


Hootsuite®

S O C I A L T R E N D S

2021



Hootsuite's fifth annual report on the
latest global trends in social media



To say any of us saw 2020 coming would be a lie.
A global pandemic, economic collapse, unignorable calls
for racial equality, and an ongoing climate crisis all made
for a tough, dark year.

But when there is darkness, there is light. There is resiliency,
innovation, and creativity—and there's always a path back to growth.

In this year's report, you'll find big ideas and quick wins. New
solutions to old problems. And real stories from leading brands
around the world. All backed by insights from the brightest minds
in marketing and data from our biggest survey yet.

I hope it helps you find your way forward.



Tom Keiser
CEO, Hootsuite

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Executive summary

Based on our annual survey of 11,189 marketers, interviews with industry experts, and exhaustive research, we've identified five key social media trends for 2021.

TREND 1 | page 10

The race to ROI: Social bridges the gap to a new customer experience

As businesses struggle to recoup lost sales in the wake of the pandemic, marketers turn to social to meet two equally urgent imperatives: deliver short-term ROI with targeted performance marketing tactics while building innovative digital experiences that win long-term loyalty by bringing discovery, connection, and fun back to the customer experience.

TREND 2 | page 18

Silence is golden: Brands find their place in the conversation

A dramatic uptick in social media use presented a huge number of new opportunities for brands this year—but many missed the mark by jumping in too soon. Smart brands sat back and listened, then won with creative, original ways of fitting *into* the social conversation to break through the wall of indifference.

TREND 3 | page 26

Way more than OK: A generation ignored by digital marketers booms on social

Stereotypes, ageism, and a yearslong habit of chasing newness over effectiveness have left marketers underestimating—and underrepresenting—an increasingly digitally savvy and lucrative demographic: baby boomers. By using smart segmentation and thoughtful representation, marketers that include baby boomers in their digital strategies can leapfrog those still stuck in stereotypes.



**TREND 4** | page 33**Do I know you? Tying engagement to identity gives advanced marketers new momentum**

For years, linking social media engagement to customer identity has proved an elusive goal for marketers. But with renewed momentum and executive attention on social media's ability to retain critical connections with customers, now is the time to take steps—big or small—to bridging the gap between engagement and customer identity.

TREND 5 | page 41**The perils (and promise) of purpose: Bold brands start in the boardroom, not the front lines of social**

In a year marked by social upheaval, marketers stumbled under pressure to publicly address issues that their organizations had never focused on, or were only beginning to align with. Instead of using social as a mouthpiece for empty promises, strong CMOs will use the intelligence gathered by social media teams in 2021 to help the organization adapt to new buyer beliefs, new ways of doing commerce, and the new path to growth that requires balancing the twin demands of building a better business and a better world.





Methodology

This report is based on a survey of 11,189 marketers conducted in Q3 2020. We've supplemented these results with insights from primary interviews with dozens of industry specialists, as well as published reports and data from Deloitte, Edelman, eMarketer, Forrester, GlobalWebIndex, The CMO Survey, and others.

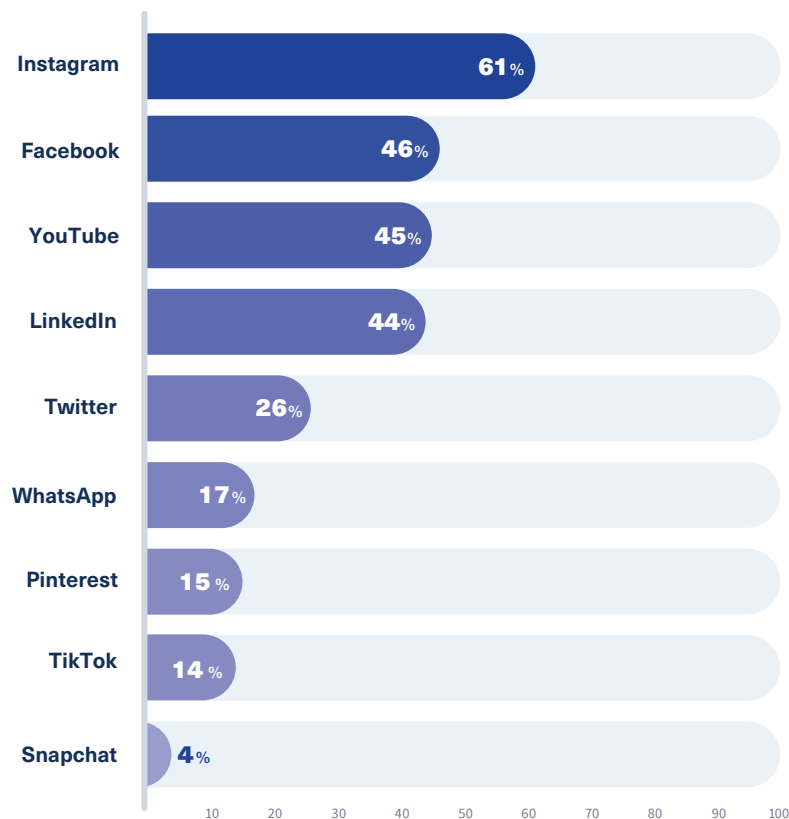
The most effective social platforms for 2021

MORE THAN HALF OF ALL BUSINESSES (60%) are planning to increase their Instagram budget, and almost half are planning to do the same for Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Notably, for all the hype of TikTok, it has not increased in importance in the investment stack.

Instagram leads the charge in attracting marketing spend



Do you plan on increasing your investment in the following channels in 2021?



