

Bouncing back from COVID-19: Five data-driven strategies for SEA marketers

Stephanie Caunter and Simon Samuel

Source: WARC Exclusive, March 2020

Downloaded from WARC

Marketers can still bounce back despite the COVID-19 outbreak threatening an economic decline in Southeast Asia; digital marketing agency ADA shares five strategies for marketers to navigate through this period of economic uncertainty.

- The situation remains uncertain in Southeast Asia and there is a natural inclination to panic as some brands face immediate cash-flow problems.
- Contrary to most reports, not all countries experienced the same effects in the travel industry.
- More than 70% of Southeast Asian marketers believe they are prepared for omnichannel marketing.

This article is part of a special WARC Snapshot focused on enabling brand marketers to re-strategise amid the unprecedented disruption caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak.

[Read more.](#)

Why it matters

Southeast Asia may be considered a single sub-region within Asia by many brands but market conditions and consumer sentiments can vary widely. To find opportunities in a diverse region that can be described as unevenly impacted by the ongoing outbreak, the first step is to look at what the available data reveals and adjust accordingly.

Takeaways

- Shift your advertising dollars to tailored campaigns to leverage emerging trends across different SEA markets.
- There is inequality in the spread of information on COVID-19. Brands can cut through the clutter by creating awareness in countries with a high number of reported cases but a low number of videos being published.
- Negative bias is one method brands can leverage to make an impact in a positive way.

Southeast Asia is still reeling from the effects of the on-going coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, with **Singapore**, **Thailand**, and **Malaysia** downgrading their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecasts and introducing stimulus packages. There is also growing concern in the financial markets as stocks continue to plunge.



Fig. 1 and Fig. 1.1: As Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand's financial markets dropped, the use of financial apps increased.

We analysed data from **XACT**, our proprietary Database Management Platform (DMP), to uncover some interesting insights on travel patterns during the COVID-19 outbreak. Contrary to most reports, not all countries experienced the same effects in the travel industry.

People travelling to Thailand from Malaysia and Singapore remained steady; while people from Malaysia travelling to and from Singapore still peaked during the Lunar New Year period – and overall travel between the two countries is bouncing back quickly.

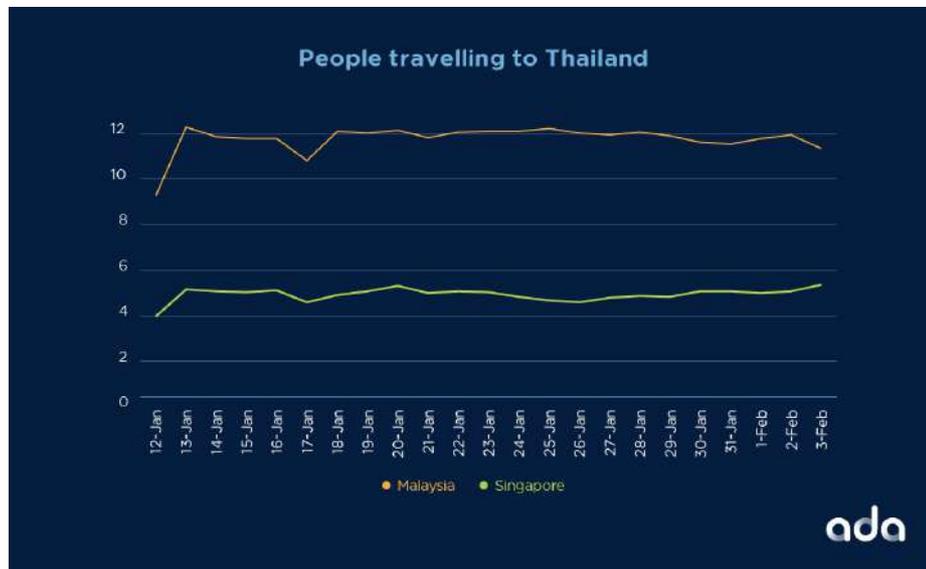


Fig. 2 and Fig. 2.1: People from Singapore and Malaysia continued to travel to Thailand; while people in Malaysia still continued to travel to Singapore.

Similar trends were spotted in the retail industry. Physical footfall traffic to shopping malls in Thailand remained on a steady trend, despite fluctuations; Singapore saw a decrease; and Malaysia is recovering from a sudden drop.

