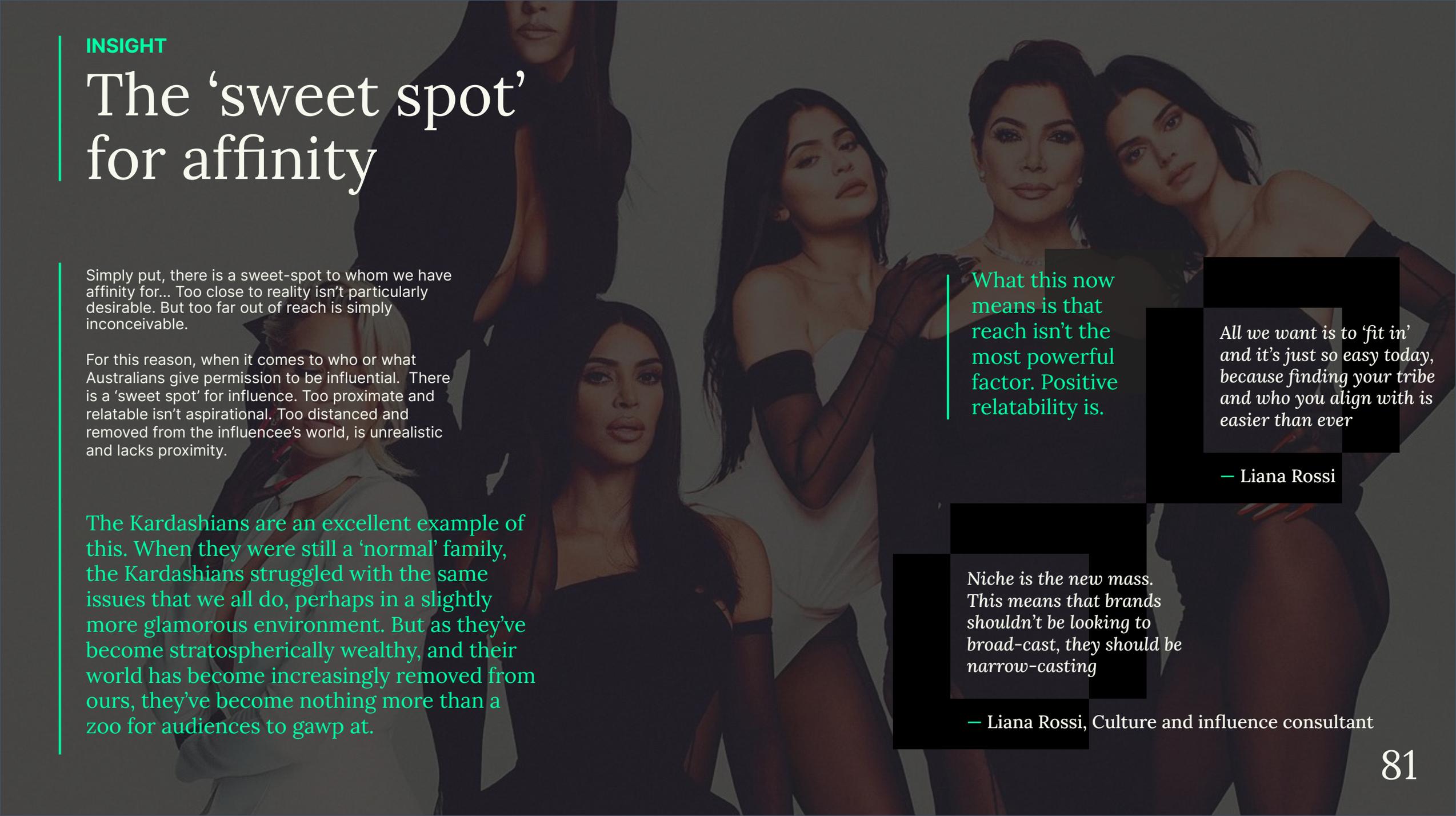
Male: **22%**
Female: **30%**

18-24: **16%**   24-35: **14%**
35-44: **13%**   45-54: **23%**
55-65: **35%**   65+: **43%**

Urban: **22%**
Rural: **33%**

80

The 'sweet spot' for affinity

Simply put, there is a sweet-spot to whom we have affinity for... Too close to reality isn't particularly desirable. But too far out of reach is simply inconceivable.

