

HubSpot  Talkwalker

2021

Social Media Trends

A Detailed Report To Drive Your
Social Media Strategy Forward



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The COVID-19 catalyst

For years now, we've been teaming up with global experts and industry professionals to predict the trends of the coming year. 2020, though, was a year no one could have predicted.



From near zero mentions in November 2019, to over 1.2B to date, the year has been dominated by the virus. COVID-19 was a catalyst, not an outcome. It expedited issues, ideas, and initiatives that were bubbling away, but may not have happened quite so soon without the crisis.

In this report, we'll share the 2021 trends as defined by the experts, and by you, our audience. This year, we surveyed consumers to rate the trends and see how they're impacting brands at ground level. The ten trends included here are ranked from what consumers think will be the least impactful to the most impactful.

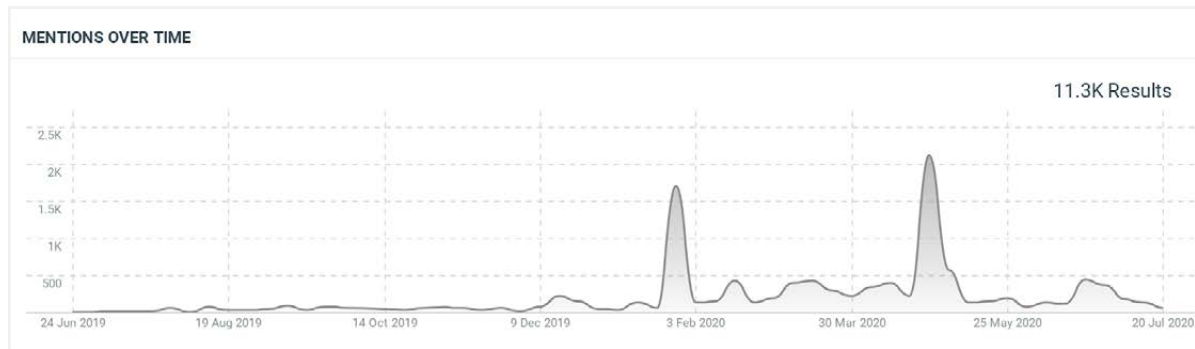
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Remixing is the new User Generated Content

Overview

User-generated content is nothing new, but the way it has been created, sourced, and shared is contemporary. Remixing is on the rise through apps like TikTok, Koji, and Instagram Reels. Remixing is the art of taking existing formats, templates, or ideas, and recreating them to express a user's own personality or ideas. Expect 2021 to bring even more opportunities for remixing, with brands engaging with new audiences and creating additional content that stands out from the crowd.

Trend analysis



Mentions of “remix” linked to platforms like TikTok or Koji are on the rise. Although we’re not seeing big numbers just yet, there was clearly an increase during the COVID-19 lockdown. When people weren’t able to head outside to create new content, they still had the tools to at least reinvent it. Remixing also makes content creation easier, with fewer technical restrictions. With remixing, anyone can take a trend and recreate it into something new.

As Dmitry Shapiro, the CEO and Co-Founder of GoMeta (Koji’s producer) says,

“remixing gives ordinary people the power to layer context and self-expression.”

Source: [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com)

The trend is only just taking off. There will be more co-production opportunities in the future, with brands providing templates for users to base their content off. This will enable more organic connections between companies and consumers.

Expert Insights

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I can see interactivity rising in 2021. After personalized web experiences, interactive video content is something that has been rising - like Ask Video. Produced as short and engaging, is perfect to engage with younger audiences.



Fab Giovanetti

Marketing Consultant and
Founder of [Creative Impact co](#)

“

No surprise for many but I think video will dominate social media engagement, we've seen the growth in Tiktok and YouTube and now Instagram Reels. The pandemic has proved that with so many of us online we've been exposed to creative, entertaining and thought provoking video content and we want more of it.



Gordon Glenister

Global Head of Influencer
Marketing Branded Content
Marketing Association

“

User generated content will be the “crown jewel” for great brands in 2021. The best pieces of content will be the ones marketers don't create, but facilitate. At a time where consumers' lives have changed dramatically, they look for people, not brands, for inspiration about products and services that fit within their new lifestyles post COVID-19.



Heba Sayed

Strategy Leader, IBM Cloud
and AI, Middle East and Africa

“

Video and music editing tools and effects available on TikTok and Koji mean that creating remix content is both simple and fun, and that is why these apps have become popular destinations for entertainment amongst Gen-Z audiences worldwide.



Ben Jeffries

CEO at [Influencer](#)

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

“

In 2021, we will see a huge influx of user generated content enabling brands to really propel themselves. The rise of online selling will only increase and it will become the norm to curate UGC. After all, there is no better social proof than your audience talking about your brand.



Declan Cox

[DC Social Media
Consultancy](#)

BRAND EXAMPLE

Chipotle

Brands are already being incorporated into remixed content, through platforms like Koji. Consumers are mixing logos with pre-existing templates, even creating brand-led games.

A user-generated game, containing elements from Chipotle's brand. Chipotle could have used this as an opportunity to drive engagement for their brand, through sharing it on their own channels. A competitor shared a similar game created around their brand, and gained 254 engagements over 4 days.

The risk with this type of user-generated content is that it could be missed by the brand themselves, especially if the brand isn't tagged into the tweet. Image and brand recognition is essential in this case.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

This new creativity will be embraced by brands and social media channels alike. Companies will look to provide users with more creative outlets, arming them with templates, tools, and assets to create original content.

While more apps, and the larger social platforms, will adapt to meet these demands. And to counteract rising competitors. Offering other outlets for users to create beyond video—expect to see a greater number of games, 3D pics, and even VR and AR user-generated content led by Smartphone advances.

TAKEAWAYS

Get your brand into the remix mix

Give your users the right assets

Digital assets, such as logos or branded templates, help people create or remix effectively. Give your users these assets to encourage creativity.

Monitor your brand logo

Image and [video recognition](#) helps you track your brand across social media, even when it's not directly mentioned in the text. This will help you find communities that are creating and engaging with remixed content.

Engage with creators

Once you've identified the content your audience has made, engage with it. This will encourage users to create more, while also improving engagement with your brand.

[User-generated content drives 28% more engagement than standard brand-led content.](#)

Consider your channels

Are you missing social channels from your strategy? Platforms such as TikTok help connect your brand to a younger, more creative audience. If you're looking to break into that demographic, [start here](#).

Beware of the risks of UGC

Not all UGC is positive. It can lead to a crisis if significantly off brand, or critical of your company. Again, monitor this remixed content continually, so you can react quickly before it goes viral.

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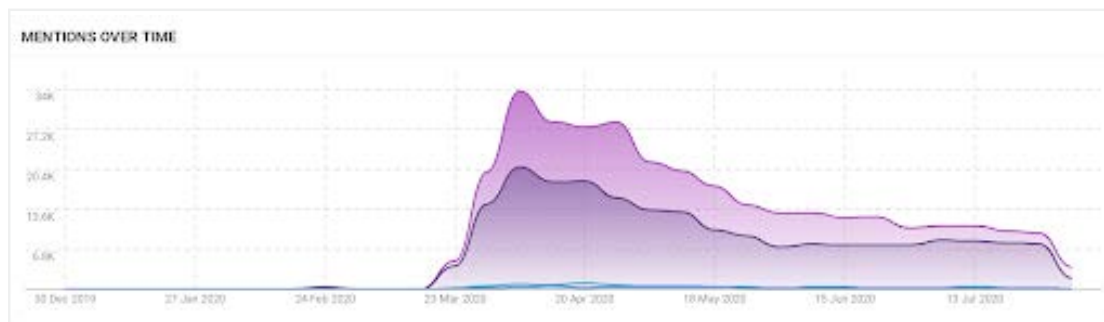
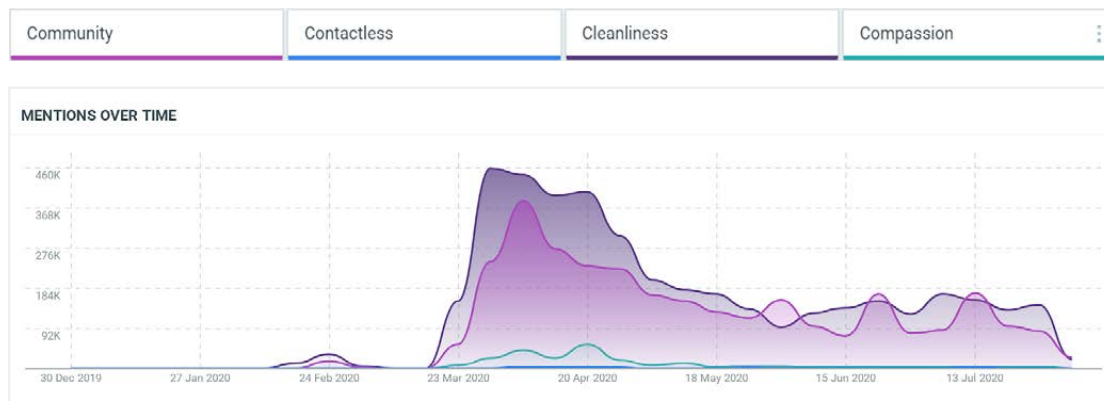
The four Cs of COVID-19 content

Overview

Even if the pandemic is resolved in 2021, the repercussions will be felt for years to come. The shadow cast by COVID-19 will most likely linger, making it hard for consumers to simply forget its consequences. Brands will need to adapt their communications with this in mind. The tone of 2021 will be shaped by the 4 Cs of COVID-19 content:

Community Contactless Cleanliness Compassion

Trend analysis



When we look at mentions of the 4 Cs in relation to COVID-19, we can see they're still conversation drivers— these topics are still trending online. In their search for information, consumers are turning to brands for information and reassurance relating to the crisis. **78% of consumers say that brands should help them out in their daily lives.**

However, there is a communication gap between consumers and brands. While business accounts are focused on messages around supporting communities, consumers are more focused on cleanliness, with mentions still rising. In 2021, brands will have to be part of these COVID-19 conversations, though they'll need to assess the topic carefully to ensure their communication is relevant.

Expert Insights

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An important social media trend to watch in 2021 will be the evolution format for the events due to the pandemic situation, I think at a business plan adaptable to create a format that mix the online and offline opportunities and be able to replicate the networking moments in some meaningful way.