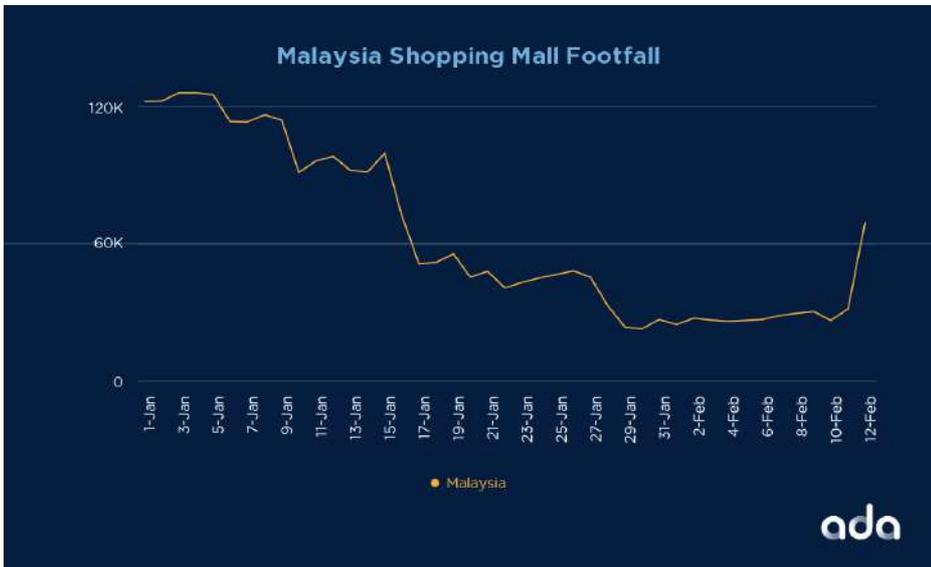
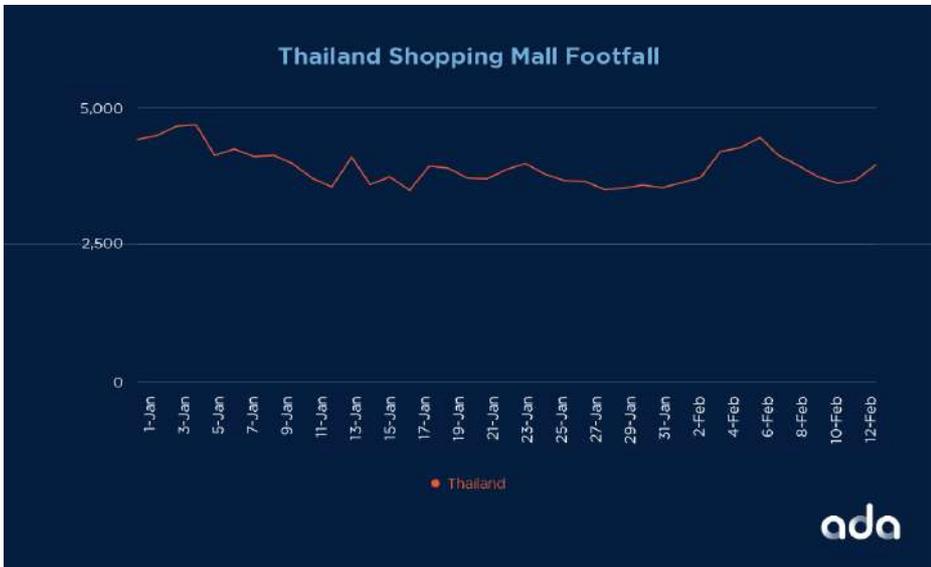


Fig. 3, Fig. 3.1, and Fig. 3.2: Decrease in physical footfall traffic to shopping malls in Singapore; while Thailand remained relatively steady; and Malaysia is bouncing back from an initial drop.

Overall, the situation remains uncertain in Southeast Asia. For many brands, small and large, there is a natural

inclination to panic as some brands we spoke to faced immediate cash-flow problems. However, as our [2020 Outlook for Southeast Asian Marketers](#) shows (which had predicted a possible economic slowdown even prior to COVID-19 making its presence felt), economies in Southeast Asia are some of the most resilient. We've been through [recessions](#), [political uncertainty](#), and [inflation](#). And yet, Southeast Asian marketers always find a way to bounce back.