Source: Hootsuite's Social Trends 2021 Survey.
n = 9,487

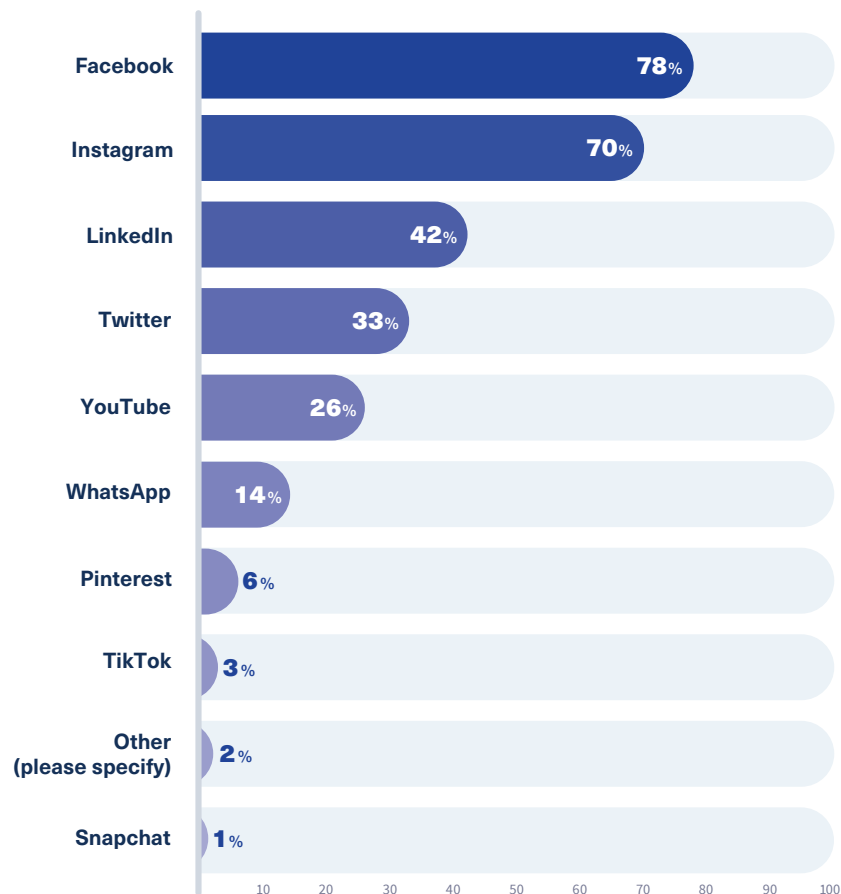


Marketers are smartly following where the user growth is. Instagram added the greatest number of new users between July and September 2020, posting even stronger growth figures than Facebook. Instagram's advertising reach grew by 7.1% in the most recent quarter—more than three times Facebook at 2.2%.¹ With overall marketing budgets trimmed in 2021, it's no surprise that marketers are focusing on familiar favorites, rather than experimenting with newer tactics and platforms.

Marketers double down on well-established platforms



What social platforms do you consider the most effective for reaching your business goals?



Source: Hootsuite Social Trends 2021 Survey.

Respondents were asked to select their top three options.

n = 9,487



Our analysis also found that for marketers who don't invest in paid advertising, Twitter and Pinterest are seen as the most effective channels. In particular, Pinterest received high marks for driving bottom-of-funnel conversions.

While our data points to what marketers see as the most effective channels, wise marketers will also look for under-priced attention.

With a fast-paced year of COVID-19, protests for racial equality, and a US election, Twitter saw a resurgence. It remains one of the top 20 most visited websites in the world, and is often underestimated in the media mix for marketers. Pinterest added new ROI-driven advertising tools and a "Today" tab to keep users engaged. And while retail remains the dominant use case for Pinterest, we saw rising use of Pinterest among brands in the education, advertising, and business and professional services industries.



T R E N D 1

The race to ROI

Social bridges the gap to
a new customer experience



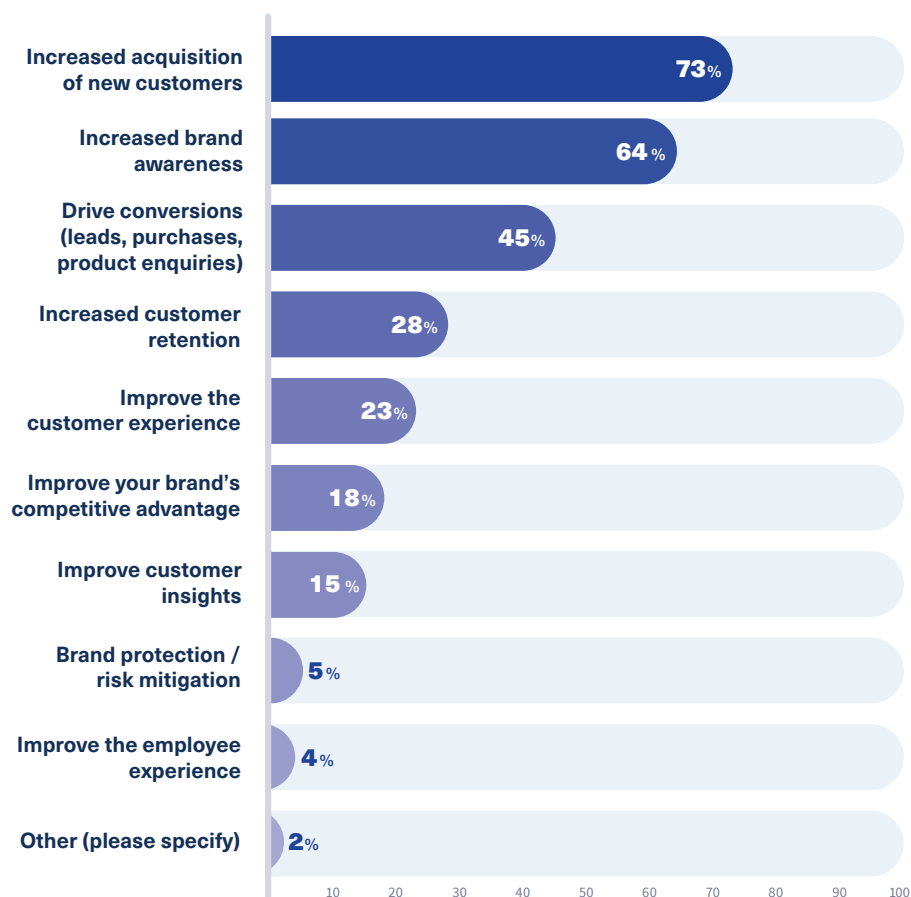


IT'S NO SHOCK: THE PANDEMIC, BUDGET CUTS, AND WORLD ECONOMIES FALLING INTO RECESSIONS have put marketers under pressure to bring new customers in the (proverbial) door. According to our 2021 Social Trends survey, 73% of all marketers ranked “increased acquisition of new customers” as their top outcome for social in 2021, compared to only 46% last year, marking a 58% year-over-year increase.

Customer acquisition is social marketers' top goal



In 2021, what are the top 3 outcomes your organization (or clients) are trying to achieve with social media?



Source: Hootsuite's Social Trends 2021 Survey.
n = 9,279

While marketers race to generate new revenue, it's interesting to note what slid further down the list. Only 23% of marketers



cited “improving the customer experience” as a key business outcome for social. And using social to “improve customer insights” sunk to 15%—a worrying slip when so much about customer behavior and demand has shifted in a historic year.

Remember the mood lighting that made you linger a little longer while buying new clothes? The technical expert who helped you choose the right product without making you feel dumb? The tasty in-store samples that ruined your dinner? Many of these tangible customer experiences that helped differentiate brands were wiped out, leaving businesses scrambling to adapt their online presence to fill the void.

So, while the shift to short-term, ROI-accountable tactics is understandable (and in some cases, very necessary), it's also critical to remember that the pandemic rolled a wrecking ball through customer experience efforts. The problem is that the online experiences offered by most organizations are highly transactional, as they were originally meant to supplement in-person experiences—not replace them.

Transactions alone don't create memorable brands or long-term growth. And sitting and waiting for things to go back to “normal” instead of building for the future will put organizations at a serious competitive disadvantage. Jason Thomas, head of global research at The Carlyle Group, predicts that “... it is likely that the most salient disparities in two years' time will be between companies within the same industry, as some management teams focus on reinventing their businesses while others endeavor to return to January 2020 levels with only minor adjustments.”²

Wise marketers will continue driving quick bursts of ROI through lower-funnel ads to keep the lights on in 2021, but they'll also be working toward delivering innovative experiences that dovetail with unchanged, fundamental buying behaviors and customer needs.

For clues on how to do this, look to the world of ecommerce, which has been rapidly reimagining the online customer experience with social media at the core. The very nature of social media revolves around discovery, connection, and fun—elements that customers are sorely missing in the absence of in-person experiences and events.

