



Ogilvy Lecture delivered by Jan Gooding

It is a huge honour to be invited to give this lecture. David Ogilvy was a towering leader of his generation, with many of the things he said still being quoted and referred to today.

Of course, some of his more memorable lines, such as ‘the consumer is not a moron, she’s your wife’ jar a little. I’m sure you are all aware that latest records show that half the women in the UK are unmarried! However, I am prepared forgive him for also being a man of his time, with the conventional expectations that came with it.

He often said that direct marketing was the foundation stone of successful advertising, because of its commercial nature. The imperative of selling a product, and the measurement associated with direct response, kept advertisers grounded and avoiding whimsy.

Browsing through his quotes, I was struck again by one of the remarks he made.

Namely, that ‘Political advertising ought to be stopped.’ It's the only really dishonest kind of advertising that's left. It's totally dishonest.’

Probably we would all agree that political claims are pretty dodgy, as they are not held to the standards we live by with the ASA. Those of you who have worked on political campaigns will have justified it to yourself, on the basis of freedom of speech, the cut and thrust of political debate, and the inevitable constraints that come with trying to put complex arguments on a poster.

But even David Ogilvy could not possibly have imagined the power of a force like unregulated social media. Nor, as a person who placed such emphasis on truthfulness, on the context in which we now find ourselves, where lying is commonplace.

We have travelled a long distance from the headline 'Labour isn't working' to the now infamous 'Breaking Point' poster, with the supporting claim that, 'Turkey is going to join the EU and millions of people will flock to the UK'.

A lie so blatant that no politician now wants to be associated with it.

We are in a world that is swirling with fake news, fake facts and ultimately, leaders who are shameless in their peddling of falsehoods.

I worry. I think we have lost control of the internet and the development of technology.

As someone who was brought up on a small island in the West Indies which was periodically devastated by hurricanes, I know that we have to respect the forces of nature when they are unleashed. But we are not completely helpless. Strong forces can be mitigated by anticipating their effects.

I also know that propaganda is not new. Unscrupulous political leaders have manipulated the population over and over again throughout history.

But I do think, that those of us who work in marketing, have to hold the mirror up at this point, and ask ourselves what responsibility we have, for contributing to the current, so called, 'trust crisis'.

I say, 'so called', because as my colleague from Jericho Chambers, Robert Philips, has so often pointed out, it would be more honest to call it a crisis of leadership. People have never really trusted financial services companies, or advertising, and have been sceptical about their claims for generations. So, to point out the lack of trust in banks and insurance companies is not 'new news'.

But no longer knowing who to trust at all, is indeed new.

Ultimately lack of trust is the consequence of poor and dishonest leadership.

Too many leaders in positions of great power and influence have colluded with, and contributed to, the undermining of evidence based, truthful discourse. Thousands of small decisions, driven by commercial imperatives and short-term profit-taking, have got us to where we are today.

I am taking the opportunity of this platform to share my concerns, because I feel it is something this industry is uniquely placed to do something about. It is

not too late for a new generation of brave marketing leaders, to grab hold of the situation and start turning back the tide. In fact, perhaps our professional understanding of the dynamics, makes us particularly well placed for making the correction.

I wonder if the root causes can be traced back to when The Conservative Party appointed Saatchi and Saatchi, and Philip Gould moved from being an advertising executive to political campaigner for 'New Labour'.

They applied professional marketing skills to political campaigning, and defined messages that targeted particular voter segments, and intoxicated a generation of politicians with the power of a focussed narrative.

A new era of PR professionals followed, who we came to call 'spin doctors'. People who would intervene, and change the narrative, of almost any media scenario in favour of the paying customer.

An emerging era of 24 hours news, hungry for the next chapter in the story, greedily gobbled up the moving stories that were fed to them.

This period marked the first era of privacy being invaded at scale. The 'phone hacking' scandal unfolded ... bringing down The News of the World in its wake.

I look back on that now as almost innocent times.

Journalists knew they were behaving badly, but did it anyway. And we all understood the technology, and could easily appreciate that the law (and ethics) had been broken, when journalists gained access to people's voice messages.

And yet, in spite of this first pass at privacy invasion, and its devastating impact - how easily we fell into the thrall of digital marketing, and the unfettered access given to people's lives.

Unregulated.

Outside the law.

With apathetic consumers who had unwittingly given away their privacy in return for free services.

The scale of what was now possible was thrilling.

We all helped to create the conditions that led to the monster Cambridge Analytica. We were so excited by what was now possible, that we didn't want to look too hard at the dark side of data analytics.

We have poured more and more money into advertising on social media sites, knowing that the data reporting its audience reach and effectiveness was both unaudited and false.

We embraced programmatic buying, and now 'Artificial Intelligence', in spite of the concerns about brand and customer safety, because it was mesmerizingly efficient.

There were big profits to be made and we were apparently prepared to live with the waste.

None of us have been part of this because we are bad people. It just wasn't considered commercially sensible to resist the tide.

If I am being generous, I would say that I don't think people have sufficiently understood the technology and dangers. If I am unkind, I think those who did - turned a blind eye because profits were prioritised.