In response to COVID-19, here are four ways any agency and/or marketers can build up their sales and marketing strategies with the help of data analytics.

1. Lean into the data

Most brands sit on a mound of valuable first-party data, and if not, there are increasing options to get hold of third-party data. Of course, the trick is to get insights from this data, which allows you to shape your tactics and strategies.

Given the COVID-19 outbreak, marketers might be asking these key questions:

- Which of my customers are most affected by the outbreak, and who are not?
- Is the change in consumer behaviour just temporary, or will there be long-term repercussions?
- Are there potential or competitor's customers that I have not yet reached out to?

To answer these questions, look at what the data tells you. Our XACT DMP data shows that:

- Travel, shopping, and dining out in Singapore were most affected.
- However, we see a steady trend for these categories in Thailand.
- Meanwhile, in Malaysia, while we saw an initial dip, this eventually began to normalise as shopping and dining out picked up again.

In response to what the data reveals, you might shift your advertising dollars using tailored campaigns to seek out potential customers in Thailand; or target specific personas in Malaysia who are likely to start consuming again once shopping and dining out picks up.

But if you wanted to get really precise information and find where your key customers (and your competitors' customers) are, there are a growing number of sophisticated tools and methods to do just that. One way is [geo-fencing](#), which allows you to construct virtual boundaries around specific areas like your store locations through Global Positioning System (GPS), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), Near Field Communication (NFC), or [Identification for Advertisers \(IFA or IDFA\)](#).

2. Be hyper-targeted and make your dollars work for you

The right data allows you to optimise your digital marketing dollars by being hyper-targeted. For example, our data analytics shows that physical footfall traffic across shopping malls in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand either decreased or remained flat. Conversely, entertainment and game apps increased in popularity, possibly because people spent more time indoors during the COVID-19 outbreak.

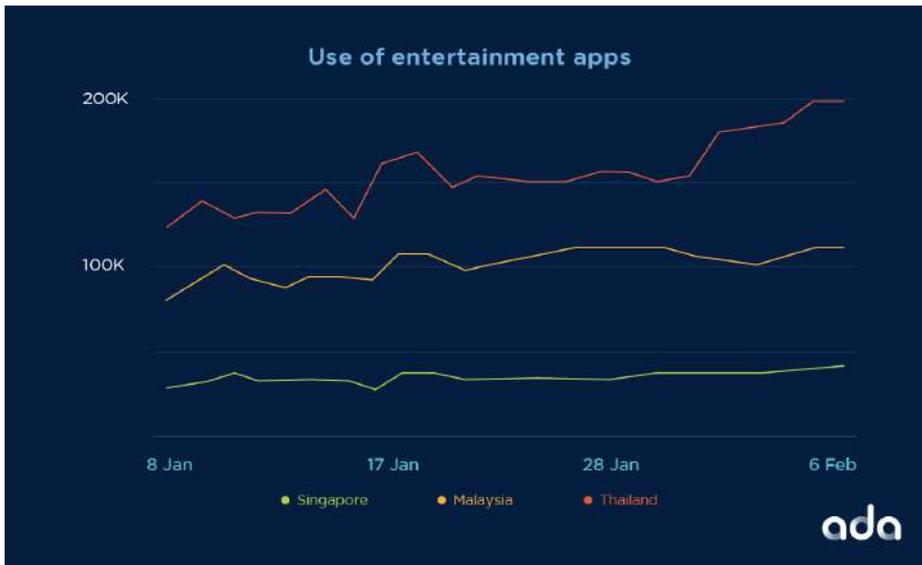


Fig. 4: An increase in usage of entertainment apps in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

When you look at the insight above, you might want to increase advertising efforts on entertainment and game apps to reach potential shoppers there.

Being hyper-targeted starts with the data we mentioned in step one – marketers can get pinpoint precision and be more specific about their target audience personas as hyper-targeting moves beyond the broad components of demographics (like age and gender) to specific attributes based on **psychographics** (like their habits, hobbies, and behaviour online).

Case in Point

Malaysian digital telco, **Yoodo**, was looking to acquire new sign-ups to their mobile app. As a purely digital business with no physical channels or stores, they knew that their target audience had to embrace specific traits and created offerings aimed at five groups of personas: gamers, tech enthusiasts, international travelers, entertainment lovers, and sports activities. An ad targeted at a gamer, for example, focused on a high-data package that would carry them through an intense marathon gaming session.