Andrea Romoli

Facilitator and Digital Connector at In Sprint Srl

“

We're seeing a rise in edutainment on social media platforms: longform educational content is condensed into bite-sized storytelling across the newsfeed and Instagram stories, feeding curious audiences that are now willing to spend more time consuming content that adds value and feeds their curiosity.



Bella Ibrahim

Marketing Manager at Kerning Cultures

“

Across the MENA region, we expect to see the prominence of cash decline as the preferred payment method in favour of digital payments. With this, brands should consider how they can build trust in digital payments with consumers.

Be prepared to redefine who you think your consumer is. The pandemic has accelerated the shift to online and with it, your typical customer is likely to have changed. Research from Checkout.com suggests that most demographics, including older age groups, have shifted to eCommerce from offline commerce since the start of the pandemic. Not only do they have higher disposable income, but also exhibit higher levels of brand loyalty. Brands will do well to consider their checkout experience for this demographic. Assess your payment options, security measures and customer support functions to best serve this emerging demographic.



Mo Ali Yusuf

VP at [Checkout.com](https://www.checkout.com)

“

“It's not “Finger Lickin” good anymore as KFC temporarily dropped its iconic slogan because, with a pandemic going on, finger lickin' is “not currently advised” and because of that, they have released a tongue-in-cheek campaign to go with it.

As the 4Cs of COVID-19 (Cleanliness, Contactless, Community, Compassion) continue to be the new normal in marketing, it's bound to change how message is relayed. The effects of COVID-19 will be felt for months to come. Brands need to consider the 4 Cs in future marketing & PR efforts.”



Janet Machuka

Founder ATC Digital Academy

“

The biggest social media trends of 2021 will definitely be influenced by the COVID-19 crisis; because of the huge, worldwide scale of this issue and the way that it's affecting absolutely everyone's lives, it's impossible to leave it completely out of your marketing campaigns or your social media strategy. But perhaps even more importantly, it's affected the way people lead their lives: from their Internet usage, their buying habits, their priorities, their spending power... everything is affected in some way by COVID-19. Because of this, I think that 2021 will be a year of experimentation: a year of trying new strategies, new approaches, even new products and services, in order to keep up with this new world order.



Lilach Bullock

Business Success Coach & Consultant, Content Marketer

“

Social commerce will explode in western markets. Forward thinking brands will quickly embrace tools from social media networks to sell products in their native apps. Some will use live streamed video content featuring social media influencers. Consumers will lap this up as the growth of eCommerce skyrockets following COVID.



Ian Shepherd

CEO at **The Social Store**

“

2021 will be the year of minding your own business, just to stay in business. Retail's not the only sector hit hard by the pandemic. B2Bs that relied on trade shows and conferences for deal flow will have to reinvent themselves online. And it all starts with optimizing the user experience by analyzing the data. Because whoever controls the layout, controls the payout.



Eric Schwartzman

Digital Marketing Consultant

“

KOL Commerce. KOLs also known as social influencers are taking social commerce by storm. The rise of social commerce has been phenomenal in Asia, fuelled by the pandemic, influencer marketing model has quickly evolved social commerce into the space of live commerce powered by influencer marketing scaling across social platforms.



Eileen Ooi

Managing Director PHD Malaysia

BRAND EXAMPLE

LEGO

Brands were quick to engage with the main health and safety messages when COVID-19 first came to light, helping diffuse it within their communities. The phrase “wash your hands” was shared by companies 81.7K times in the 5 months since lockdown began in March.

LEGO engaged with this in their own unique way, sharing the message with their family audience (also note the use of employee advocacy). This tweet alone generated just short of 4K engagement. They’ve continued to engage with this messaging throughout lockdown and beyond, building on their community aspect, and encouraging cleanliness, especially among younger audiences.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

The 4 Cs should shape brand communications over the coming year, adapting as the key consumer concerns change. Brands will connect more with their consumers, analyzing their conversations to understand the details of their concerns, enabling them to tackle these issues more effectively.



TAKEAWAYS

Bring the 4 Cs to your brand content

Engage global trend analysis

You can't only look at the brand or even industry trends. Consistently monitoring the pandemic, and seeing how you can help your customers through it, will make a big difference in your communication strategy. Promoting key messaging can help you engage and build stronger connections with your community.

Be conscious of the ongoing pandemic

Your main priority could be to drive sales for your brand or to boost company awareness. But for your consumers, the ongoing pandemic is still driving their motivations. Invasive advertising won't work. Instead, focus on relevant content that covers audience needs and concerns.

Focus your content on the 4 Cs

Link back to the elements that consumers are focused on and connect those points to your brand. Is your store tackling cleanliness worries that you should highlight? Or would a more compassionate emotion-based campaign go down well in the current climate?

Understand where your brand sits within the crisis

Crisis management is a daily occurrence. Make sure you know how your audience is responding to your brand messaging, as the issues are changing every day. This will help you shape your marketing messages and avoid other brand decisions that could create negative PR.

Prepare for the next major issue

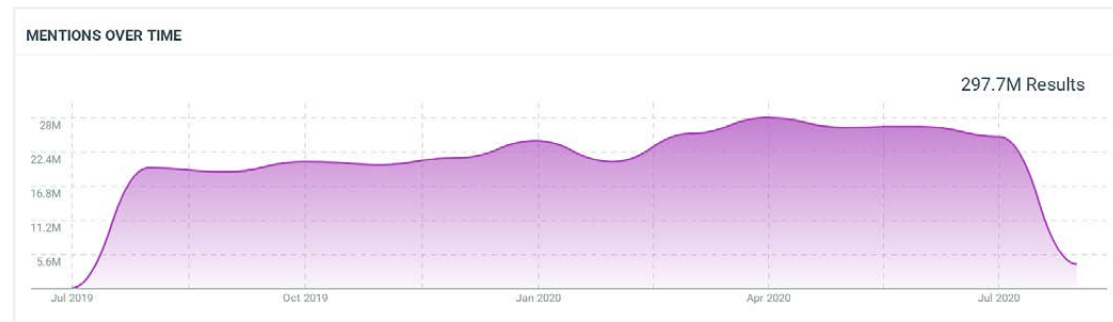
2020 has been a tumultuous year that blindsighted many. Prepare a crisis plan that prepares you for the unexpected. You never know what issues you could be responding to next.

Overview

Forget emoji. Clean your desktop of the GIFs. Memes are now the way to communicate. They're spreading across the internet as a fun way to engage communities. They're not all positive and cute, however. As per any communication, they can be used to manipulate the mindset of viewers. They can be used to normalize extreme behavior, like external agencies interfering with elections or other major events. In 2021, you need to be ready to protect your brand from memes.

Trend analysis

Mememes are big amongst younger generations, with **55% of 13-35-year-olds sending memes every week**. Over the last year, that number has grown. Mentions of memes increased over the last 13 months, from 19.8M mentions in August 2019, to 24.9M in July 2020 (+26%), with a peak of 28M during April 2020. Users turned to them for engagement and escapism while under lockdown.



As memes become more popular, though, they become more susceptible to being used for malicious reasons. With disinformation on the rise, these memes can influence the mindset of consumers. Many of these mentions originated from forums that are highly politicized and topics covered included COVID-19 (2.9%), the economy (2.8%) and politics (2%). All highly charged topics are at risk of memetic manipulation. In the coming months and years, expect memes to be used more to persuade consumers, both on key issues such as these, and the ones that could impact your brand.

Expert Insights

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Given the current business environment and the herculean task of charting the road to recovery, Social and Influencer Commerce leveraging each platform's native features will become a top priority for Brands and Businesses. The Boom in Short Video Content Space has opened up massive engagement opportunities for Creators, expect Brands to learn the craft of Short Stories and personalize content at scale. Lastly, the past few years we have seen the rise and rise of Moments & Memes. We will see more and more consumer brands acting and behaving like Memers in the coming times!



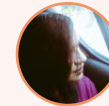
Hitesh Rajwani

CEO at [Social Samosa](#)

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

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Talk about last 10 years or last 6 months, there has been immense fatigue in the content listed on all kind of social channels. Consumer is evolving and their options are ever-growing, hence it is important that a touch of innovation is constantly there in content marketing charters - memes have evolved from simple stickers to GIFs and now video memes. The old school style of Satire is the new-age catalyst in marketing.



Komal Gupta

Head Content Marketing & Storyteller at [Ferns N Petals](#)

BRAND EXAMPLE

PlayStation

Memes are a fast and easy way for consumers to respond to company news, which can be a great benefit for brands. Following company news or releases, you can quickly get a feel for how it was taken by reviewing the meme responses from consumers.



Following Sony's PS5 reveal trailer, users quickly responded with memes related to the product's new look. The simplicity of the format is easy to engage with and quick to share, so these images can go viral quickly. This one alone generated 180K engagement.



In this case, the memes were more towards banter, rather than a potential crisis. PlayStation social media managers no doubt monitor their logo in case that chatty tone changes.

Memes are a 2-way street. PlayStation echoed the **'this is Sparta' meme** to connect their latest game release with their community. This tweet garnered 14.3K engagement, demonstrating that with relevant messaging, you can build strong audience connections.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

While it's impossible to predict the next meme, they're sure to appear across social media in the coming years, even filtering into mainstream media. As they arise, expect to see an increase in monitoring the format, for brands, and to minimize the propaganda potential of the medium. We may even see new regulations appearing as platforms attempt to mitigate the risk of challenging memes.

TAKEAWAYS

Create brand content like you meme it

Monitor your brand logo

Normally, memes will appear with little to no text mentions. The only way to see if your brand is in one is through monitoring them through **image recognition**.

Engage in the meme community

Connecting your content to popular memes can help engage this aspect of the community, encouraging engagement, with the aim of creating more virality for your brand.

Share user-generated memes

If any user-generated meme jumps out, try to share it on the channels they're naturally most effective on—forums like Reddit and Twitter are ideal for this. Make sure you credit the creator, as it'll build a stronger brand connection while encouraging others to create branded content too.

Be careful what you post

In late 2016, Wendy's included a meme including **Pepe the frog**. This caused significant negative response, as the character is often associated with the Alt-right. Wendy's had to respond quickly and delete the offending tweet. Before you share a meme, make sure you're 100% certain of what it means and its implications.

Check the regulations

As memetic media continues to grow, there will be repercussions, and possibly regulations. Keep track of them to make sure you're not breaking any rules. Memes also live on the edge of copyright rules. Careful use is essential when using memes for marketing purposes, so be cautious to avoid any legal repercussions.