Transactions alone don't create memorable brands or long-term growth.



Livestreaming events on social platforms have been helping fill the void, offering new ways for brands, experts, influencers, and customers to connect. In China, where social commerce has already been widely adopted, a Tommy Hilfiger livestream event attracted 14 million viewers and sold out of 1,300 hoodies in two minutes.³ In the US, livestream shopping events are predicted to generate \$25 billion in sales by 2023, according to Coresight Research.⁴ Livestreaming shopping events are basically a fun, community-driven, digital version of home shopping channels on TV like QVC, so this isn't a radical new concept—it's an age-old tactic delivered in a new way, under the right conditions.

We can see the monetization of short-form video, another core component of Asia's social commerce success, gaining momentum as well. TikTok has already begun experimenting with in-app purchases, allowing a popular creator to sell goods through a pop-up page within the app.⁵ And with its multibillion dollar investment in TikTok, Walmart, one of the biggest brick-and-mortar retailers, clearly sees the economic potential of engaging with consumers not just when they're buying something from their website, but when they're creating and consuming short-form video in a social setting.

On Taobao, China's largest ecommerce platform, 42% of product pages already include short videos.⁶ As Connie Chan, general partner at venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz put it, "Think of them as compulsively watchable commercials—with a direct link to buy."⁷

Simply chasing bottom-funnel clicks in 2021 won't be enough. Marketers must use social's performance abilities, while also helping to recreate missing customer experiences.

This will not only elevate social's value in the eyes of leadership but also help to differentiate your products and services from a rising sea of advertisers desperately trying to win wallets in a retracting economy.





The trend in action

Clarins reimagined the offline experience for online shoppers

Hootsuite's customer, Clarins, a luxury skincare, cosmetics, and perfume company, was forced to close all of their stores when the pandemic hit, which had traditionally been the source of most of their retail sales and profits. The company needed to shift its focus to ecommerce while continuing to provide the expert guidance it's known for—without the face-to-face in-store interactions.

The team called on Clarins beauty coach Rebecca Jones and quickly settled on a low-cost approach tailor-made for social media: Rebecca would share her expertise with customers by posting new videos daily—from her own bedroom—via Instagram Stories.

Replicating the insights and techniques that customers would have experienced in store, Rebecca showed off skincare rituals designed to address the different sensitivities that consumers were finding in their skin. The home-based, DIY nature of the stories resonated with customers, who identified with Rebecca and enjoyed watching her perform her skin care rituals in her own home.

The results were immediate and positive, with story completion rates jumping from a previous average of 20% to an impressive 75%—the highest the team had seen on social channels.⁸

While in-store retail remained out of the question, Clarins still wanted to provide the one-to-one consultancy the company is renowned for. The team developed and launched a new service called Clarins & Me, allowing customers to book a free video consultation with a Clarins beauty advisor. Launched just two weeks into the lockdown, the new service was successful from the start, with more than 450 bookings in the first month alone.



What you should do in 2021

➔ Multiply your ROI by adding more channels

Multichannel campaigns tend to have a higher ROI than single media campaigns. In fact, for every channel you add, you can improve your ROI and effectiveness by up to 35%, according to Analytic Partners.⁹

Start by bringing user-generated content (UGC) from social into email marketing campaigns, or by uniting your search and social ads.

➔ Turn inspiration into incremental revenue

Online shopping is typically a very task-oriented activity, which takes a lot of fun out of the buying process for customers.

It's fun to go shopping with your friends at the mall and browse through the aisles—it's less fun to sift through search results and Amazon reviews to find a new blender.

Bring back some of the fun in the buying process by using Instagram Live or Pinterest as virtual showrooms. Think of it as the checkout lane at the supermarket, where people would be inspired to buy things they didn't know they needed or wanted.

➔ Put social back in shopping

It's tough to be confident you're making the right purchase when you can't see, touch, or interact with the product you're buying—or when there isn't a salesperson or trusted expert to guide you toward the right decision. Have your employees host live Q&A sessions or simply share content that can help bring an informative yet social element back into the buying process.

Another effective way to inspire confidence is by tapping into influencers and user-generated content. "Most people dislike being the first to try or buy new things," says Matt Greener, VP



of marketing at TINT. “And when we’re not able to tangibly handle a product or service, that distrust is amplified even more. If I can’t really see it in person, it’s more difficult to trust what the brand is saying. But if I see other people, who I can tell haven’t been paid a lot of money to say positive things, I can trust that.”

Jim Habig, global head of business marketing at Pinterest, agrees. “If you don’t have the impulse moments at the checkout anymore, where people grab something spontaneously off the shelf, recommendations from trusted creators can become that source of inspiration.”

➔ **Make social the leading light in customer loyalty**

If social does one thing well, it’s helping organizations stay connected to their most loyal and dedicated customers. Forrester predicts that spend on loyalty and retention marketing will increase by 30% in 2021 as CMOs assert control over the full customer lifecycle.¹⁰

This is an excellent opportunity for social teams to lead the charge. Show the entire marketing organization how social can be a unifying thread that can correct disjointed customer experiences. This involves working closely with your social support teams to reduce customer churn, fixing major complaints such as bad pricing or return policies, and helping to rescue customers in danger of leaving with proactive social listening.

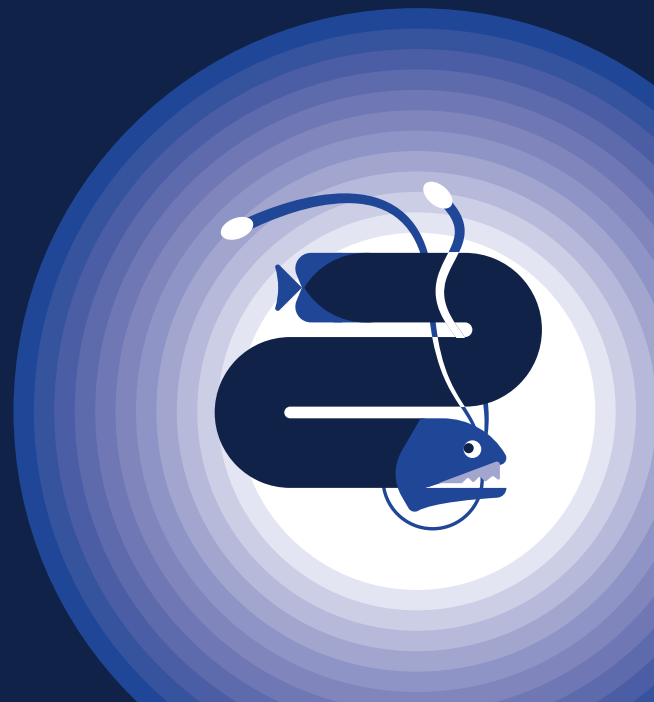




T R E N D 2

Silence is golden

Brands find their place
in the conversation





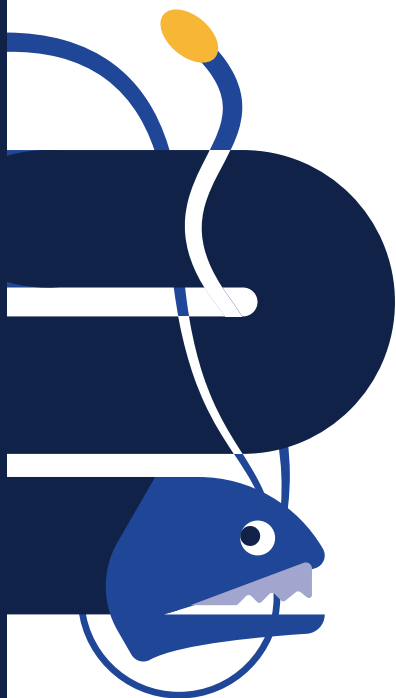
THE DRAMATIC UPTICK IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE THIS YEAR presented an irresistible opportunity for brands to put themselves front and center in the conversation, overlooking the fact that people primarily want to connect with each other, not brands—especially in a time of crisis.