3. Let's get personal

Today's consumers are spoilt for choice – **over 400 hours of video content are uploaded every minute**, with more than **20,000 videos on COVID-19** specifically. They have become more discerning, and expect (even demand) greater personalisation through social media marketing, and brands have to service that need.

Omnichannel is not just a buzzword

It has become top priority to meet customers where they are, and how they prefer to buy or consume information. According to **econsultancy**, more than 70% of Southeast Asian marketers believe they are prepared for omnichannel marketing.

This is encouraging, because as it looks like the effects of COVID-19 are only just starting to unravel, so being attuned to the changing behaviour and consumption habits of your consumer will be a must.

One brand that has done this well is IKEA with its **IKEA Place app** that allow customers to shop remotely for products they can visualise in the context of their own homes, lessening the need for them to travel to its vast network of self-service, out-of-town stores.

Other ways of bringing the experience full circle include **REVO**, a tie-up with Mastercard that uses a cashback reward system to drive physical footfall to stores.

It's time for Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO)

DCO combines the best of data science with creatives to help marketers deliver personalised ads at scale. The technology behind DCO automatically generates multiple variants of creatives, which allow marketers to test, learn, and optimise. **Unilever Indonesia used DCO** to create multiple variations of a simple ad that captured moments of an early romance – each clip was micro-targeted to the relevant target audience.

Creative Management Platforms (CMPs) allow designers to produce large sets of ads – with variations in copy and design in the thousands – using super-powered design tools. CMPs also allow marketers the ability to make small changes to individual creatives to enable true personalisation.

With the high demand for personalisation and hyper-targeting, CMPs allow brands to be more efficient in their efforts. There are an increasing number of platform providers and agencies who are able to help with this.

As marketers jump onto the bandwagon of video content and the TikTok phenomenon, it is hard to make sense of the sheer volume of content that is being created daily. ADA's own data showed an inequality in the spread of information on COVID-19. Brands can cut through the clutter by creating awareness in countries with a high number of reported cases but a low number of videos being published.



Fig. 5: Singapore, Thailand, and South Korea have a low number of videos despite having a high number of cases.

4. It's the best possible time for brand-building

A [recent report we released](#), found that over 76% of marketers in the Asian region will struggle with sluggish consumer growth and would start looking at cost-savings or promotional methods to stimulate consumer spending.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, we challenge brands to divert resources to brand-building, which establishes consumer trust. The study by experts [Les Binet & Peter Field](#) showed that brand-building drives long-term growth as 62% of consumers are loyal to brands that they **trust**.

Here are how three Southeast Asian brands used this time of crisis to stand out, and build trust with their customers, whilst doing some good.

- Peer to peer marketplace [Carousell's #ChooseToGive](#) campaign aimed to curb panic-buying by encouraging over 900 people in Singapore to give away surplus protective face masks