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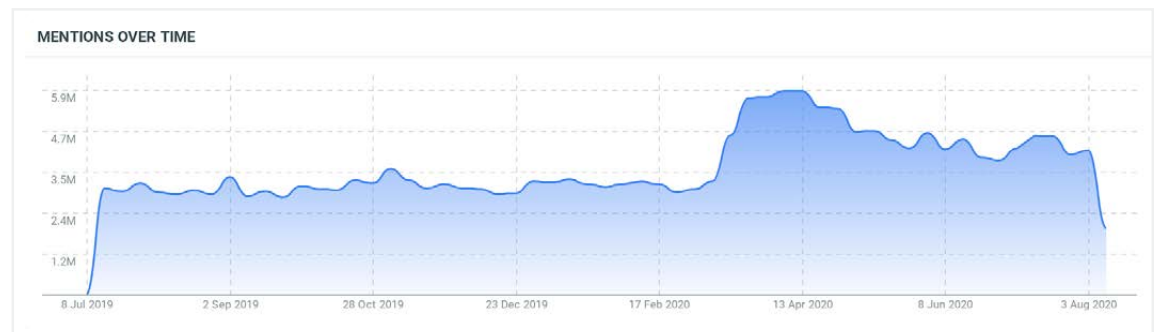
Nostalgia marketing

Overview

It's easy to look back on 2019 and think how much better it was. The positive emotions connected with the "good old days" help boost current emotions. The appeal of nostalgia marketing is clear. It connects strong positive emotions to your brand, and gives it a sentimental boost. During times of uncertainty and economic downturn, it appears more frequently as consumers look to connect with happier times to distract from current situations.

Trend analysis

As soon as the lockdown hit, the rose-tinted glasses went on. Mentions of keywords related to nostalgia or remembering the past, shot up from a baseline of around 13M mentions to 24.4M (+88%).



People want to remember the "good old days" even if they weren't so good. Nostalgia marketing was used more during the 1920's depression, the late 2000's Great Recession, and therefore should be big in the economic downturn over the coming years.

Connecting with positive memories from the past helps people disconnect from their current struggles. Connect that positive memory to your brand and that sense of positivity will build an emotional relationship with your consumer. You made them feel good, therefore they associate your brand as a good brand.

Expert Insights

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After 2020, we need to remind our community, how precious a world full of freedom was. With some nostalgia marketing, we can create fun campaigns and look back to the good old days. The world is change, and we never know when it's over. Staying positive is the best way to life with this pandemic.



Aji Aditra Perdana

Head of Social Media & Content Marketing, Home Credit Indonesia

“

Nostalgia campaigns work especially well with Millennials as they mainly focus on purpose also because a good marketing strategy should always have a purpose. Reliving positive memories and beloved icons from the past can feel good. We are all so busy with hectic schedules every day that fond memories that make us smile leave us open to brand messaging.



Eleonora Rocca

CEO @ Elle Innovation Consulting | Co-Founder @ Growence | Digital Strategy Consultant | Speaker | Lecturer

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

“

Totally and why not! We've seen times where we were #initttogether and togetherness leaves a plethora of memories behind. Business leaders should make sure each social media share has that little emotional edge that captures the attention of their target audience.



Sakshi Saxena

Marketing Communications at Bizongo

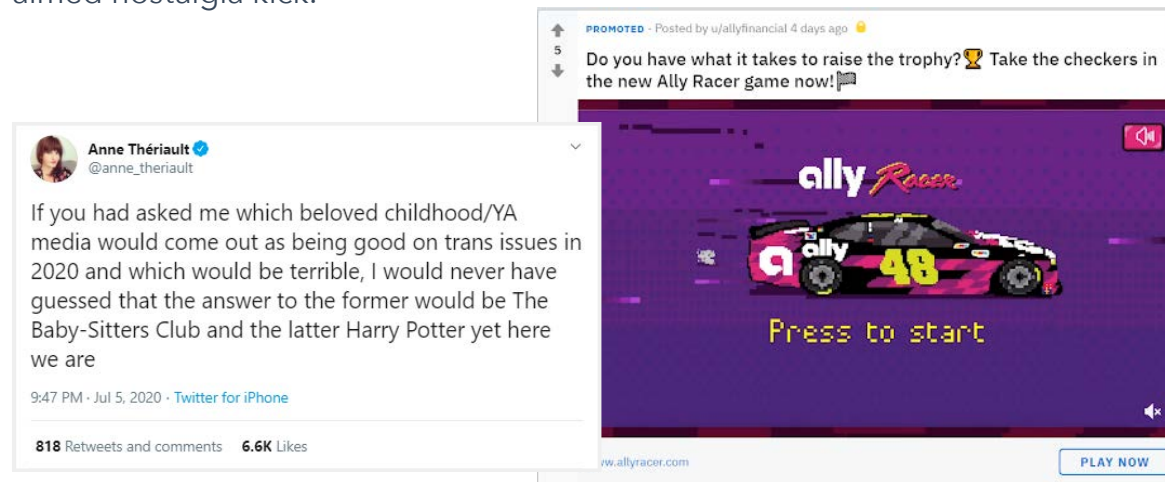


BRAND EXAMPLE

Netflix

Netflix has always been masterful at creating content that hits the mark with their audience, balancing the mix between creating original ideas alongside shows that tweak viewers' nostalgic needs.

Stranger Things has been a hit for the streaming platform - heavily relying on 80's nostalgia to entice their audience. The show was mentioned 6.1M times, with 23.1M engagement. In early July, they released the first season of The Baby-Sitters Club. Based on the books and TV series popularized in the 90s, it's another well-aimed nostalgia kick.



The show also actively engages with topics critical to their viewers, encompassing another trend around targeting socially conscious audiences. This has led to 67K mentions, with 201.4K engagement. With 53.5% positive net success, the show has been a hit, with just time needed to build another successful show for Netflix. This is an active strategy for Netflix. Nostalgia was mentioned alongside the brand 157.5K times with 6.7M engagement. We can expect that to rise in the coming years, as people look more for more escapism.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

2021 will see the rise in more nostalgic elements. It could be stories associated that play with themes from "better days", content that revolves around classic elements, re-releases of now defunct products, or even content presented in more "old school" ways.

We may also see brands segment their audience further. Nostalgia marketing will only work for one generation at a time—we could see content themes being adapted to suit the targeted audience. An 8-bit style racer game made by Ally Bank and promoted on Reddit will work for one generation, for example, but not for another.

TAKEAWAYS

Time to get brand nostalgic

Know your audience

For nostalgia marketing to work, you need to consider your audience in different demographic sets. Remember, each campaign will probably hit an audience within a ten year age bracket, and even then, gender, location and other factors will impact the effectiveness.

Go big data digging

To find that gold nugget that entices your audience, you'll have to really dig into your historical data. Reverse trend analysis plays a major role. What was big in the 70s, 80s, 90s? Look not just within your industry, but culturally, too.

Old is the new new

Revisit your product catalogue and see what could be re-released now. Not only will you hit that nostalgic spot for your existing audience, but younger generations could be tempted to buy, as the product would be new to them.

Think outside the box

The Ally racer game mentioned above engages their audience with limited brand intrusion and connects in a fun way. Games, songs, brand design, and even retro flavors can help engage with consumers' pasts and connect on a more sensory basis.

Engage retro influencers

Many existing influencers have built communities focused on nostalgic elements. Look to them for content ideas or introduce them into your [influencer strategy](#) to connect with an audience that is already connected with the best bits of the past.

Expert Insights

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Revealing the human side of the brand: Smart businesses will understand that being transparent, authentic, and even vulnerable is smart marketing in 2021. People connect with people. This means the brand should be personified in a way that reveals who they stand for and what they stand for. Get more faces out there, create more video, and talk about what matters to your core tribe.



Michael A. Stelzner

CEO & Founder, [Social Media Examiner](#)

“

In 2021 a focus on original & authentically branded content will dominate the next wave of marketing. Defined brand voices will ultimately assist in better-developed chatbots and voice search leading to growth in strategic marketing, and a demand for technology to feel more human in its engagement with the end consumer.



Ming Johanson

Mother of Unicorns

“

Social media has played a key role in how many small medium enterprises (SMEs) have remained connected to customers during the pandemic. 2021 will be the year that social commerce takes off. More small businesses need to change up their usual marketing tactics and connect with customers on social media channels to stay ahead.



Andrew Pinto

Head of Marketing [Mudah.my](#)

“

Community Building is going to be one to watch out for! Lots of brands ramped up demand gen and brand building activities during COVID-19, 2021 is the time their activities will move further into fruition; they should push the throttle on this - it always reaps rewards! Communities build brand, which builds business.



Vanshika Mehta

Brand Storyteller and Community Builder, Solopreneur

“

Brands need to be more human on social media, inviting the world to your dinner table for a meaningful and engaging conversation. You are your fan's greatest fans and need to embody that no matter what social media channel you live on. Emote, respond, recognize, relate, be engaging. We're not robots.



Aaron Kaufman

Director of Social Media & Community at [Square Enix](#)

“

Honest, personalized conversations. We need to put customers at the heart of the messaging strategy and the best alternative to meeting them in person, is with video. Brands need to humanize this virtual relationship and create emotional connections. It is time to listen more to customers and less to shareholders.



Janitha Sukumaran

Founder of [Rantau Golin](#)

“

AI marketing is revolutionising how brands do business. Efficiency, streamlining and cost-effectiveness are becoming watch words for brands to help them cope with changing market needs as they adapt to doing things differently. Understanding customer behaviour has never been more important, and this is where AI marketing has the opportunity to excel.



Kareem Farid

Founder of Leap Comms, [KF.Solutions](#), 16 Secs, Kundera App

“

Marketing Automation via Conversational Commerce will be more important than ever in the years to come. With time spent on messaging growing exponentially; 68% of users choosing texting as their preferred way of communication and solutions like Google Duplex already hitting the market (check the Google Duplex A.I Assistant video on YouTube), brands should seriously start building their conversational funnels online



Sotirios Seridis

Founder and Head of Product Marketing at [XYZ Lab](#)

“

With the introduction of LinkedIn Stories to some areas earlier this year, storytelling through ephemeral content is not slowing down. As we have already seen, this kind of storytelling is really powerful and allows brands to peel back the curtain to really share their personality with their audience. And audiences love that they can share in the moment and interact and engage with their favorite brands and companies.