We saw this disconnect on full display in the early days of the pandemic, when many brands adopted the same overly sentimental tone in their content, resulting in a wave of nearly indistinguishable campaigns that people began mocking on social media.¹¹ The wise ones took this time to prioritize listening over talking. For example, Coca-Cola pulled their advertising spend and redirected their efforts into the COVID-19 response, while continuing to engage and listen on social.¹²

When it was the right time to talk, the campaigns that stood out provided much-needed moments of levity and fun—aligning with why people turn to social media in the first place. On average, 32% of key demographics (Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers) say “finding funny or entertaining content” is their main reason for using social media.¹³ And data from Morning Consult shows that useful and entertaining ads are most likely to drive purchases, as consumers increasingly crave a return to normalcy.¹⁴

Coors Light took a lighthearted approach in a campaign that offered real value to consumers. Instead of harping on the “unprecedented times” we’re living through, they created a spot that lamented the “sucky, suck, suck, suckiness” of today and launched a social campaign that encouraged people to nominate someone who #CouldUseABeer. They then sent 500,000 beers to grateful customers.¹⁵





The truth is that most brands have long been miscalculating the type of content people want from them on social media, and how much people want to even interact with them in the first place.

As Jessica Liu at Forrester put it, “Brands have no sense of purpose on social networks or of how to cater to the audiences they’re trying to woo.” This is reflected in the fact that 68% of people don’t think brands or companies share interesting content.¹⁶

“When social media first came along the hype was all about having one-to-one relationships with customers, but of course the reality is that most people don’t want to have one-to-one relationships with very many companies,” says Jerry Daykin, EMEA media director at GSK Media. “But social media does still allow for much more nuanced and personal targeting, and the ability to offer different creative to different audiences. But marketers still need to figure out how to do that well. How to find the balance between being personal, but not diluting your creative.”

In 2021, the smartest brands will understand where they fit into customers’ lives on social media. And they’ll find creative ways of fitting into the conversation instead of trying to lead it, creating content that breaks through the wall of indifference.

In the immortal words of Amanda Wood, social media marketing manager at Hootsuite:

“Don’t be a bummer.”





The trend in action

Securian Financial timed a campaign perfectly by listening to the conversation on social media

At the start of the pandemic, one of Hootsuite's financial services customers, Securian Financial, struggled to balance their desire to continue connecting with consumers with being sensitive to the hardships they were suddenly dealing with.

"We don't want to appear ignorant; we want to relate to people's lived experiences and meet them where they're at," explained DJ Hamm, head of social media at Securian Financial. "So listening was vital to ensuring we weren't being disingenuous, or trying to force ourselves into a conversation where we weren't welcome."¹⁷

Through social listening, they noticed that their key demographics had shifted away from complaining about quarantine to sharing more positive content about how they were staying connected. The team realized these insights rang true with their own personal experiences of striking a new life balance, and they decided to launch a UGC campaign called Life Balance Remix.¹⁸

The campaign encouraged people to share content that highlighted their "new normal" with the hashtag #LifeBalanceRemix. To encourage participation, they donated \$10 to Feeding America for every user who engaged with the campaign, whether by sharing the campaign or posting content.

The campaign was a roaring success. With over a thousand participants, the campaign generated over 2.5 million campaign impressions across Twitter and Instagram.

"Never did we expect that our small pilot would garner so much attention," said Hamm. "We estimated a total ROI of \$35,000 worth of support in our brand marketing, which was so important given that we had paused our TV spots out of respect for what everyone was going through."





Ocean Spray watched and waited before jumping in on a viral moment

After his car battery died on the way to work, Nathan Apodaca filmed himself cruising the rest of the way to work on his longboard, lip-syncing to “Dreams” by Fleetwood Mac and drinking from a large container of Ocean Spray.

His carefree vibes struck a chord on TikTok, and the video quickly went viral. In true TikTok fashion, people around the world began recreating the video, gulping down Ocean Spray while riding on skateboards, wakeboards, and more. Pretty soon celebrities, influencers, and US state governors had all jumped on the trend. Members of Fleetwood Mac, including drummer Mick Fleetwood and singer/songwriter Stevie Nicks, even created their own TikTok accounts just to join in on the fun.

A lot of brands would have pounced immediately, but Ocean Spray stayed silent for over a week. As they let the hype unfold, they were also busy buying a new truck and delivering it to Apodaca (and filling it with Ocean Spray, naturally). When the time was right, they had their CEO recreate the video on TikTok.

By giving back to the creator who had gotten them into this position in the first place and not just trying to capitalize on the free publicity, Ocean Spray has been inundated with positive comments and praise from TikTok users, who can be a hard crowd to please for most brands.



What you should do in 2021



Don't dismiss passive content consumption

While most marketers know they shouldn't only count vanity metrics such as likes and shares, it's a hard habit to break. However, only a small minority of online users actually comment or share content—the vast majority of all online media is consumed passively.

In fact, our Digital 2020 data shows that the average Facebook user has only shared one post in the last 30 days.¹⁹ Just one. And yet many brands still desperately try to latch onto memes and viral moments in pursuit of a few extra retweets that don't actually translate into any type of meaningful business value. This leads them to base their social content on goals that go against the typical behavior of most users.

Likewise, while retweets and mentions are counted as the primary success metrics for Twitter content, our data shows that Twitter's total website traffic is 3x larger than its actual user base. Millions of pieces of Twitter content are read by passive visitors, since Twitter allows you to search and read content without an account. This passive traffic makes Twitter the eleventh most visited website in the world and an underestimated part of the media mix.²⁰

Know when to aim for engagement and participation and when to aim for reach and reaction. In the case of Securian Financial, their UGC campaign was appropriately designed to generate active engagement. But for many other campaigns, mass reach and reaction are much more realistic engagement goals than mass participation. And any type of engagement you generate on social media, if successful, should eventually lead to further behavior—whether it's reaching out for more information, going to a store, searching online, or simply strengthening brand salience.





Bolster social listening data with other sources of insight

It's not as easy to monitor conversations across Instagram Stories, LinkedIn, TikTok, or private messaging as it is on Twitter or Facebook—and this can skew the insights you're pulling. People who are publicly vocal on Twitter, for example, often have a very different mindset than those communicating on more ephemeral or private channels.