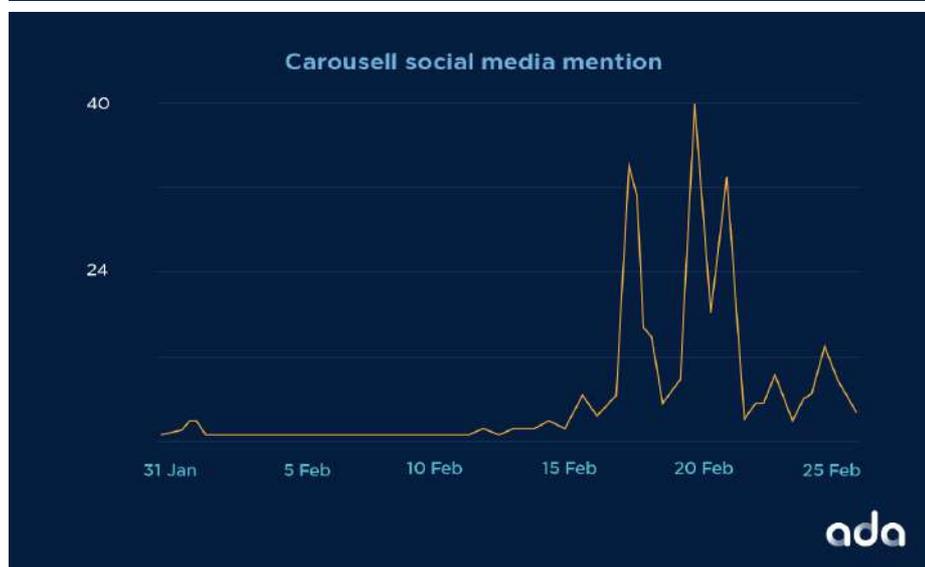
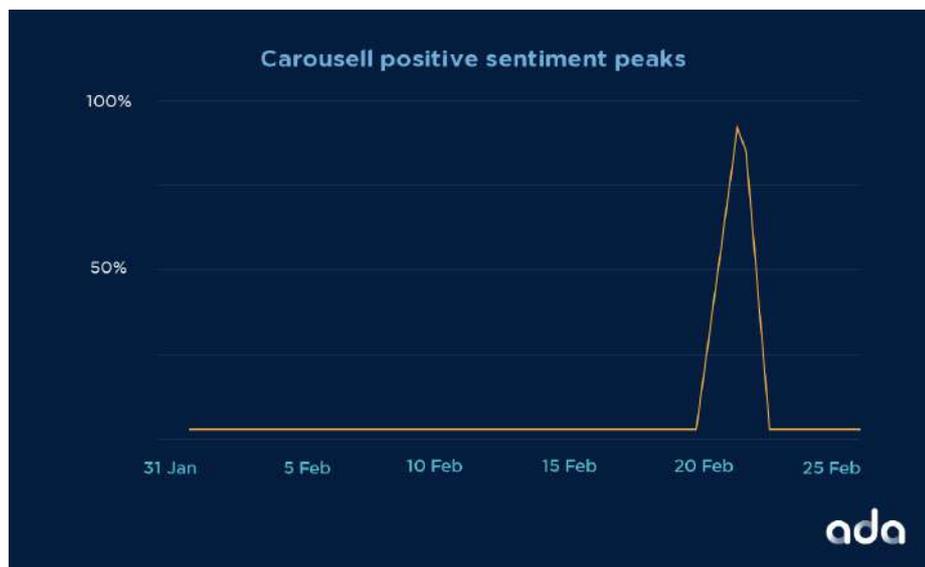


Fig. 6 and Fig. 6.1: ADA's social media listening data show that both social media mentions and positive sentiments for Carousell increased after their campaign.

- Home Improvement retailer **MR.DIY gave out over 3.5 million** free protective face masks in Malaysia and saw a spike in social media mentions and positive sentiments



Fig. 7 and Fig. 7.1: ADA's social media listening data show that both social media mentions and positive sentiments for MR.DIY increased after their campaign.

- Ride hailing platform **Gojek's GoHeroes campaign** gave \$10 ride vouchers to frontline healthcare professionals so that they could travel safely. The campaign resulted in the Indonesian-based brand gaining over 14% in positive sentiments on social media