With a quarter of Millennials and Gen Z users looking to stories for information about brands and products, and with social media platforms exploring more and more ways for users to connect shopping to this experience, I only expect it to grow over 2021. The biggest challenge for brands is to look for new ways to create innovative content that will stand out and stop their followers from scrolling.



Mireille Ryan

CEO - Social Media Marketing Institute

“

The most important social media trend to watch in 2021 will be community focused activity. Groups and building a community around your brand will become more prominent as businesses struggle to learn new ways of doing things. Sharing our knowledge, assisting others and webinars will become essential as we navigate our way around working from home and remote working options. There are so many companies out there who are still new to social media and the companies who will stand out will be the ones who offer demos and add value with content that inspires, gives hope and educates. Let's mind each other more this year and walk the walk, helping each other with RTS and sharing each others' content.



Samantha Kelly

AKA [Tweetinggoddess](#) and CEO of Women's Inspire Network

“

With social media ad platforms continuing to get saturated, producing innovative, 'stand out' creative is going to be more important than ever. If your ad creative looks like everyone else's, you're doing it wrong. How will you stand out in 2021?



Dan Knowlton

Co-Founder & CMO, Knowlton

“

I expect collaboration to become much more prominent, not just among influencers as we know them, but also brands, agencies, business leaders and independent talent alike. I believe in collaboration and 'collective spirit' and think it's about time like-minded brands and people show more openness to collaborations that would've previously been shunned by those with a little too much red tape.



Ellie Hernaman

CEO at [Truffle Social](#)

“

Marketers will gain appreciation for Omnichannel Social Media. This means that social media messages will extend across platforms and even channels, reaching audiences and customers by amplifying social messages across various touchpoints. There is much more opportunity for social media to be tied into all media, and the unpredictability of 2021 will accelerate that shift.



David Berkowitz

Founder, [Serial Marketer](#)

“

I think livestreaming will EXPLODE even further in 2021 and beyond. It's definitely a trend worth tracking. Streamyard, for instance, allows up to 10 presenters to stream to 8 sites at once and record continuously for 8 hours. What's not to love?



Keith Keller

Twitter Video Marketing Specialist, [Keithkeller.com.au](#)

“

Driving engagements through individualization to build sustained conversations that stay relevant and engage en masse.



Malay Harsha

VP Marketing at Clevertap

“

The new business model for writers and content creators will be to monetize their individuality through social media platforms that provide direct access to a smaller, more engaged audience which will continue to upend the media landscape.



Brendan Weitz

Head of Product Partnerships,
[Quora](#)

“

As the world moves increasingly online there's a lot more competition for attention and retention. The key for 2021 is making your content work hard to grab and maintain an audience. It's essential to be entertaining, compelling and to understand human behaviour.



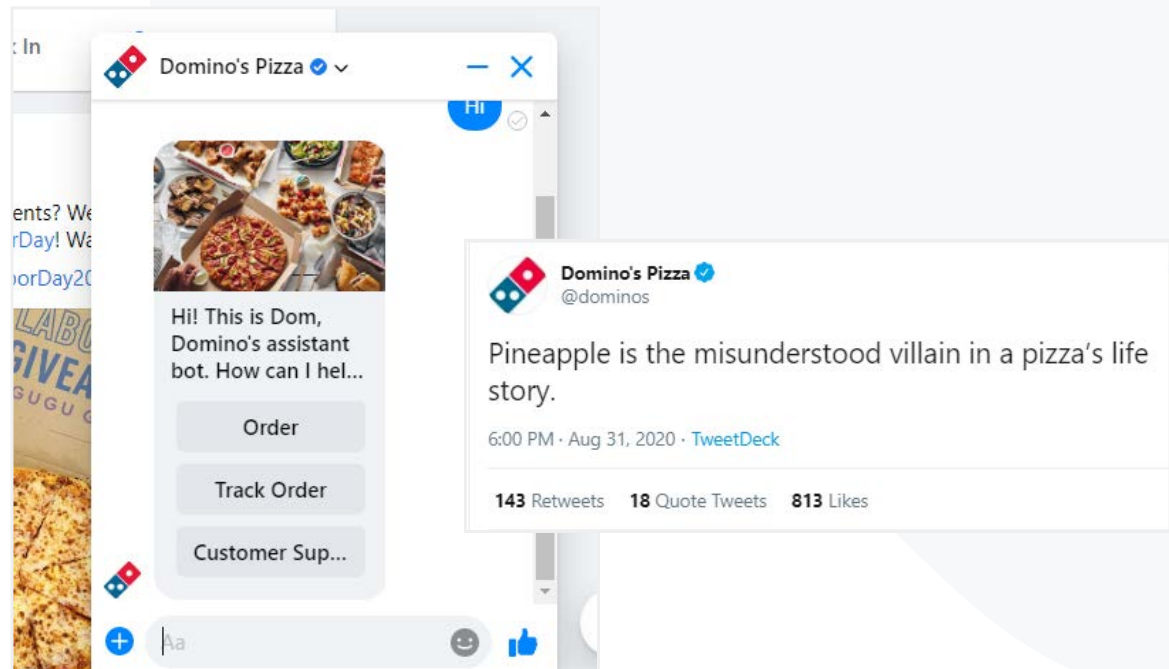
Dan Thorne

Senior Social Media Manager at
[Guinness World Records](#)

BRAND EXAMPLE

Domino's

Domino's interactive Facebook Messenger bot helps tackle consumer questions on a large scale enabling customers to quickly and easily access customer support, track orders, and best of all, buy directly. The bot has a name, Dom, giving it personality, even if a person isn't involved. This combines perfectly with the brand's conversational style that also engages with relevant, relatable content.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

In 2021, expect brands and platforms to engage in more AI-led opportunities in order to connect with more consumers. Promotions will become less forced and derive more from natural conversations and established relationships with consumers.

TAKEAWAYS

Bring the conversation to your consumers

Start those consumer conversations

Consider how you position your brand with consumers and give them ways to start conversations with you. Chatbots, social media messaging, and SMS all provide opportunities for your brand to speak with your audience.

Review your customer journey

Across all your content, look at new ways to lead your consumers into connections. Live-streamed demos are a great way to add personality to the sales process, while heavily focused sales content will quickly deter people from your brand.

Soften your tone of voice

Start showing the human side of your brand. Lose the sales-speak and instead, focus on creating a tone that is more approachable. People will more likely connect with your brand if they feel that more authentic connection.

Break the silo between marketing and customer service

Many of your conversations start in the customer service department. Working more effectively between these two channels can reveal new marketing opportunities and create workable solutions for your customers.

Create a single source of truth

Integrate your customer service data, from chats, emails, and calls, into your analytics platform. This will provide additional insights into all aspects of your **customer journey**, from identifying key messages that engage consumers, revealing pain points causing speed bumps in the sales process, to post-sales complaints that could cause impact on your brand. Try out the **HubSpot free CRM** to make this process easy.

Expert Insights

“

Technologies like AR and VR will help in creating a social media virtual reality world where people can connect, play games, and explore.

Brands started recognizing social media as customer service channels, since customers try to reach out to them on social media. Social networks and regulatory bodies will tighten their norms.



Nur America

Director and Founder, [Newness](#)

“

Gaming audiences is still a largely untapped but potentially effective avenue for brands to drive innovative forms of social engagement. To succeed, brands should go beyond just integrating products & key messages; and focus on the experience they want to build; that's unique to their brand essence & core values.



Eunice Yin Ern

Social Strategy Lead at [Digitas](#)

“

Gen-Z audiences use gaming and social media in equal measure, and that is why these worlds are beginning to merge. As the gaming industry is set to be worth \$94 billion by 2024, brands should consider implementing marketing strategies on gaming sites to complement their wider social media strategy.



Ben Jeffries

CEO at [Influencer](#)

“

The blurring of lines between social media, and gaming platforms will be something to watch out for, as these two communities continue to evolve, and merge.



Jheric Delos

Angeles, Head of Marketing & Partnerships at [Amanotes](#)

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

“

The biggest trend that I see is User Generated Content and gaming interactive form of contents. The reason for this trend to grow is because most of the online users like to interact and engage with content that has entertainment.



Rahul Pillai

Senior Social Media Analyst, Freelancer

BRAND EXAMPLE

Warner Bros.

With the closure of movie theaters, it's been challenging for production companies to ramp up marketing efforts for upcoming films. As well as relying on social media to maintain buzz, some have engaged growing gaming communities to boost awareness and headlines. Warner Bros. made the most of their relationship with the Fortnite game to reveal the trailer for their latest movie, Tenet. They benefited from Fortnite's Party Royale—a space within the game specifically designed for players to engage with the community away from playing.



Overall, the Tenet trailer was mentioned alongside Fortnite 2.6K times, generating 10.3K engagement. These are not massive numbers, but those are just the conversations outside of the game. It was within the Fortnite community that the real conversations and connections happened.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

Expect to see more franchises to expand beyond their gaming origins, building more upon their community connections. With environments like Facebook Horizon due to launch later in 2020, we'll see more communities appearing within gaming and virtual worlds, each with their own interests. We'll also see more brands breaking into these audiences, creating personalized content targeted to drive engagement, and ultimately, sales.

Spotify also saw the benefit of these gamer connections, **partnering as the exclusive audio streaming partner for League of Legends Esports**. This demonstrated a connection between two relevant audiences, and created a separate marketing channel.

TAKEAWAYS

Get your brand game on

Look for more communities

Communities are popping up everywhere, from groups on social media to influencer fanbases, and even gamers within their own gaming world. Find ones with the right demographics for your brand and you have a ready-made consumer base waiting to be spoken to.

Up your social listening game

As these communities grow across more niche platforms or across multiple platforms, you can't rely on basic social listening to understand them. Broaden your opportunities with more data sources, such as Twitch (for gaming communities) or [platforms like Quora](#) (a collection of communities in itself).

Understand those communities

You can't just jump feet first into these communities and hope for the best. Understand what makes these audiences tick and create content designed for them. It'll be less invasive and will be more likely to build the engagement you want.

Break the mold

Part of the success for the Tenet/Fortnite teamup was the ingenuity. Releasing a trailer over a video game was so new that it drove a significant number of press mentions. The originality of the idea was just as effective as the idea itself. When it comes to your next release, see if there are more creative ways to share the news while engaging your community.