As Jerry Daykin noted, "You won't get a holistic and balanced sense of the world from just social listening, but it can be useful as a faster, agile tool for spotting interesting opinions and trends, especially in these times when things can change so quickly." Search analysis, he added, is a powerful tool in addition to social listening, as it goes beyond what people are publicly willing to talk about and reflects more of what they're privately thinking.



Lean on trusted UGC to replace costly content production

Producing polished brand content is difficult right now, thanks to the logistical and financial limitations of pandemic life. But with the uptick in social media usage this year, there's no shortage of content being created by people themselves. UGC is cheap and has the added bonus of being content that people trust. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, earned media is far more effective than advertising when it comes to earning trust, as consumers are more likely to listen to their peers than a brand itself.²¹

For example, the University of Michigan's medical faculty created a UGC campaign to recognize frontline workers during the pandemic with the hashtag #HailToTheFrontLine. This gave the university a way to connect students, faculty, and the community at a time when bringing everyone physically together was impossible.²²

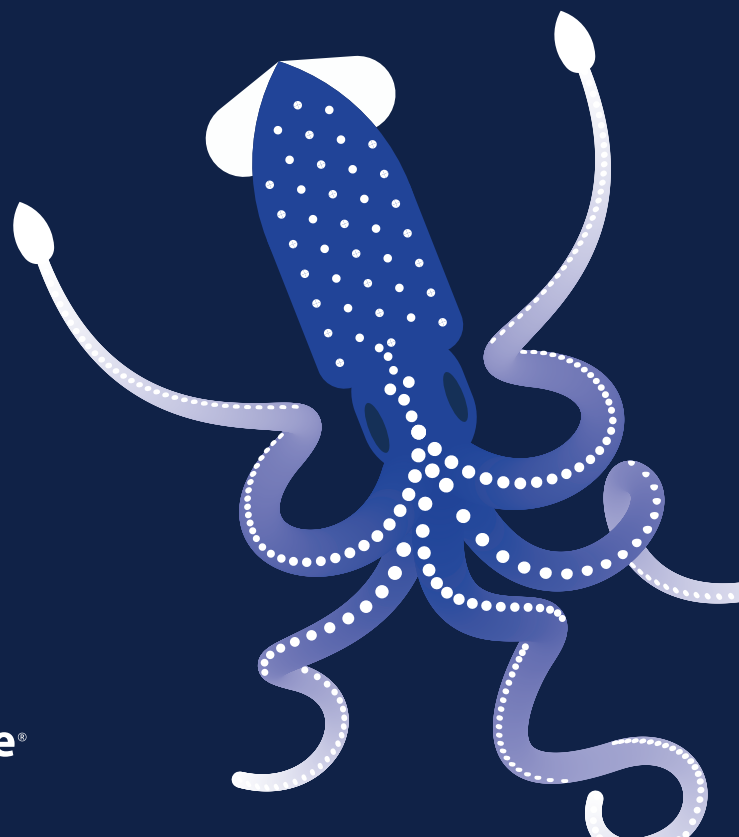




T R E N D 3

Way more than OK

A generation ignored by digital marketers booms on social





THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A TIPPING POINT FOR BABY BOOMERS ONLINE. Increased time with social media, digital video, gaming, and mobile payments have yielded new forms of digital literacy that are turning into habits set to outlast the pandemic.

According to our Digital 2020 data, 70% of internet users aged 55-64 say they've bought something online in the past month,²³ and 37% are planning to continue doing so more frequently when it's over.²⁴

As with every generation, the pandemic has left many baby boomers out of work or living on shoestring budgets. But as a whole, they came into the crisis with healthier finances than younger generations and are showing less financial fragility so far during it, according to eMarketer.²⁵

Marketers have typically targeted baby boomers through traditional TV advertising, which is still one of the most effective ways of reaching them. But it's worth noting that cord-cutting reached historic highs in 2020. In fact, eMarketer is forecasting that households without cable TV will outnumber those with it by 2024.²⁶ Meanwhile, there's been a 66-point increase in baby boomers discovering new brands and products via social media over the past 4 years, according to GlobalWebIndex,²⁷ and over a quarter of baby boomers are spending even longer on social platforms now as a result of the pandemic.²⁸

Baby boomers are particularly active on Facebook (which any millennial with an oversharing mother can tell you). The director of marketing at one medical technology company told us, "Facebook is 50%–60% of our media buy, as it is so effective from a targeting side, but we don't engage with two-way conversations on our page. Our patient population is 65+ and they just talk all the time. They're basically telling our story for us, so we don't even need to get involved."

70% of internet users aged 55-64 say they have bought something online in the past month.



Why have so many digital marketers been overlooking this increasingly digitally savvy and lucrative demographic?

One culprit is the industry's bad habit of chasing newness instead of effectiveness. For example, TikTok has been one of the most buzzed-about marketing topics all year, and its cultural influence certainly continues to grow, but it was ranked as one of the least effective platforms by respondents in our 2021 Social Trends survey. Facebook, however, was cited as the most effective platform and remains by far the preferred platform of Gen X and baby boomers.²⁹ (Although there are plenty of baby boomers who have been welcomed with open arms on TikTok, some amassing millions of followers.)³⁰

Another force at play is ageism. The vast majority of marketing and advertising professionals are under 40 years of age, and this is reflected in all aspects of the work they produce. For example, although 46% of the US adult population is over 50, only 15% of images containing adults include people in that age segment, according to a study done by AARP.³¹

In 2021, marketers cannot afford to overlook older generations on social media. By using smart segmentation and thoughtful representation, marketers that include baby boomers in their digital strategies can leapfrog those still stuck in stereotypes and capitalize on this growing technological enthusiasm.



The trend in action



Woolworths used AR and video ads to increase brand favorability with female baby boomers

A prime example of not underestimating the digital savviness of baby boomers comes from Australia's leading supermarket retailer, Woolworths. Through its rewards program, Woolworths launched a "Plant a Tree" initiative, giving members the opportunity to experience the joy of giving during the Christmas season.

Through an innovative augmented reality Facebook filter, members could plant and care for their own virtual Christmas tree. They could also contribute their rewards points to an environmental charity and, in return, have a real tree planted on their behalf.

Woolworths used video ads to introduce the "Plant a Tree" initiative and directed members to a Facebook Messenger experience, where they could learn more about the idea, the rewards program, and the charity.

The results: an 11-point lift in brand favorability and a 46-point lift in message association among females aged 55-64. Most importantly, over 6,000 trees were planted as a result of the campaign.³²



What you should do in 2021

➔ Target baby boomers by passions or hobbies—not simply by age

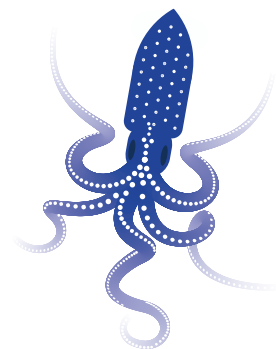
Generations aren't monoliths, so simply deciding to target baby boomers isn't enough. A recent study from BBH exposed the truth that "these 'generations' are simply random collections of people who share no special connection beyond being born within two decades of each other."³³

Not all baby boomers are going to be a relevant audience for your brand. Social media segmentation can offer richer, more relevant, and more emotional foundations for defining audiences beyond simple demographics. For example, Danone, a multinational food and drinks group, moved away from defining groups of consumers by demographics and toward defining them in terms of common passions. Rebuilding its creative and targeting with social data reflecting these passion points led to a 40% lift in ad recall.³⁴

Instead of targeting baby boomers by age alone, target them by passions and hobbies and you'll be more likely to attract a cross-generational audience, which can lead to new revenue opportunities.