For this reason, when it comes to who or what Australians give permission to be influential. There is a 'sweet spot' for influence. Too proximate and relatable isn't aspirational. Too distanced and removed from the influencee's world, is unrealistic and lacks proximity.

The Kardashians are an excellent example of this. When they were still a 'normal' family, the Kardashians struggled with the same issues that we all do, perhaps in a slightly more glamorous environment. But as they've become stratospherically wealthy, and their world has become increasingly removed from ours, they've become nothing more than a zoo for audiences to gawp at.

What this now means is that reach isn't the most powerful factor. Positive relatability is.

All we want is to 'fit in' and it's just so easy today, because finding your tribe and who you align with is easier than ever

— Liana Rossi

Niche is the new mass. This means that brands shouldn't be looking to broad-cast, they should be narrow-casting

— Liana Rossi, Culture and influence consultant

81
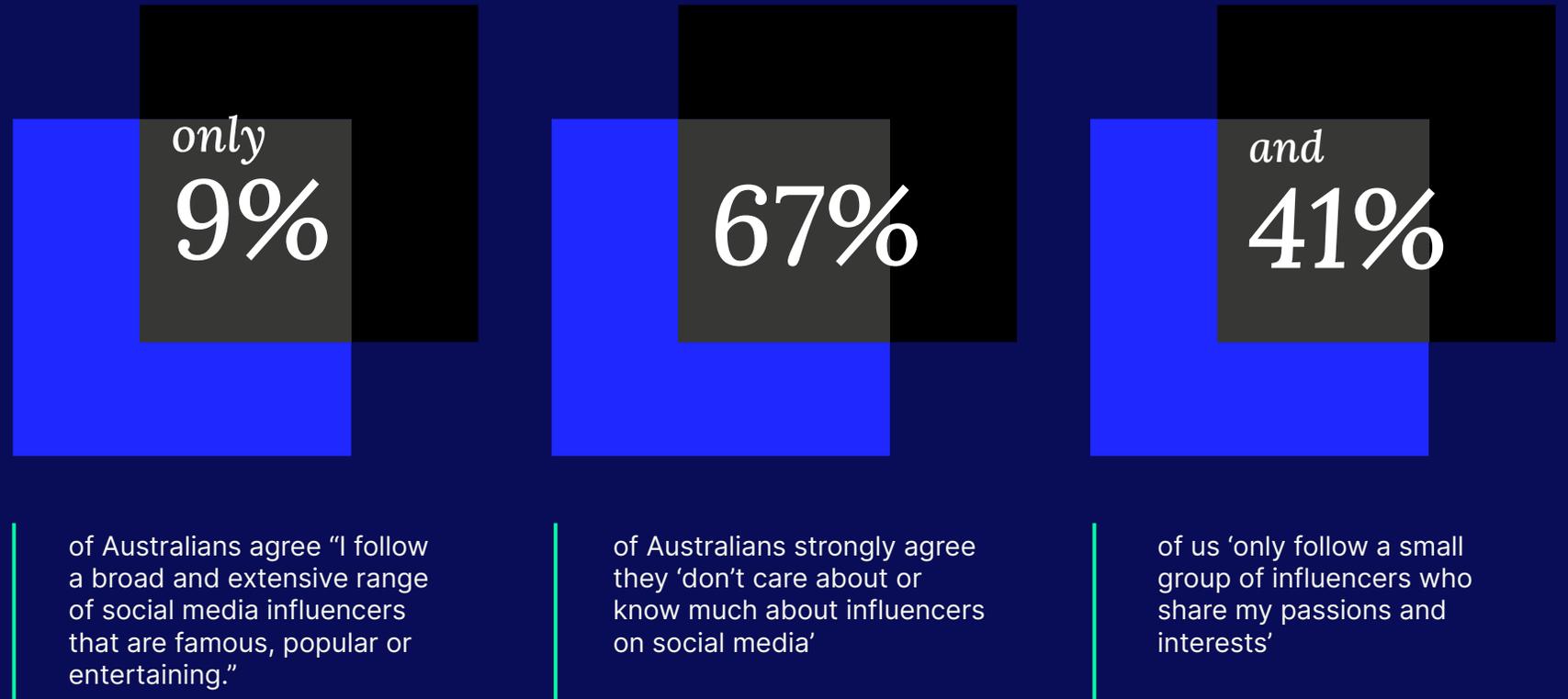
IMPLICATION

Reach doesn't = influence. *Relatability does.*

Which is why influencers aren't the answer.

As we look to find new sources of influence, many in the world of marketing have mistaken the reach of so-called influencers, for the outcomes of real influence.