If you can't advertise on them, join them

Not every platform offers commercial opportunities. If they are relevant to your audience, though, they should be relevant to your brand, too. Wendy's highlighted this by inviting fans to join them in streaming games like Animal Crossing and Minecraft during the lockdown. Their [Twitch community now has over 86K followers](#).

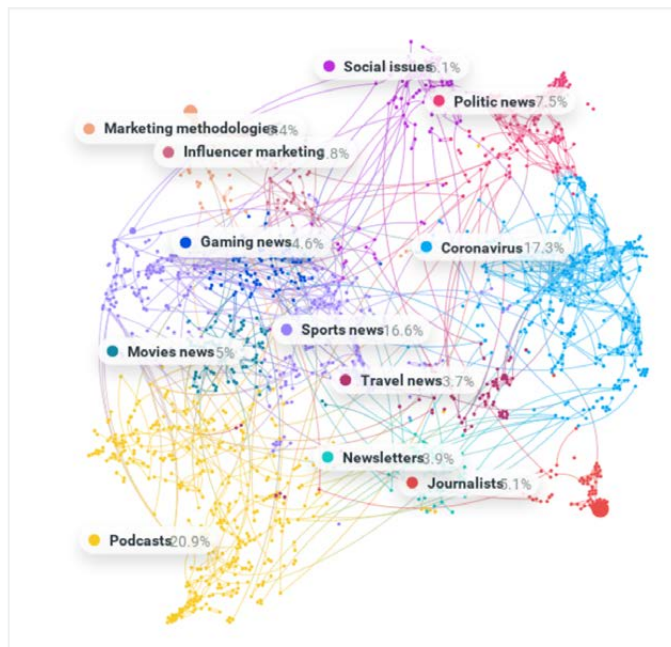
4

Old-school marketing for a new market

Overview

Some trends come and go overnight. Some circulate, bouncing back into the social consciousness every now and then. Marketing techniques are no different. Tactics we previously saw can suddenly reappear, especially during times of uncertainty - with comms professionals switching back to tried-and-tested methods over disruptive ideas. In 2021 we will see a rise in “old-school marketing” as brands switch back to a simpler way of engaging consumers.

Trend analysis



The shape of ‘old-school marketing’ can be seen through our **Conversation Clusters**. During the COVID-19 crisis, people were craving more relevant information. Old-school marketing tactics such as newsletters and podcasts may lack the finesse of more recent methods, but they’re easy to establish by marketers and most importantly, easy to consume by customers.

55% of Americans now listen to podcasts, while newsletter mentions were up 14% during lockdown. 2021 will see continued growth in these areas. There’s also a rise in ‘old-school’ communication methods coming from users, with voice calls coming back. Voice used to be essential for communication, with calls significantly outweighing the use of messaging. Yet currently, **68% of consumers text more than they talk on their smartphones**. Now, we’re seeing voice coming back, with voice search, voice notes, and now voice Tweets—a method to tweet your stories with vocal additions. This ‘new’ communication method has already had 164K mentions with 744.4K engagement, showing these will become bigger in the coming years.

Expert Insights

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Marketers need to be digital first in mindset today. That’s why “old school digital marketing” is as important today as ever. From customer education through blog posts and email marketing to engaging with consumers in webinars, videos, and even podcasting, old school digital marketing is all the rage



Neal Schaffer

Author, *The Age of Influence*

“

Micro > Macro: we will see a rising importance of micro targeting, micro influencer and small data. The little is the detail, the more is the value.



Federica Brancale

CEO at *Marketing Freaks*

“

As 90% of podcasts are listened to on a smartphone – essentially being ‘radio on demand’ – the creation of a series of podcasts to deliver business updates, to keep employees and staff motivated and to update on the state of play, has proven to become an effective means to really resonate and build a level of trust with internal audiences in the absence of the physical office set up.

As we now come out of these few months and some of us move back into offices, whilst others stick to working from home, one thing’s for certain: how we communicate will never be the same again.



Cheryl King

Managing Director, *markettiers* MENA

“

From a brand perspective, studies show that podcast advertising is more effective than other forms of digital advertising thanks to deep audience engagement and strong host/listener rapport. So, when you look at the opportunities for custom-made podcast series and audio ads, the opportunity to reach a young digitally minded audience is absolute.



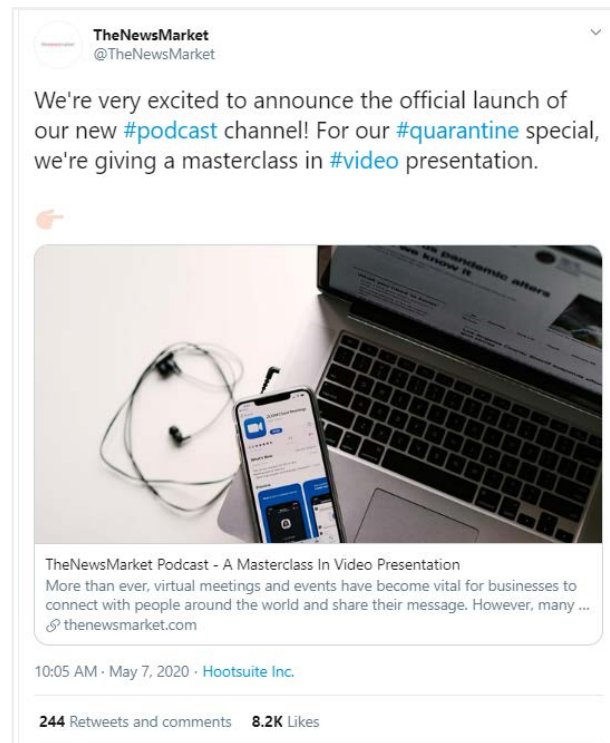
Leila Hamadeh

CEO *Finyal Media*

BRAND EXAMPLE

TheNewsMarket

With the rise in popularity of podcasts, we've seen an increase in new podcasts created over the last 13 months, with 57.6K mentions related to new podcast series. The topics and creators involved are highly varied. From brands stepping into the medium, celebrities expanding their engagement, influencers from YouTube or TikTok increasing their audiences, and even educational podcasts to help consumers deal with the stresses caused by the pandemic.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

Like many of our other trends, this is about building communities. What's different here, is that it isn't about how the content is shared—it's that the content is good and easy to access making for a great user experience. Expect brands to focus more on providing consumers with more content to fulfill their information voids with a particular focus on content over style.

TheNewsMarket already had a more 'old-school' marketing model providing professionals with industry news through various newsletters. A podcast was the perfect fit, and with the launch tweet garnering 8.5K engagement, their audience connected with it straight away.

TAKEAWAYS

Out with the new, in with the old school

Focus on providing the information consumers need

Providing relevant information quickly should become higher priority. High value video production looks great, but it takes time and can be challenging in a working from home environment. Podcasts and newsletters can build those connections quicker. [Here's some more info about starting a podcast](#) for your business.

Use newsletters to nurture your audience

[31% of B2B marketers say newsletters are best for nurturing leads](#). With creative segmentation of your database, you can have hyper-personalized messaging that really cuts through to the information that your consumers are looking for.

Look for podcast opportunities

Even if creating your own podcast may not be suitable, it's become such a broad market—there will be one out there suitable for a brand relationship. Interviews and [sponsorships](#) give you an opportunity to connect your company to a pre-nurtured, defined audience.

Find omni-influencers

Community focused influencers work across multiple channels, combining newsletters and podcasts with TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook content. These omnichannel influencers have multiple connection points with their audience, ensuring their content has maximum engagement and impact.

Add the 'listen' to social listening

With the increase in voice usage through social media and podcasts, textual and visual social listening could miss spoken mentions. Audio analytics ensure that you never miss a brand mention - though only the most advanced social analytics platform will include them.

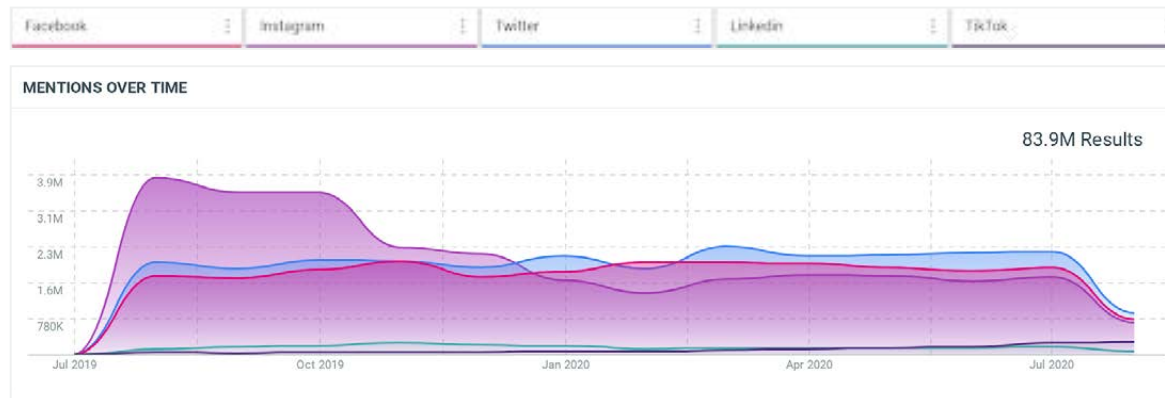
3

Social media giants adapt to the new normal

Overview

Often when reviewing social media trends, there are folks that will cry out that one platform is dying, or that another will take over. For this trend, we predict that the dominant social media platforms of today will be just as significant in 2021 and beyond. They may have new features and will adapt to the trends in their own particular way, but their significance is unlikely to dwindle in the coming years.

Trend analysis



Over the past 13 months, the level of news stories around the 3 biggest social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have balanced out with Twitter being mentioned slightly more across digital news channels. Despite differences in audiences, demographics, and users, these channels hold similar positions in consumers' minds, and it's extremely unlikely they will lose that dominance. Even though awareness of TikTok is increasing through numerous stories mainly focused across the US, it still has a long way to go before it catches up.

These larger platforms have the size and capabilities to adapt quickly to changing trends and consumer habits. Incorporating new features like Facebook Horizon or Twitter voice tweets is very doable while pivoting their features to counteract the popularity of growing channels, at the same time reacting to the trends to counteract disinformation and engage socially conscious audiences.

In 2021, they will still have a significant grip on the social media market, though they certainly won't be exactly the same platforms we use today.