Pinterest is a great fit for this, as it has the strongest penetration among boomers of any non-Facebook social network.³⁵ And because it's such an outlet for passion projects and planning, you can include them in campaigns set in a highly contextual setting where the audience is primed for action.

"Retired baby boomers have more time on their hands, and we see a really high affinity within that demographic for gardening, travel, art, animals, DIY, and recipes," says Jim Habig, global head of business marketing at Pinterest.



➔ Include baby boomers in your creative without stereotypes

The sudden focus on older generations being at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 had many baby boomers bristling at the idea that they were now being considered “elderly” by health officials, politicians, and their well-intentioned millennial children.³⁶

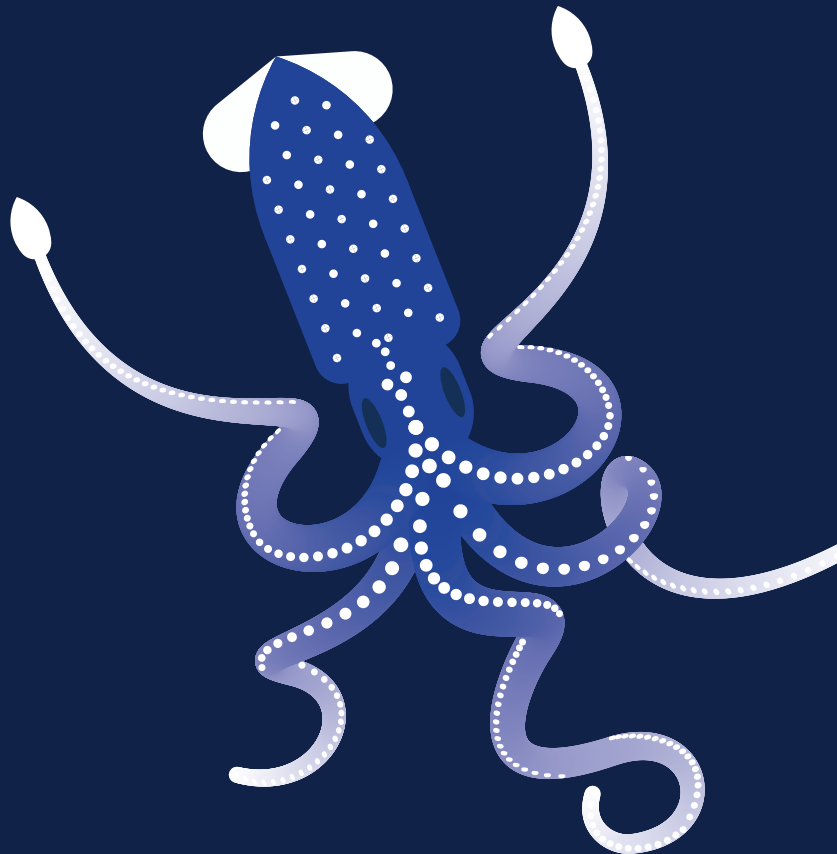
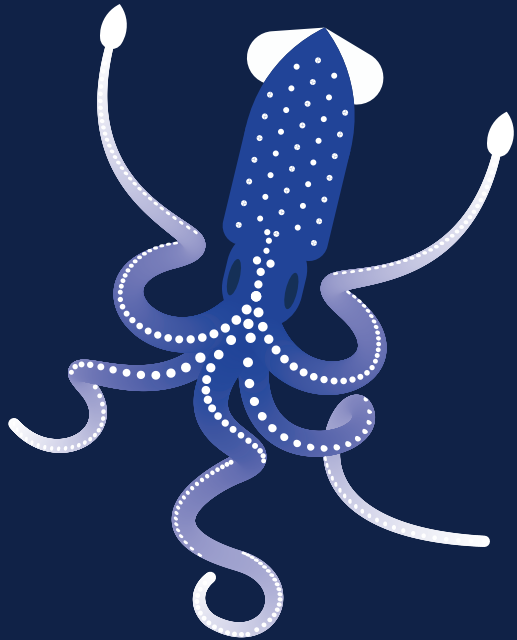
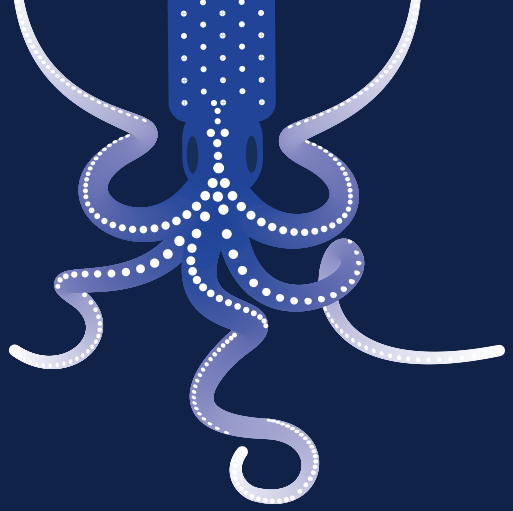
The last thing baby boomers want to see is advertising and marketing campaigns that depict them as old, yet that’s the majority of what they’re seeing. For example, the AARP study found that just 5% of images showed older generations interacting with technology, despite the fact that 69% of people between the ages of 55 and 73 own a smartphone, according to the Pew Research Center.

Do better by seeking out [The Disrupt Aging Collection](#) on Getty Images. You can find over 1,400 images that depict older generations in a more accurate light.

➔ Use online reviews to bolster trust

Online reviews influence boomers’ purchasing decisions more than any other online source.³⁷ The Google My Business integration in Hootsuite allows you to monitor and engage with customer reviews on Google alongside your social media activity.





T R E N D 4

Do I know you?

Tying engagement data to
identity gives advanced
marketers new momentum





IT'S EASY FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO BELIEVE THEY CAN REACH THEIR CUSTOMERS ON SOCIAL—after all, over four billion people are now on social, including more than 450,000 new users in the past 12 months, which equates to more than 12% annual growth.³⁸

And yet, in a survey of 2,162 marketers and executives that Hootsuite conducted with Altimeter for our Social Transformation Report, 54% said they aren't confident that their social media followers are more valuable customers than those they don't engage with.³⁹

This is because most social media managers have no idea if they're replying to a lifelong customer, a new lead, an ex-employee, or a disgruntled detractor. If you're unsure whether you're actually reaching and deepening relationships with customers—and if you can't quantitatively prove it—you're potentially wasting a lot of time generating top-line engagement that isn't really paying off.

But your customers *are* out there, and you *can* use social media to create more valuable relationships with them. You just need to get better at closing the loop and quantifying these things—and this year is the perfect window of opportunity to make it happen.

The pandemic has given executives renewed appreciation for social media, which became the strongest bridge for connecting with customers after so many traditional strategies collapsed.