Dishonesty is insidious. It's hard to stop it. It takes courage and leadership to address.

I hope I am not coming across as naïve about commerce. I understand that brands and advertisers set out to simply promote their products in a favourable light, and don't deliberately do harm. I also know that profit is not a dirty word.

But I am asking everyone to help redress the balance. I am here to ask you to use your influence, to help restore the value of honest dealings.

The way we do business has consequences. The way brands behave influences the world of politics and helps to shape society.

As the chair of LGBT equality organisation Stonewall, I have seen first-hand the dark side of fake news, and highly polished propaganda being pumped through targeted, shareable, social media campaigns. I have also seen the positive impact of brands and business as a countering force for good.

You will have seen the protestors outside Parkfield and Anderton Park Schools in Birmingham, wildly angry because the government has legislated to introduce relationship education in primary schools.

Not sex education, relationship education. So, children would read stories where two male penguins are parents thereby introducing them to the idea that they may have classmates who have same sex parents. It is education that exposes children to the many different kinds of family that exist - and explains the legal and cultural context of the UK.

These protestors happen to be Muslim. But they could just as easily be Christian. Which of the great faiths is in play is not in itself significant, but the extremism that sits at the heart of it, is.

I am the first to acknowledge the leadership shown by more mainstream and moderate Muslim voices in Birmingham, and elsewhere, who have declared unequivocally that these people do not speak for them or their faith. And are the first to recognise the danger of a 'pick and mix' approach to equality.

But the danger is that religious extremists believe there is a hierarchy of freedoms and rights.

Whereby religious belief trumps all other human rights. For them, it is not enough to respect different points of view and agree to disagree.

They forget the common values of love and respect that are at the heart of most religious belief.

It doesn't matter what the law is.

It doesn't matter what harm and offense is caused to LGBT people.

It doesn't matter that The World Health Organisation is clear that being gay, or transgender, is not a mental health issue but just part of who you are.

It won't matter to them that the government is committed to stopping people from using so called 'cure therapies' on LGBT people.

These people declare that it is 'irresponsible' to teach children about different kinds of families and relationships.

I have had sight of videos, and other literature, advocating that children might 'catch' their sexual orientation, or become confused about their gender identity, just by knowing LGBT people exist. This is the very nonsense that has fuelled the fear, hatred and persecution of gay people for centuries.

Of course, parents want to understand what their children are learning at school. And to be reassured that it is being done in a way their child will understand, and they can discuss with them at home.

But what I am concerned about is the money is pouring into the UK, from Christian fundamentalists in America, funding campaigns targeting parents and teachers with false narratives about LGBT people.

Using all the techniques proven to be effective by politicians through YOUTube and social media.

Twitter accounts have been set up which automatically block LGBT organisations and activists so their fake content cannot be challenged.

Why do I raise this with you today?

It is because over the last 30 years of Stonewall's existence it is **brands and business that have been our greatest allies**. The active engagement of leaders in organisations who have wanted to provide an inclusive workplace for their LGBT staff has been a gamechanger.

They have invested in the education of managers, the evolution of policies, and zero-tolerance over discrimination and bullying at work. Striving to make the workplace a safe haven.

The natural next step was to address their services to customers. The more enlightened organisations became, the more they were prepared to consider how well LGBT people were accommodated and represented in their marketing.

My own employer Aviva started to provide pension statements that acknowledged same sex spouses, and trained staff how to sensitively handle contact from a customer who wished to change their gender identity on their policy documents.

Most powerful of all, brands have acted as advocates and allies. It was brands who were major sponsors of football like Adidas, Aon and Barclays who formed Team Pride and really got behind Stonewall's 'Rainbow Laces' campaign until finally the Premier League Clubs all got on board.

The significance of major global football clubs like Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United tweeting 'hashtag' 'Come out for LGBT' is a big deal. As well as the good it does in UK - it is seen by their fans in those countries where being gay is still illegal or, even worse, a capital offense.

You will notice that LGBT rights are weaponised by some countries who want to distance themselves from the global north.

It is no accident that just as some countries have been advancing the human and economic rights of LGBT people, others have been moving in the opposite direction.

The economic power and sway of big business on the side of LGBT, and other vulnerable minority groups, at this time is absolutely vital.

The support of brands and organisations around the world during Pride really matters.

The value of the visible acceptance of LGBT people, by those who are powerful, helping to create safety at a time when hate crimes are rising is huge. It is felt in small rural towns and communities, as well as capital cities.

I know that brands can be accused of 'Woke-washing'.

I am the first to acknowledge that there are brands who are clumsy, ill-informed and opportunistic on every big issue from climate change to racism.

We all need to rediscover the ability to engage with the complex and ambiguous, by doing the work. Looking at the facts. Being open to research

and evidence. And questioning the provenance and trustworthiness of our information.

We have to show that the facts play a part in how we make difficult decisions, as well as our moral compass.

I have also noticed that some companies and brands have also got a bit lost on the topic of purpose.

They seem to be finding it difficult to define in a meaningful way. Let alone follow through into operations.