Expert Insights

“

I see a coming backlash to racial and other bias in marketing unwittingly introduced by AI algorithms and the polarizing AI algorithms used by the social networking companies to slice people into groups, so they only see one side of an issue.



David Meerman Scott

Marketing Strategist and WSJ
Bestselling Author of Fanocracy

“

Social shopping will become more prevalent as Facebook rolls out (and optimizes) its Commerce Manager functionality for business owners. Also, virtual events will evolve to become more immersive experiences for social connection in our new COVID-19 world.



Dr. Karen Sutherland

Social Media Educator and Researcher,
University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

“

The era of discussing and debating regulation of social media will soon be over. In 2021, tech giants such as Facebook will increasingly need to adjust to a new set of rules and restrictions imposed by governments and regulators.

Social media users will also have higher expectations in regards to the conduct and behavior of social platforms following scandals such as Cambridge Analytica. Those platforms that fail should expect limited patience or forgiveness by its users in 2021.



Matt Navarra

Social Media Consultant

“

More than ever before, live-stream broadcasts have taken the spotlight on the list of social media trends this year. Livestream viewership has risen by 50% since the start of 2020, coupled with higher rates of engagement compared to regular video uploads. As a practitioner, I've personally seen user preferences changing, platforms evolving, and new platforms coming into existence. And the results? Fantastic. Live streams are certainly exploding right now. They have been proven to be effective in maximizing engagement and driving optimal viewership, dominating the world of social media. Tools like Streamyard and Switcher are game-changers.



Bella Khaja

Founder and Account Director at **Nimble**
Marketing Consultancy

“

Year 2020 has definitely been the year of changes in the digital space. With the ban of TikTok in India and the launch of Instagram Reels plus the rise of lots of local players like Roposso, Trelle etc the influencer marketing ecosystem is definitely evolving. We still don't have a clear winner but it will be good to see who emerges as a leader post TikTok.



Arushi Gupta

Head - [Influencer.in](https://www.influencer.in)

“

A trend that looks to emerge is social shopping. The majority of modern shoppers already use social media for product research and buyer sentiment, and brands will look to capitalize on this point of user contact by bringing the experience one step closer. E-commerce usage is already a part of our everyday lives, and social shopping looks to be the next big thing.



Ashvin Anamalai

Chief Strategist at [Be Strategic](https://www.be-strategic.com)

“

Social commerce in 2021 will completely change the way in which we purchase through social. Driving customers from social to websites has become increasingly difficult due to platform algorithms, over the next 18 months we'll see purchases being made in App. Through Facebook & IG lives and TikTok's partnership with Teespring.



Adam Barrie

Co-Founder & Creative Director at Electric House



“

As the data around the correlation between mental health issues and the rise of social media platforms become more evident, we will begin to see a wave of more conscious social media consumers.

The wave has already started among thought-leaders and the more-aware social media users, and it will continue to rise as the awareness about these issues spread.

The most impactful solutions still largely lie in the hands of the social media platforms, governments and regulators around the world are aware of this fact, and I expect them to start enforcing more strict regulations on the platforms to combat the mass addiction caused by their algorithms.



Yazan Al Tamimi

Social Media Manager at Spotify

Phone makers like Google and Apple already started implementing screen time monitoring tools within their smartphone systems; it's a good start to help users control their consumption but the biggest impact is still to be led by the social media platforms.

There are lots of dynamics to consider in the potential solutions here since the business models of all these platforms are built based on the very thing that is causing these issues— more consumption = more ads served = more revenue. But with all this in mind, now more than ever, it's our collective duty to find and implement solutions that will help combat the negative outcomes caused by the excessive social media consumption.

BRAND EXAMPLE

Facebook

Facebook is a brand as well as a marketing platform. They can engage in consumer relevant trends just like any other company.

As Facebook tackled issues with disinformation, they also took the opportunity to share relevant information with their audience across their own Facebook channels. This video packed with facts about the COVID-19 was shared 33K times, with 183K engagement. This is a demonstration from the platform that providing the right information consumers crave is vital for the retention of the community.

We can also see their response to the rise of platforms like TikTok, introducing [Instagram Reels](#). This new feature engages the needs of upcoming audiences, demonstrating that the brand listens to the trends and responds successfully.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

Expect to see these major platforms continue to dominate the landscape, even encapsulating more elements into their structure (such as Facebook's acquisition of GIPHY). Though things are unsettled now, they will remain a vital element of every marketing strategy, especially earned and paid marketing.

TAKEAWAYS

Go big on social media

Don't get lost in the hype

Though negative stories do arise, the headlines don't always match consumer sentiment. These channels still show growth in user numbers and audience reach, demonstrating they're still strong marketing outlets.

Find the right social media mix

There's always the temptation to try and be on every social channel available, but as more niche platforms appear, you may spread yourself too thin. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter should still be the backbone of your marketing spend, so you can encapsulate their large and broad audiences.

Adapt as the platforms do

Keep reviewing how you use each platform, and make the most of the features available. It's a challenge, but if your audience engages with Stories more than posts, for example, you'll want to adapt your content to meet their expectations, or risk losing them.

More channel monitoring

How can you tell how your audience is changing? Channel monitoring can help. These analytics will give you vital consumer insights, which can help influence your content ideation and planning. While native analytics give you an overview of each channel, a complete [channel monitoring solution](#) makes the process much simpler.

Monitor your paid social effectively

If you are investing heavily on paid social media, you should monitor that just as efficiently as your other social monitoring efforts. Since paid and organic work well when aligned, a solution that monitors both would help you optimize those campaigns.

2 The rise of digital disinformation

Overview

Social media has always blurred the lines between fact and fiction—from the highly edited lives of some Instagrammers, to Twitter parody accounts. The COVID-19 health crisis has brought the issue of disinformation to the forefront. Society is facing an uncertain future, and this uncertainty has created a hotbed of misinformation, with false stories leading to life-changing decisions. Expect 2021 to be the year brands and social media channels focus on highlighting the truth, and silencing ‘fake news.’

Trend analysis



From February 2020 onwards, mentions of fake news, misinformation, and conspiracy theories increased dramatically. The sudden rise of COVID-19 created an information void –people desperately wanted more information around the global pandemic, yet it wasn't easy for people to identify an authoritative source they felt they could trust. This led to consumers filling in the gaps for themselves, leading to a rise in fake news and conspiracy theories.

This will have some drastic consequences in the coming months - 28% of U.S. adults believe a potential vaccine for COVID-19 will be used to implant microchips into people. This misconception will lead to a challenge for medical companies and governments attempting to put down the virus.

Expert Insights

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We will continue to see the growth in creators in the social media space. Influencers will continue to be present, but accountability, authenticity, and transparency will be the areas brands and companies will use to determine who to partner with, and who to pass on. Empathy and advocacy will be elements that will be integrated within messages and purposes for creator campaigns. The days of “faking it till you make it” without any experience other than having lots of followers are over.



Karen Freberg

Associate Professor of Strategic Communication

“

The rise of digital disinformation will place extra pressure on government and public sector agencies as they step up their communications online. The COVID-19 infodemic in particular needs agile, responsive, trusted and transparent digital communications. Social listening is essential to capture public sentiment and to respond to fake news.



Joanne Sweeney

Author & CEO at [Public Sector Marketing Institute](#)

“

Because of the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of today's very competitive world, misinformation and disinformation will not just be on the rise, but their distant cousin - malinformation - will rise as well. And they will continue to wreak havoc if/when left unchecked by social media platforms. We are, therefore, faced with the most difficult task of carefully balancing when and what content to police or when and what content to allow in the name of freedom of expression.



Ron F. Jabal

APR, [CEO PAGEONE Group](#)

“

The rise of deepfakes, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda and post-truth, often referred to as fake news, raises concerns over the role of Internet and social media in building your brand and how your brand will be perceived in the future. Due to its rapid and widespread diffusion, digital disinformation has not only an individual or societal cost, but it can lead to significant economic losses.

Today, social media platforms miss an adequate regulation and their roles and responsibilities are still not clearly defined. A number of issues are still open, like the application of adequate data protection rules and until this is rectified, prepare for a field day for the fakes.



Janet Machuka

Founder [ATC Digital Academy](#)

“

The audience will show greater prudence in detecting propaganda and fake news - they have seen conspiracy theories fall flat in the year 2020 and are aware that the content on leading social platforms are not gospels of truth.



Umesh Krishna K

Director - Marketing at Swiggy

“

We've seen a massive shift online to "harmful content" or content that is meant to harm brands, either intentionally or not. Because of that, fake news, misinformation, lies, or QAnon will create crises for brands—without much warning. This is the most important place for you to spend your time in 2021.



Gini Dietrich

Founder and author, *Spin Sucks*

“

I hope to see more efforts in minimising fake news, half-truths and hate speeches on all social media platforms. If social media were to replace printed media like newspapers, they need to build credibility by fact-checking contents on its platform.



Andrew Lee

Group Managing Director at Havas Immerse

“

Trust and authenticity will be key themes. Weary consumers are gravitating to trusted media brands to help navigate uncertainty. The tech giants are under greater public scrutiny. There is an opportunity for brands and marketing and communications teams to build trust by engaging authentically with their audiences.



Tim Williamson

Managing Director, APAC, *Telum Media*

“

The digital surge during the pandemic has put transparency, communication and trust under the spotlight. Going forward, consumers will continue to demand authenticity in everything, from information sources to experiences. That is why the future of social media will be user-generated and community-driven, by far more trustworthy than branded content.



Tania Tai

Managing Director at *DIA Brand Consultants Malaysia*

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

“

I see consumers becoming discerning on social media platforms - evaluating fake news, paid media, buzzy news vs some real conversations between brands and humans, engaging with authentic and more real content. Also social enabling some real human connections vs a 'projected life.