In fact, Australians actively are turning away from self-proclaimed influencers in droves.

The number of us 'seeking new ideas from influencers on social media' has halved in the last 5 years, dropping from 22% in 2019 to 11% today.

only **9%**

of Australians agree "I follow a broad and extensive range of social media influencers that are famous, popular or entertaining."

67%

of Australians strongly agree they 'don't care about or know much about influencers on social media'

and **41%**

of us 'only follow a small group of influencers who share my passions and interests'

Leveraging *affinity* for growth.

The Influence Codes

Affinity builds desire at scale.

In the modern era, the **old methods** of creating influence **still work**. However, they are substantially **less potent** than methods which prioritise Affinity.

Considering Aston Martin for example. Whilst technical information about product superiority or test-drives may have encouraged certain customers to choose the brand, it is hard to dispute that being featured as James Bond's car has done far more to build wide-spread desirability for the brand.

The same can be said for Tesla. In 2018, Elon Musk revealed that 82% of model 3 owners bought the car without ever having driven one. A testament to **power of the high affinity** felt for those who had already chosen Tesla.
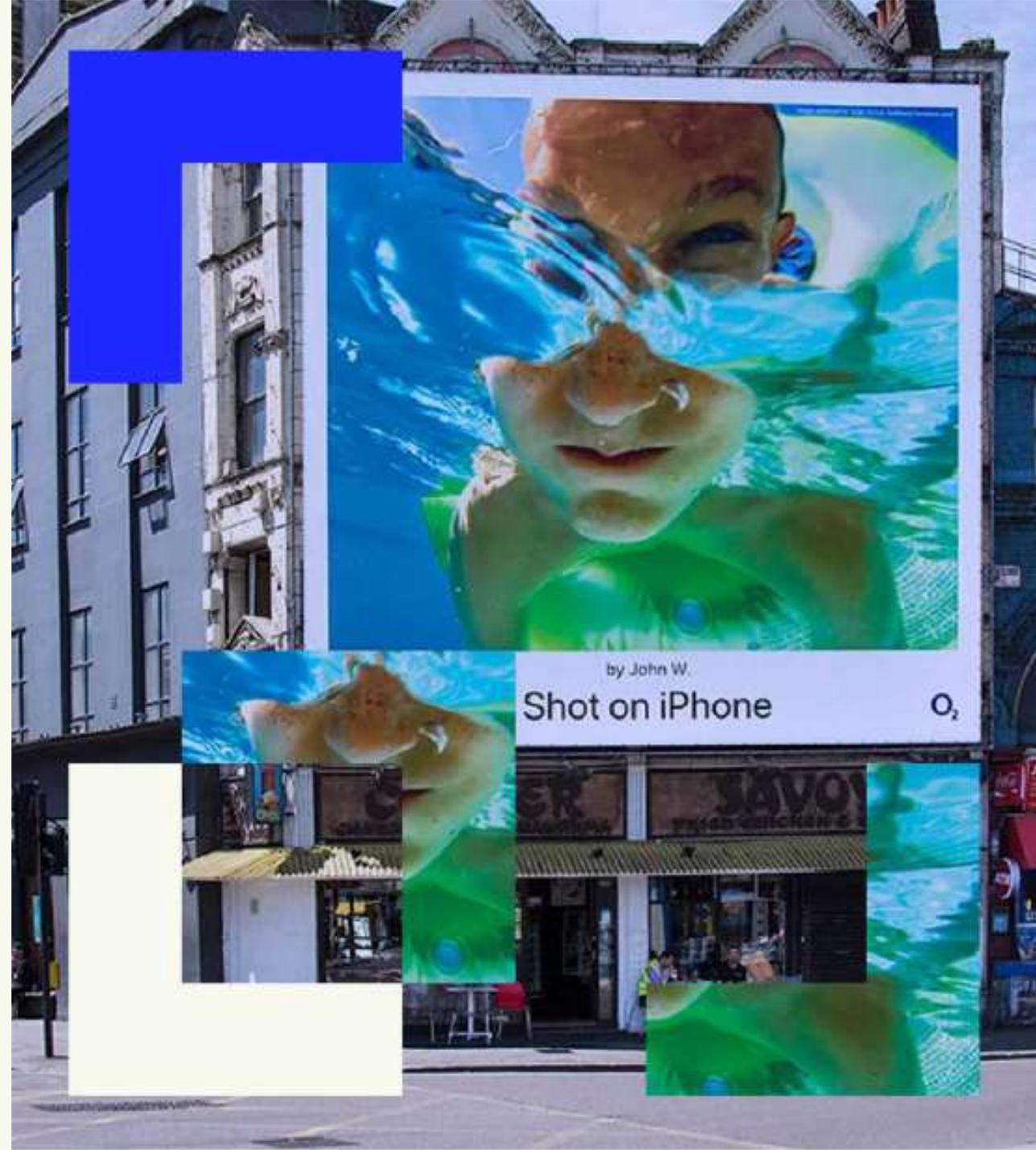
Affinity eases the fear of failure.