In our Social Transformation survey, 69% of respondents agreed that social media helped them prepare for COVID-19's impact on business disruption by maintaining customer relationships via social.

Boosting loyalty is also top of mind for budget-conscious CMOs this year, and this is where social shines. According to The CMO Survey, 33.5% of marketing leaders cite retaining current customers as their key objective during the pandemic, more than improving ROI (3.5%) or even customer acquisition (14%).⁴⁰



So what's preventing so many marketers from being able to confidently prove they're engaging in the right ways with the right people? Data integration. Our Social Transformation research uncovered that only 10% of marketers feel they have mature practices around integrating social data into enterprise systems like Adobe, Marketo, or Salesforce. Without pushing every social engagement into some kind of database, it's hard to match it with other behaviors like purchasing, applying, or donating.

For the small percentage of organizations that do have strong social data integration, it's paying off. According to our 2021 Social Trends survey, 85% of organizations that integrate social data into other systems have confidence in their organization's ability to accurately quantify the ROI of social media.

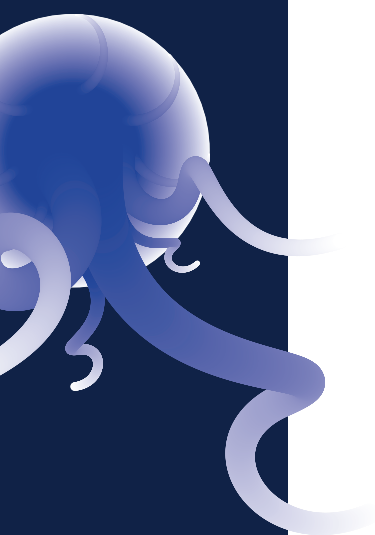
Data integration is a complex, messy process for even the biggest organizations. But our Social Trends survey uncovered a much more accessible entry point that can help marketers better connect social engagement to customer identity and measurable ROI: integrating paid and organic social media activity.

The targeting opportunities and detailed reporting metrics that come with paid ads are crucial for delivering relevant content to the right people on social media. Yet almost one third (28%) of respondents in our Social Trends survey don't run any social ads at all, even though the oasis of organic reach started drying up as early as 2010. In contrast, mature organizations with completely integrated paid and organic social strategies are 32% more confident in quantifying the ROI of social media.

"Companies that only have an organic presence on social media will find it incredibly hard to do any type of attribution at all," said Jerry Daykin, GSK Media. "First, it lacks the scale and impact you need to be able to attribute anything to it, and second, it's often just anecdotal: *We had one conversation with a customer and they bought something.* Well, that's great—but it's not at the scale a business needs to actually grow."

Further, we saw a correlation between more mature social advertising practices—such as using lookalike audiences, building custom audiences, and syncing data to CRMs—and confidence in social ROI. This creates a virtuous circle, as our

85% of organizations that integrate social data into other systems have confidence in their organization's ability to accurately quantify the ROI of social media.



data also found that as an organization's confidence in social ROI increases, they soon expand to other strategies such as employee advocacy and social listening, elevating the role of social in their organization overall and helping the brand differentiate in the marketplace.

Whether you begin integrating social data into your martech stack or start by ramping up your paid social strategies, taking steps toward quantifiably proving you're reaching the right customers, engaging with key suppliers or partners, and boosting loyalty will set top social marketers apart in 2021.

How mature is your company on social media?

Hootsuite's Social Maturity Assessment is a benchmark of over 1,000 enterprise organizations in 12 industries and covers every aspect of how organizations use social to create business value, including attribution practices, use of social data in customer journey mapping, integration of social data into CRM systems, employee advocacy, paid media and influencer strategies, and workforce education programs.

To complete an assessment of your own organization's social maturity, start here:

hootsuite.com/maturity-matters





The trend in action

Pierre & Vacances Center Parcs Group united social and CRM for a deeper understanding of the customer journey

Pierre & Vacances Center Parcs Group, a Hootsuite customer, found itself fighting to retain and grow market share in recent years in the face of new online forces such as Booking.com, Tripadvisor, and Airbnb.

With a reputation for delivering unique and memorable vacation experiences, the Group had already attracted a loyal community of highly engaged fans on social media. To build on the value of these relationships, the Group set out to design a strategy that would help it build a more nuanced understanding of customers at each stage of their journey—leading to new insight and opportunities to engage more effectively with customers before, during, and after their stay.

To integrate its social media strategy into its overall business and develop its strength as an acquisition and loyalty channel, the Group decided to unite the social media team with the CRM division under the sales department.⁴¹

By sharing tools and data between social and CRM, both groups were able to gain greater visibility into customer touchpoints across their journey—and create new commercial opportunities.



What you should do in 2021

➔ **Hold social accountable for more than just reactive engagement**

All the data integration in the world won't help you if your social media strategy doesn't have a strong foundation. Who are you trying to reach and what do you want them to do or think? This sounds basic, but it's easy for marketers to lose sight of these objectives in the pursuit of engagement for engagement's sake.

When it comes to measuring your efforts on social media, clear objectives that are aligned with broader marketing measurement frameworks will help prevent you from getting lost in a pit of attribution or measuring social in a silo.

"It's important to develop KPIs that match with your overall goals, and match expectations of the organization. Social media is a piece of the customer journey, and rarely is it going to be a straight line from social awareness to customer," said Chris Campbell, CEO of ReviewTrackers. "Social is used as a part of a customer's research process; it's a touchpoint that takes them through the buying funnel.

"Sophisticated social media marketers know that vanity metrics, such as impressions and reach, should be taken with a grain of salt, and that you should be tying these numbers back to your web traffic sessions and bounce rate. If you're trying to build brand awareness, you should be focused on overall engagement, and if someone comes to your website, how long they're visiting. These insights can be helpful for evaluating your other marketing efforts and understanding if they're resonating with your audience."



➔ **Start taking small steps toward gathering quantifiable data from social engagements**

Putting a basic UTM framework in place to track all data from both your organic and paid campaigns will help you understand which channels and content pieces are driving action. This is a great foundational step you can get started with right away, especially if you aren't using enterprise solutions like Salesforce or Tableau.

Ensure that your framework is consistent—for example, only using lowercase letters—so that when you view the data in a platform like Google Analytics, it's aggregated appropriately. For a full guide to using UTM parameters, check out the [Hootsuite blog](#).

➔ **Set up manual workflows in the absence of perfect technological solutions**

LinkedIn is a key channel for financial services, but it also has API restrictions—which means you can't sync social interactions on LinkedIn into CRMs. But one of our customers, a large financial services organization, has manually set up a workflow that helps quantifiably measure the value of their social selling program.

Advisors who generate a new lead through sharing content and engaging on LinkedIn move the conversation to email, which helps with privacy and compliance. Then, they create a lead in their sales CRM. The key at this point is having a unique source field in the CRM that's dedicated to the social selling program. The social media manager and the sales team can then track those leads and measure the conversion rate—leading to quantifiable ROI from social selling and not just anecdotal reporting.





T R E N D 5

The perils (and promise) of purpose

**Bold brands start in
the boardroom, not the
front lines of social**





THE SHIFT TOWARD PURPOSE-DRIVEN, SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CAPITALISM that had begun well before 2020 was certainly sped up by the events of the past year.