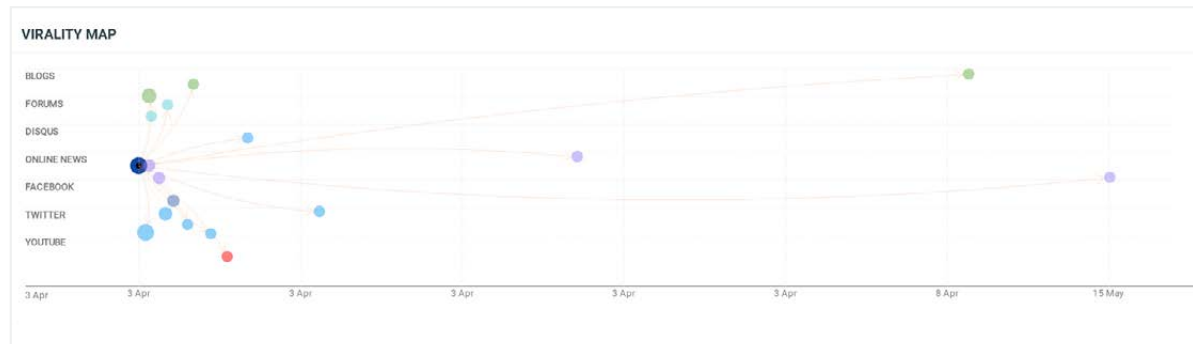
Vartika Malviya Hali

Nielsen Global Connect

BRAND EXAMPLE

Vodafone

Vodafone recently got pulled into a COVID-19 fake news story. A fake video claiming to be a whistleblower from the company stated that the virus was caused by 5G. This video was initially shared across forums and news sites, with just one mention of the video gaining 1.8K engagement after being shared across social media.



How the trend will change the digital landscape

Expect social media channels to continue actively tackling misleading information, through means such as **labeling that Twitter recently activated**. It'll be a challenging task, as platforms find the balance between transparency, open communication, and managing the issue, so expect numerous fixes to appear throughout 2021 as a fitting solution is found.

CNBC @CNBC

Vodafone exec slams 5G-coronavirus conspiracy theories: 'The worst type of fake news'

Vodafone exec slams 5G-coronavirus conspiracy theories: 'The worst type of fake...' Such baseless claims have inspired people to torch cell phone towers in Europe, resulting in outcry from officials, carriers and scientists. [cnbc.com](#)

5:15 PM · Apr 21, 2020 · SocialFlow

Vodafone, alongside numerous other telecom companies, have suffered the repercussions of this story. 5G towers have been burnt down, causing significant damage and delay to the network. The company was forced to respond to counteract the negative impact, though it appears more needs to be done to calm the situation.

TAKEAWAYS

Be a brand information provider

Be a transparent brand

If you're not providing the information consumers want, someone else will. **66% of consumers state that brand transparency is one of the most attractive qualities in a brand.** If you're more open with the truth, it's harder for people to fill information gaps with dishonesty around your brand.

Get your security locked and loaded

We're seeing a rise in hackers taking over authentic channels to disseminate false information—users responded to tweets as they appeared to come from a trusted source. Ensure all your channels, social media, email, etc, are secure and verified, to help mitigate the risk of hacks.

Monitor more broadly than ever

You'll have to up your **brand monitoring** to a new scale to detect issues that don't exist. Ensure you have an alert system in place to quickly find where your brand is being tied to fake news. And remember, many of these stories are born on politicized forums, so ensure you are covering them in your data.

Careful what you share

Don't pull your brand into controversy by sharing the wrong information. Ensure all comms teams (plus C-Suite) have clear communication guidelines. And if they're not 100% sure of the authenticity of a source, they should seek support from your legal team.

Check who controls your channels

The other risk with social media is the possibility of rogue employees (or recently made ex-employees) taking over your channels—we saw this play out with a **disgruntled social media manager at TapMedia**. This can lead to disinformation, or non-publicly disclosed details, being shared in the public eye. Check who has account access, and ensure a plan is in place if admins are about to change.

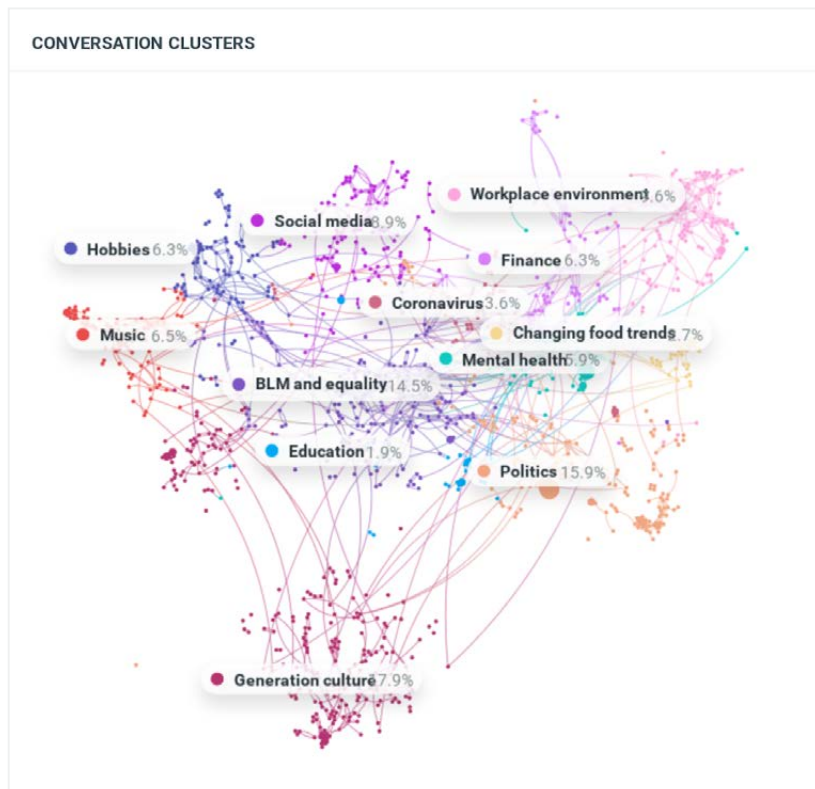
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The impact of socially conscious audiences

Overview

This is the number one trend as defined by our survey. In 2020, it was clear how this socially conscious generation (and the future Generation Alpha) had an impact on brands, politics, and society as a whole. Companies will have to engage more with topics like mental health, inclusivity, and social justice, or face becoming irrelevant and potentially obsolete in 2021.

Trend analysis



When we look at **Conversation Clusters** relating to Generations Z & Alpha from 2020, we can quickly identify how socially aware they are. Politics, equality, education, mental health, finance, changing food trends are proliferant conversations on social media. These topics are critical to these generations, and social media is their way to bring them to attention. The COVID-19 health crisis also impacted Gen Z badly - **50% have either lost a job, or had someone in their household** lose a job because of the pandemic. In the coming years, they will have more to fight for, and will potentially become more vocal about the issues that matter more to them.

Expert Insights

“

The rise of socially conscious consumers is only expected to grow with Gen-Z now moving towards adulthood and nearing their entry into the formal workforce. Known to be the most well-educated generation yet and one that mirrors similar values to those of Millennials, including their outlook on climate change, racial equality, feminism, educational and professional equality and much more. Brands need to realize that they need to go well beyond just lip-service and do the work on creating an honest social impact. Based on a poll conducted by Forbes in 2019, 88% of consumers want to support brands that have social causes aligned with their product/service. Aside from it just being something 'nice' to have on your mission statement, it's now, also incredibly profitable.



Roha Daud

Wellness & Food Sustainability -
Brand Consultant

“

With the rise of social conscious audiences brings complexities for the social media companies and entities such as NGO's who support social causes globally, for example, the global refugee problem. It is going to become increasingly difficult for some NGO's to raise awareness and funds through social media companies in 2021. This will stem from the fact that there is more attention around political and social issues around the world and the negative publicity or impact that social media companies like Facebook have received that come across as interference in other countries' issues. NGO's supporting causes outside their own country will get caught in a situation where they may not be able to boost posts monetarily to raise awareness and funds any longer. We are just starting to see this trend now and will only increase to the point where some NGO's may need to consider other ways besides social media to communicate to audiences who support their global missions in 2021.



Dennis Owen

Digital Storyteller and Social
Media Consultant

“

The pandemic has changed a lot of habits and digital consumption is the most drastic one. While social media was a platform to build conversations earlier, it now becomes a channel for brands to build their cultural identity, especially in SEA region where the number of digital consumers would reach 310 million by the end of 2020.

This identity ensures that consumers remember a brand beyond their products, they relate with them and consider them reliable. Lastly to build a strong brand on social, marketers have to think beyond the generalisation of Gen Z and millennials to create a brand which focuses on building a community of like minded individuals



Charles Tan

APAC Marketing Director at OPPO

“

Brands will have to find their place in public dialogue on social, particularly when it comes to social justice. However, words without action are meaningless: demonstrating commitment will matter more than ever when it comes to attracting (and retaining) employees, customers and other key stakeholders.



Eva Taylor

Director of Social Strategy,
Operations & CSR at Hootsuite

“

Short-form video will continue to rise in popularity, with more brands exploring TikTok and Instagram’s Reels. Brands will be looking to create unique 15-second videos to ensure they are showing up where their audience is now spending time. We will see more corporate, traditional brands launching eye-catching campaigns in this new medium in a bid to target Generation Z audiences. We are likely to see more recruitment campaigns for both career and education opportunities utilizing TikTok and Reels.

Savvy brands will enlist the help of food, beauty, fashion and sports influencers to create content on their behalf. These influencers will have technical know-how in using the full menu of effects, such as stickers, filters, and music to ensure their content stands out.

Global brands with health advertising budget will explore paid opportunities amongst short-form video content, particularly when it comes to supporting large events such as the Super Bowl and rescheduled Olympics.



Alison Battisby

Social Media Consultant and
Founder of **Avocado Social**

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In the coming year, socially conscious consumers in Asia will continue to impact on brand marketing decisions. But not necessarily in support of the same issues that western audiences engage with. While global topics such as climate change and gender equality are important, Asian consumers want to engage with issues that often feel more immediately ‘closer to home’ – poverty, clean water, healthcare, local democracy. Brands creating and engaging with a global purpose, need to be aware that one-size doesn’t fit all.



Lee Nugent

Chair **PRCA SEA** & Regional Director (APAC), Archetype

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Going into 2021, Team Carney recommends brands to embrace their “Why” with specifics. Consumers are paying attention, and actively choosing to support brands that align with their values. How would a brand or agency do this? Pick a side and lean into your values with action. Think Aerie’s commitment toward using un-retouched images and diverse representation or Patagonia’s investment in renewable energy and its monetary incentive for employees to carpool.

At Carney, we help clients reach their “why” by kicking off any project with a Discovery Session. We dig deep into audience personas to formulate messaging that speaks to their material and emotional needs.



Rob Carney

Owner of **Carney**: a digital agency that produces the marketing newsletter, The Daily Carnage.