As previously mentioned, for many decisions, the **fear of making an incorrect choice** and the resulting damage to ego is creating more uncertainty and heightening the levels of **anxiety**.

And whilst we may seek more information and knowledge to help, for the vast majority of us, more **technical specifications and detail can be baffling**.

Take for example mobile phones. Camera quality can be broken down into number of megapixels, lens arrangement, processing power and pixel size. From one manufacturer to another, defining which product is better can be hard to ascertain unless you have a deep understanding of the technical specifications and differences.

To overcome this, Apple developed the 'shot on iPhone' campaign. Showcasing incredible photographs that had been taken by regular iPhone users, the brand created a perception that customers could also achieve incredible results too.

Socially 'norming' the use of iPhone through an elegant and highly visible demonstration, this simple exposition **build affinity** between current and potential customers, easing their fear of making a poor choice.

Marketing's new magic trick.

The majority of the marketing world is still labouring under the assumptions that authority and information are the most critical signals that influence customer choice.

However, in the face of this new research, it appears that marketing may have a new magic trick.

Building affinity will not only drive desirability, resonance, loyalty, pricing strength and resilience.

But even more importantly... In a world where affinity reigns supreme... increasing affinity breeds advocacy; The steroid injection for growth.

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Affinity pulls all the way through the funnel

For all types of decisions, affinity is the dominant factor in delivering influence. Proximity, Relatability and Character are the pre-eminent sources of influence in both consideration and conversion.

BEING PROXIMATE
152ix
Rank #4

BEING RELATABLE
178ix
Rank #2

BEING HONEST & SELFLESS
190ix
Rank #1

BEING PROXIMATE
160ix
Rank #2

BEING RELATABLE
157ix
Rank #3

BEING HONEST & SELFLESS
173ix
Rank #1

In general decisions, *Proximity, Relatability and Character* are the most powerful influence attributes alongside Experience and Authenticity