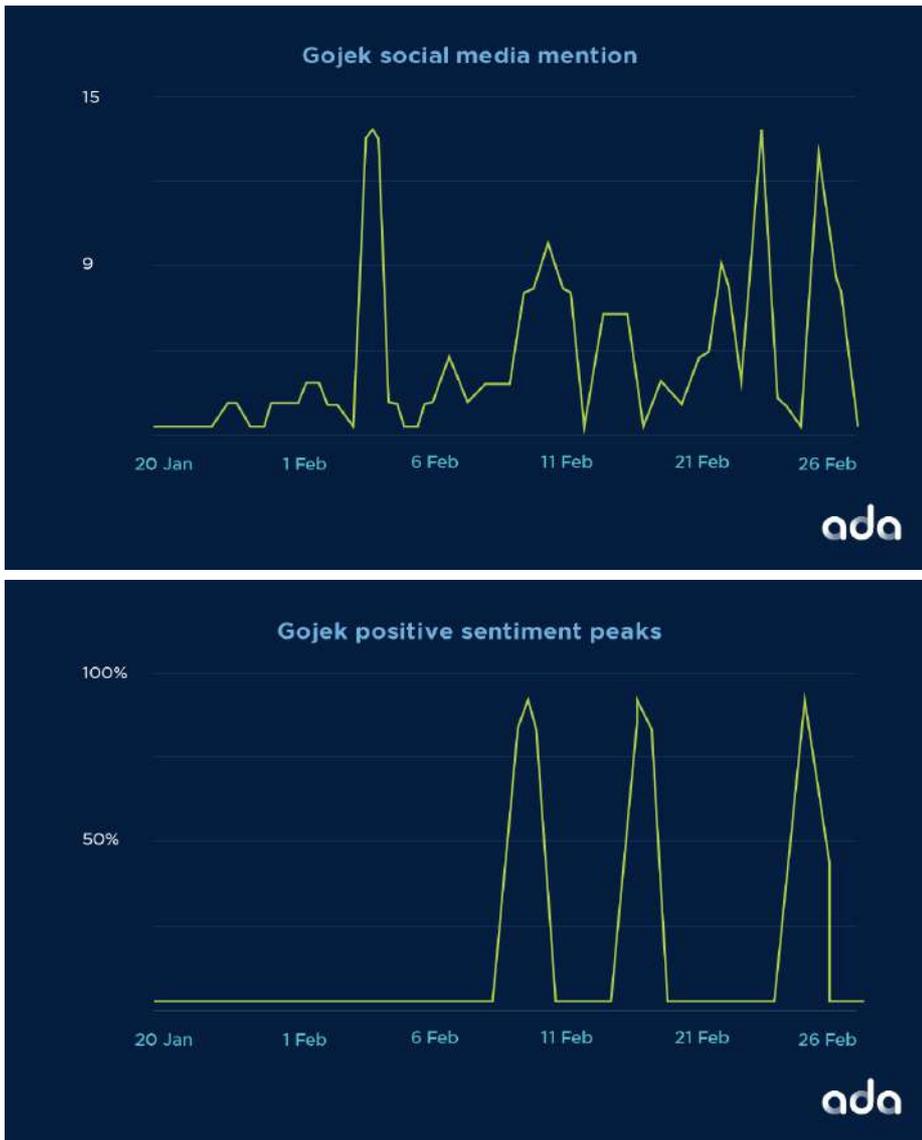


Fig. 8 and Fig. 8.1: ADA's social media listening data show that both social media mentions and positive sentiments for Gojek increased after their campaign.

5. Create a stronger impact through negativity bias

The effects of negativity bias are common throughout all forms of communication, including social media, news articles, and even ads. Research by noted social psychologist **Roy F. Baumeister** and the **University of Pennsylvania** show that negative events, visuals, and messages can leave a stronger impression.

For example, we know that the most searched keywords for videos on COVID-19 were on the first cases or the China origins of the coronavirus. Due to the nature and suspected origin of the virus, we also found that people were commenting the most on videos in the **pets and animals category**.

Fig. 10: ADA's social media listening data shows that positive sentiments for Kyoto increased after their campaign.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in a decline in many Southeast Asian economies, creating an unprecedented challenge for marketers in the region. But Southeast Asian marketers are extremely resilient.

Marketers can still bounce back by leaning into the data, being hyper-targeted, getting personal, gaining trust by brand-building, and creating strong impact through negativity bias. We believe that marketers can leverage on opportunities that others might miss, cost-save through optimisation, and make the most of the current situation to still come up on top.

About the authors

Stephanie Caunter
Head of marketing, ADA

Simon Samuel
Head of data analytics, ADA

Data driven agency and consultancy **ADA** is a part of the Axiata Group, and specialises in integrating data, insights, media and content to achieve client objectives. This Covid-19 report is a collaboration between the company's marketing and data analytics teams.

© Copyright Ascential Events (Europe) Limited 2020

Ascential Events (Europe) Limited

Americas: 229 West 43rd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036, United States - Tel: +1 212 201 2800

APAC: OUE Downtown 1, #44-03, 6 Shenton Way, 068809, Singapore - Tel: +65 3157 6200

EMEA: 33 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6UF, United Kingdom - Tel: +44 (0)20 7467 8100

www.warc.com

All rights reserved including database rights. This electronic file is for the personal use of authorised users based at the subscribing company's office location. It may not be reproduced, posted on intranets, extranets or the internet, e-mailed, archived or shared electronically either within the purchaser's organisation or externally without express written permission from Warc.