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Inclusive and intergenerational content: If we’ve been keenly watching 2020, we’ll notice one thing. The year has been unraveling many truths. Truths that have been longing to get their due. 2021 will be the comeback that we’ve been waiting for. With shorter form content still being the most shared format, we’ll be seeing inclusivity with brands being more ‘woke’ along with consumers.

Brands must be careful on stepping on the thin line between actionism and activism. Speaking of inclusivity, intergenerational content will be mounting the hobby horse of popularity and help bridge the gap between generations, getting people closer as a result. Memes will continue to use truth as an icing, adding mirth to the laughter cake and facilitating micro-conversations. It’s all about chattering with fingertips, with silent lips and that will change the parameters for social engagement. Let me double tap that!



Shashwith Uthappa

Network Director, GetCraft Singapore

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The rise of socially conscious audiences - With an increased focus on well being of self and society, the relevance of brands giving back to society and environment has never been higher. Audiences are also connecting more with brands that have a cause or stand for initiatives that they relate to and this trend is going to grow even further in 2021.



Vikas Chawla

Co-Founder - [Social Beat](#),
Influencer.in & Digigrad

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The number of senior executives being fired for inappropriate tweets, the rising examples of brands coming under fire for putting advertising budgets behind questionable content and corporations being punished in stock markets for unsustainable business practices, all point towards one thing - the rise and rise of socially conscious consumers.



Prasad Sangameshwaran

Editor, [ETBrandEquity.com](#)

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Audiences, whether they be customers, employees, investors, or anyone who comes into contact with a brand, are increasingly expecting it to play a role in society, beyond simply producing a product or service. As if the brand were itself a person, it's no longer enough to be a consummate professional. How does the brand behave outside the workplace, what values does it believe in, and whose company does it keep? These are the questions that communications professionals are now having to address.



Madan Bahal

Managing Director, [Adfactors PR](#)

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Brand responsibility is taking centre stage. Now more than ever, we're demanding that our brands show up with purpose and meaning, beyond product marketing agendas. Those that do well will be the soul searchers who are committed to long term understanding of their wider impact. What's exciting is that brands are using social data to fuel their responses with a true understanding of what's going on, in real time, and how their vision fits. We'll see more long-termism, less emphasis on product marketing and unprecedented investment in brand health mechanisms that offer consumers credible value. Well, for the brands that want to succeed in today's business climate!



Dr Jillian Ney

Digital Behavioral Scientist, [The Social Intelligence Lab](#)

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

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With the increase of social media activism and activist, we will witness a change in behavior in the way consumers interact with social platforms. They will be more conscious and brands have to capitalize on this behavioral change with the content they produce. It will mean brands can no longer be happy to remain neutral without opinions. Brands that take a stand will be loved and engaged with versus brands that insulate themselves against any form of opinions.



Binodan Sarma

Vice President & Head of Digital, **Dentsu Impact**

VOICE OF THE PUBLIC

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Trust is going to be imperative, so brands have to be honest, conscientious, and appropriately humorous. In a world where people feel that they have to compromise enough (in what we hope is a post-pandemic world), the last thing they want is for companies to be insensitive, or unethical to make a quick buck.



Vasundhara Mudgil

Head of Communications at Spotify India

BRAND EXAMPLE

Nike

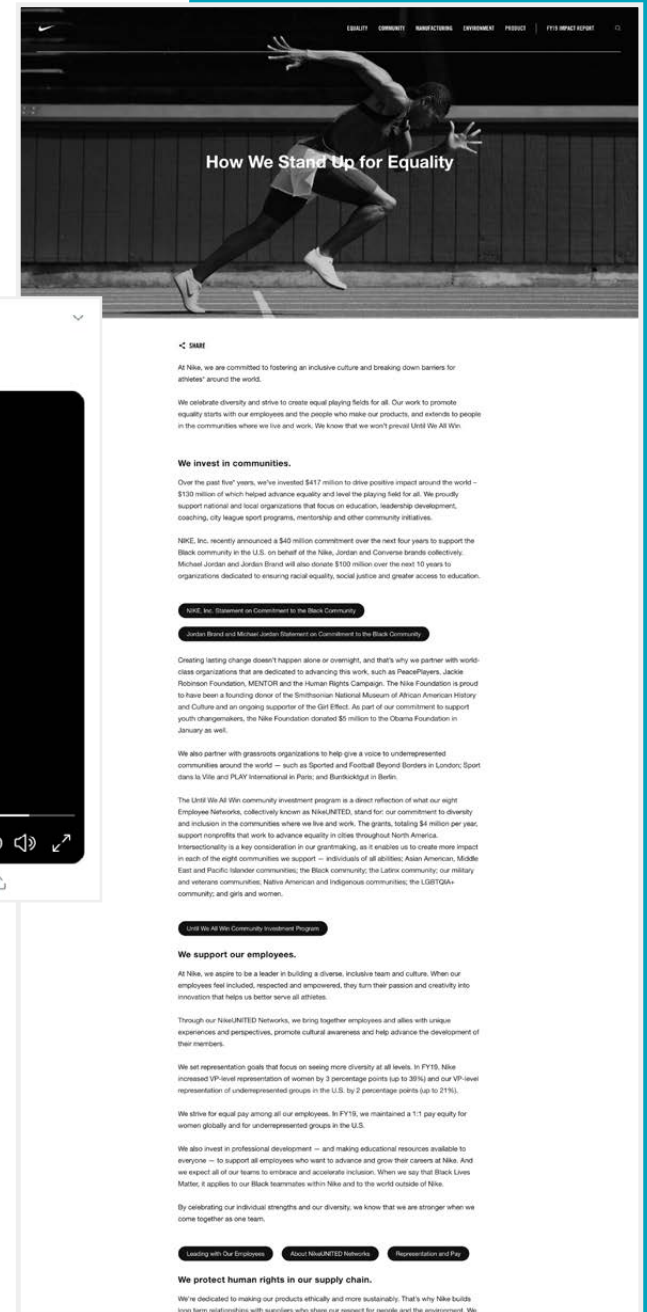
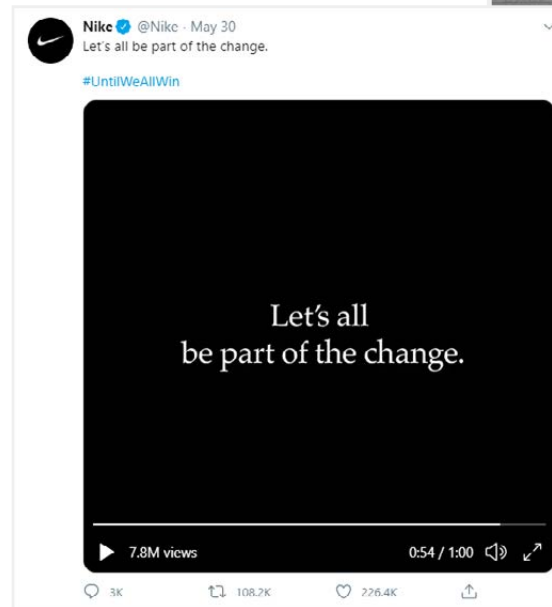
Nike has never been a brand to edge away from politics. Following the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement earlier in the year, Nike engaged with the topic quickly, drawing their line in the sand. This tweet quickly garnered attention.

With over 7.8 million views and 326.5K engagement, the message resonated. Nike followed up with clear brand commitments, both financial and strategic, to support their employees, supply chain and communities. To date, #UntilWeAllWin has been mentioned 131K times, with 671K engagement.

Their socially conscious strategy is making a difference with powerful messaging, like their You Can't Stop Us campaign, already reaching nearly 58M views on YouTube alone.

How the trend will change the digital landscape

Brands will start to reposition themselves dramatically over the coming months, moving away from marketing methodologies, to more cause-driven messaging. Socially conscious marketing isn't a quick trick, though, and brands that act superficially will flounder when called out by consumers, while brands that authentically engage with the issues that matter will thrive as younger generations increase their spending power.



TAKEAWAYS

Add the conscious to your brand social

Connect your brand and your audience

Understand your audience to find the issues that matter to them. Before you engage publicly with an issue, you have to be earnest about it, ensuring that you're tackling it across your whole company. If not, you will face repercussions.

Focus your marketing on your mission

Hard sell won't work for Millennials and younger generations. Advertising can be seen as invasive, and only **1% of Millennials say a compelling advertisement will build trust**. A mission-led marketing campaign will instead connect with the audience on a more emotive level, creating stronger brand resonance.

Align your marketing and PR

If you've not aligned these departments, **do it now**. The more human side of PR can help disseminate the new messages you're tackling. This can only work if the two departments are completely aligned with positioning and data (with **a single source of truth**).

Go full throttle, but keep a toe on the brake

With these types of campaigns, it's all or nothing. You have to be committed to your cause, but it's possible to misjudge the timing or tone of your message. Monitor the response sentiment. You will get some flack (you can't please everyone), but too much and you should look to pull the campaign.

Avoid social crises

Even if you don't market your brand around social issues, that doesn't mean you're immune. Savvier generations will research your brand, and look at how you're tackling global issues. If they find something that's not up to par, the best case scenario is that they won't become a customer. In the worst case, you could have a brand crisis on your hands.

2021'S ULTIMATE TREND

The Consumer is King

To succeed in 2021, consumers need to be at the center of your marketing strategy. The idiom “the consumer is king” may be cliché, but it is more relevant than before. The brands that fully understand their consumers—their motivations, needs, conversations—and take decisive actions based on those insights, will be the ones that survive the turbulence ahead. Now is the time to listen to the **customer voice** and turn it into brand success for 2021.

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We will see a deeper focus on community building and audience intelligence. The pandemic has created new opportunities for us to connect and brands are seeing the importance of fostering these bonds. Brands will need to do more social listening and research to better understand why consumers engage with them.



Christina Garnett

Insights Strategist at VIZIT

Methodology

Insights were taken from Talkwalker Analytics and Talkwalker Quick Search for the last 13 months, prior to August 14, 2020. Mentions of topics were gathered from a variety of media including news sites, social media channels, blogs, and forums. Sentiment analysis, video analytics & image recognition are powered by the Talkwalker AI Engine.

Sentiment analysis is performed with an average of 90% accuracy, with the ability to detect sarcasm and ironic comments. Images are compared to a database of over 30,000 brand logos, to help identify brands in social media photos and videos. Queries were used to identify the topics discussed. In some cases, these may have been improved using Boolean operators, to help remove false positives.