In specific decisions, the same three attributes remain the top three factors of influence, *with proximity becoming more important*
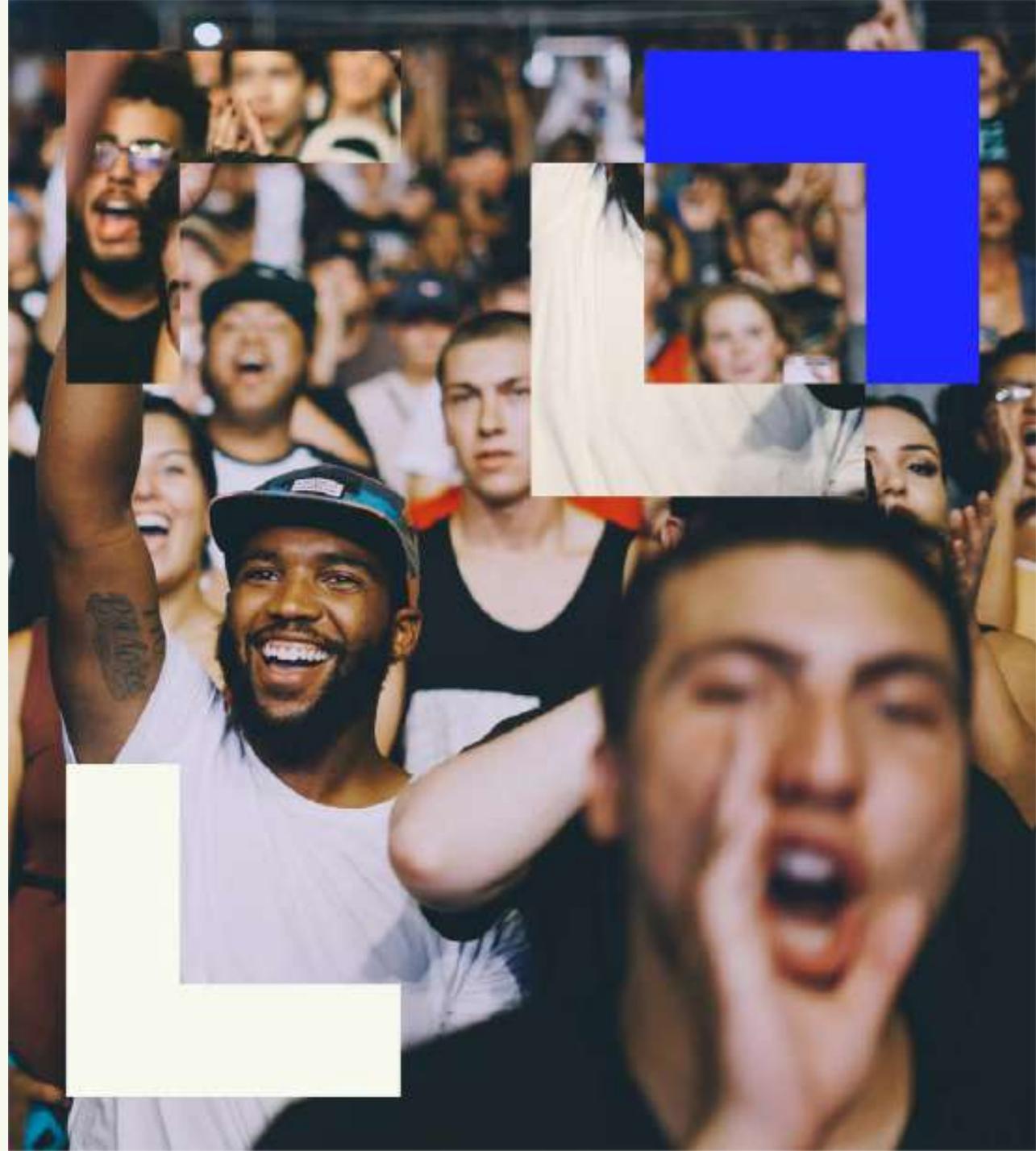
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Community is the shortcut to building affinity. You've got to give something... before you get.

In almost all cases, the definition of community represents a pre-existing affinity group. Which means that if you are able to participate and **contribute positively to a community**, it can accelerate your affinity growth amongst that community's members.

Brands should be thinking about how to **invest in the community first** before they seek a value exchange. Self-less and honest participation in community, is key to developing the all-important components of character and relatability...whilst also increasing your brand's proximity to the issues and topics your influence target cares about.

We should think community, but we talk audience: "You cannot just buy into a community, but instead you have to do the work to understand its people and their commonalities, what makes them belong and how they find joy."