I can see that to be able to state a 'purpose beyond profit' has the appeal of simplicity and single-mindedness. It also offers the potential for differentiation. And yet can be quickly limited and become lost in translation.

People have to make difficult decisions every day, trying to balance out the demands of multiple conflicting stakeholders. It can become very difficult to agree what 'doing the right thing' - which lives up to the purpose - actually is.

At Aviva, our purpose was defined as 'freeing people from fear of uncertainty'.

A noble enough cause. But colleagues generally found the company values of 'care more', 'never rest', 'create legacy' and 'kill complexity' more useful....

Rooted as they were in behaviour and attitude.

So, how do we do reassert ourselves as business leaders and brands who can be trusted?

One useful framework within which to navigate the relationship between purpose, communications, leadership and trust - is that of **Trustworthiness**.

Academic research confirms that there are four principle drivers which build trustworthiness in an organisation.

Namely.... Honesty, Competence, Reliability and Benevolence, each of which can be made tangible for leaders seeking greater trustworthiness between stakeholders.

Honesty is about words and actions matching up.

That means if you make a promise about your product or service, you need to keep it. After all, despite being bottom of the Edelman Trust Barometer, banks are trusted to hold our money safe in our current accounts,, and not to charge a fee, because that is what they have evidently done for generations.

Competence means your products and services must work.

Brands provide a stamp of quality. It is their most fundamental reason for being and we should equally ensure that consumers have confidence in the efficacy of what we offer.

Reliability is delivering what you said, when you said you would, and providing value to customers.

And when, as inevitably happens, there are failures. Every effort should be put into making things right, quickly and with good grace.

Benevolence is ensuring that nothing you do should do harm to the planet or people.

Isn't it odd that this now even needs to be said? But modern slavery, the strain on the world's resources, and the emerging threats to labour from AI mean we are being presented with unprecedented responsibility for the sustainability of the world, and everyone inhabiting it.

All of this is easy to say, and perhaps even a little obvious - but it isn't easy to do.

What I think what is useful about these four drivers, is that they each relate to behaviour, that should be tangible and possible to evidence.

And as always - what we do, is so much more important that what we say.

So finally, what does this mean for us as leaders.

My great friend, Oliver Pauley, from Bunhill, has persuaded me that we have not yet escaped 'the age of reason'.

He argues, that **this is not the first time that technological change has created an explosion of content and access** – both good things – and, at the same time, seen an explosion of controversial material.

The printing press, mass literacy and the rise of newspapers, radio, film, cable television, and VHS video – all delivered exponential surges in content and access. They all came with their own excesses and caused real concerns in the societies in which they landed.

But, a combination of regulatory and commercial pressures, and social change, generally managed to exert a **corrective influence over time**.

We have libel laws that hold publishers as well as authors to account, advertising standards regulations, press regulation to a degree, and powerful broadcast media rules.

There are also rigorous market disclosure rules that mandate us not only not to lie, but proactively to tell the truth, as soon as we become aware of it.

And at the same time, media audiences are becoming more sophisticated in how they consume new content and **they reassert a basic human need for truth and confidence in the information they receive**.

They are also alert to the issues around their privacy, and resist being stalked and monitored as they go about their lives.

It's important to hold onto that insight.

People do actually want to know who to believe and trust, and their behaviour will be influenced by it. This is important territory for brands and the organisations and leaders that sit behind them, to leverage.

Telling the truth is powerful. People respond positively to it. They don't like being lied to.

And I believe they don't easily forget, or forgive, lying.

You only have to observe the ongoing vilification of Tony Blair, who deliberately misled parliament, and the country, to lead us into an unwanted war..... to understand that there are consequences.

The Marketing Society makes much of encouraging leaders to be brave.

For me that means that we have to find the courage to speak our minds, and act accordingly.

We need our marketing leaders to be **fearless activists**, who are able to **accommodate dissenting voices**.

To be an inclusive leader requires us to hear the diversity of opinions, based on different life experiences, and outlook.

I think perhaps those of us who work in the creative industries, understand more readily than others, the **power of divergent thinking and genuine debate**.

We know that all ideas are enriched and strengthened if they are developed collaboratively and built on by people from different disciplines and perspectives.

We will judge our leaders by how they **navigate the trade-offs** between the demands of shareholders, staff, customers and the community in which they operate.

And would hope they have a transparent **framework of principles**, to underpin the way in which they make difficult decisions, as they strive to reach their goals,

It is an imperative that marketing **leaders are accountable** for what they do, and perhaps increasingly important, what they choose **not to do**.

This is what will help us know whether our leaders can be trusted.

We need marketing leaders who are much more than brave, **we need leaders who are trustworthy**.

That means leaders who tell the truth and say what needs to be said.

Who demonstrably do what is right for their staff and customers.

Who speak up for others who are less powerful than they are.

Leaders who educate themselves deeply on issues, bothering to understand the facts before coming to an opinion.

People who are prepared to step forward and lead, and not just slavishly mimic or follow.

I hope to have another decade ahead of me working in this industry and I am certainly reaffirming my commitment to honest dealings based on solid facts.

I hope you will all join me.