— Marty Wirth, Founder & Managing Director, Present Company

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Community participation overcomes cynicism

Where cynicism is the default behaviour for Aussie consumers, brands need to work hard to establish trust and build the permission to be able to recognised as influential.

Once a brand is seen to be behaving in good character, through community participation, permissibility for influence increases.

90%

of Australians say honesty: being trustworthy' is extremely or very important to them

79%

of us say that 'actively seek communities that share their beliefs & interests' is extremely of very important to them

70%

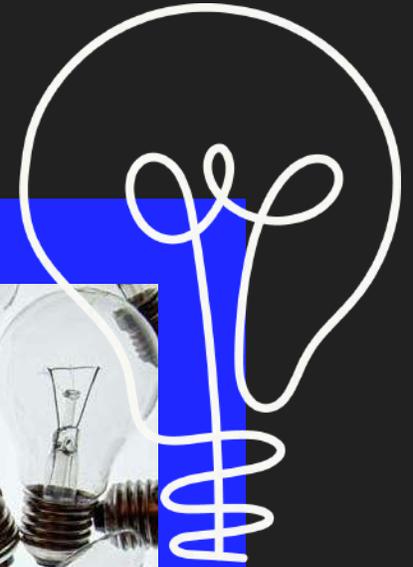of Australians will pay more for products that are better for the environment

60%

of Australians consider the causes brands support when making purchasing decisions

90

You have to *earn* the right *to have a voice.*

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Conclusions
for both the short-term and long-term.

The Influence Codes

Some of the fundamentals of marketing, are now fundamentally wrong.

We have always looked for influence to help us make decisions. And whilst information and authority were the most dominant factors historically, times have changed.

We are now faced with more decisions than before. But we live in a world where there is infinite information and multiple conflicting authorities. The signals we looked for to help us decide are now harder to see.

The result is that we are feeling greater anxiety and stress in our decision-making due to the significant cultural and environmental shifts that have redefined our decisioning-context.

This increase in doubt and uncertainty has opened the door for influence to be more necessary for consumers as they try to find more confidence in their choices.

Because our evolutionary biology cannot keep up with these changes, we are being forced to adapt. This means that the signals we have traditionally looked for to help us interrogate our decisions has fundamentally changed.

In this new decisioning context, there is a new model of influence that reframes some of marketing's most tightly held dogma.

The factors of influence have been rebalanced towards affinity.

Previously, information and Authority were the most potent influence factors. Today, Affinity is the most powerful tool to leverage in order to deliver powerful influence, advocacy and most importantly...growth.

Across all geographies, genders, ages and social standing, affinity reigns supreme in delivering influence for brands, business and behaviours.

But the signals that the public are looking for, in order to make better decisions are being broadly ignored by the marketing world. Sadly, in many occasions, the efforts of marketers (to provide more information and authority) are actively serving to increase the uncertainty and doubt that consumers are feeling.

In the short-term, there are some reframes that can be adopted to develop influence.

Firstly, at times of high-cognitive load, affinity can ease the decision-making pathway.

Secondly, there is a goldilocks zone for affinity. It is important therefore not to conflate reach, with relatability and ultimately resonance.

Thirdly, brands no longer need to maintain a ruthless rigidity when it comes to brand tone. Different postures can build a brand's affinity depending upon the decisioning context and behaviour you wish to create.

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Growth can be engineered for those brands who re-calibrate appropriately.

Armed with this new knowledge, brands have an opportunity to re-calibrate the way they seek to develop influence in the long-term.

Despite what consumers say, more information is only further creating anxiety and uncertainty for the public. Rather than adding to the deluge, you can build permissibility and desirability, by investing in affinity actions and community building.

Considering that the vast majority of brand discussions occur peer to peer, it is time to rethink how marketing and communications could build influence differently.

Rather than utilising communications to create a moment of persuasion... brands can now take a broader and more holistic approach to building influence through the affinity that drives consumer advocacy instead.

Because in the modern era, advocacy from a high affinity source is the true steroid injection for growth.

The Growth Distillery × Ogilvy

Sharing
is caring...

The Influence Codes