Between the economic and emotional fallout of COVID-19, the uprising against racism and police brutality, and climate change fueling historic wildfires across Australia and North America, marketers were under significant pressure to publicly address issues that their organizations had never focused on or were only beginning to align with.

A lot of meaningful change did happen this year as a result of this public pressure. Starbucks now ties its executive compensation to meeting diversity goals.⁴² Airbnb set a new standard for corporate compassion when laying off nearly 1,900 global employees, offering a generous severance package that included several months' pay, a year of healthcare, and help finding a new job.⁴³

Modern brand building is clearly changing as organizations adapt to the socially conscious mindsets and expectations of younger, more diverse generational cohorts like Gen Z.

In Deloitte's annual survey of millennials and Gen Z, 60% of respondents said they plan on buying more products and services from large businesses that have taken care of their workforces and positively affected society during the pandemic.⁴⁴

"It's not that there's more demand for purpose in the market, because I think the market has been demanding it for a long time," says Dominic Leung, group strategy officer at Cognito, an integrated communications and marketing agency for finance, technology, and professional services. "What's changed is that some brands have gone and really doubled down on purpose; they've decided to codify it, go to market with it, and have it actually influence the way they do business. So the pandemic has just become an additional market



influence, creating more urgency and changing the speed at which companies are internally embracing it. It's given people either permission or the bravery to do more."

Purpose-driven companies will certainly be on the right side of history in the years to come—but becoming one isn't something you can fake or simply mimic on social media.

And this is where a lot of brands stumbled in 2020.

The (understandable) desire to respond to public pressure and positively contribute to these conversations ended up manifesting in knee-jerk reactions, many of which were quickly called out as hypocritical. These efforts came off looking especially inadequate when viewed in the context of brands like Patagonia or Ben & Jerry's, who have been doing this work for decades and have the track record to prove it.

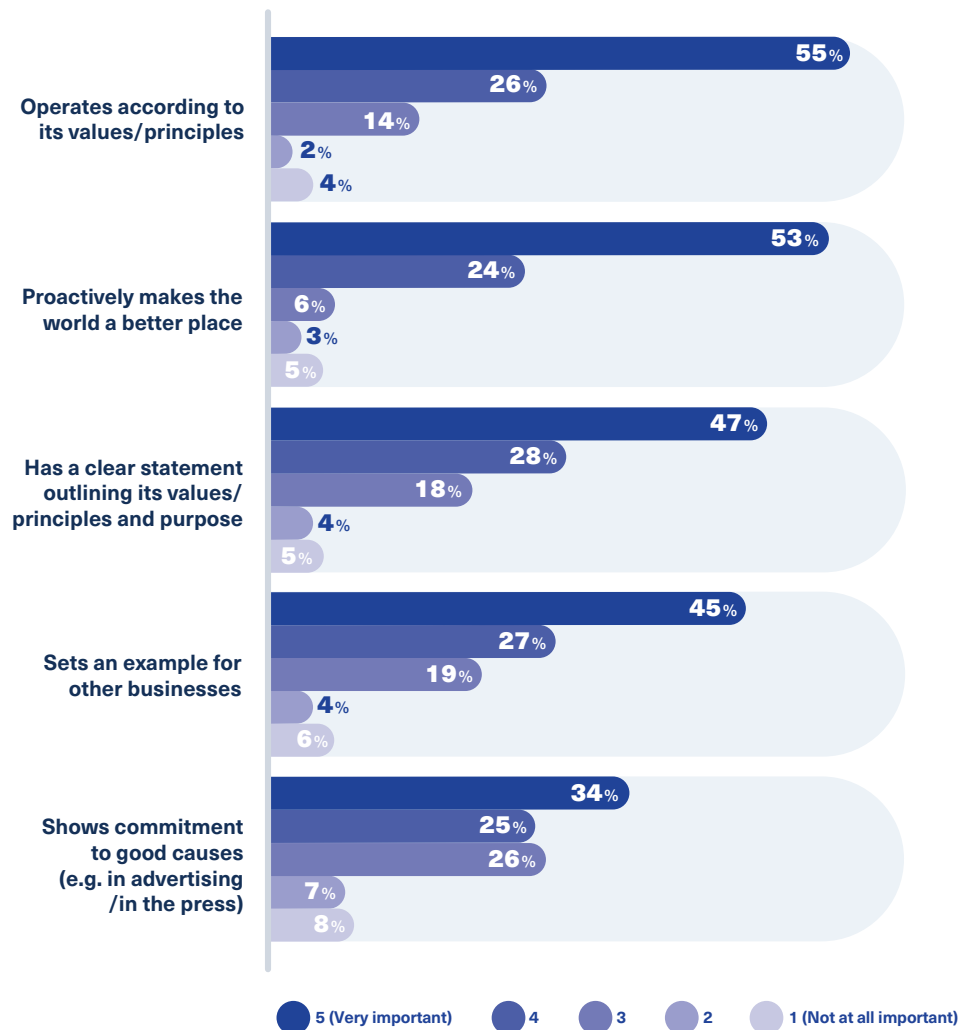
While consumers are developing higher expectations for what they expect businesses to contribute to the world, using social media as the megaphone for promoting it may not be as critical as marketers think in 2021.

Social media statements alone can't make up for a lack of true brand purpose embedded deeply across an organization. Data from Brandwatch shows that consumers are much more concerned about whether a brand operates according to its values and proactively makes the world a better place than they are about its performative actions around those values (like sharing statements about it on social media, for example).⁴⁵





How important is it to you that a business...



Source: [Brandwatch](#)
n=7,180

If 2020 was dominated by reactivity from brands on social media, 2021 is a year for restraint as brands work to get their house in order and take the pressure off frontline social teams.

This has to begin at the top. If CMOs are not actively working toward creating a truly purpose-driven organization, they can't expect their marketing and social teams to create the veneer of purpose on social media.



Now more than ever, CMOs must be the voice of the customer in the C suite, helping other executives feel the force of these cultural and customer changes that frontline social teams experience every day. Strong CMOs will use intelligence gathered by social media teams to help the organization adapt to new buyer beliefs and new ways of doing commerce—and lead the organization to a new path to growth that requires balancing the twin demands of building a better business and a better world.

“The authentic voice of the consumer is being expressed now unlike any other time in history; it’s stronger than it ever has been. The brands that are capable of listening, and shaping their messages in a way that is cognizant of that narrative, will be more likely to survive and grow. Those that only pursue brand-driven narratives that aren’t sensitive to the times we’re in simply won’t retain customers.”

MICHAEL MCGOEY

SENIOR MANAGER, ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS, TWITTER





The trend in action

Expensify's CEO made a bold move— and took the heat on social

Two weeks before the US presidential election, the CEO of Expensify, David Barrett, emailed the company's 10 million customers urging them to vote for Joe Biden.

Was it controversial? You bet. But whether or not you agree with the medium (or the message), it was a clear example of the C suite stepping in and setting the direction for the rest of the organization to follow. This type of top-down involvement empowers the social team and gives them permission to stand behind their values as an organization.

This move didn't begin and end at the top, either. As Barrett told Business Insider, there wasn't universal consensus on sending the letter, but ultimately more than two-thirds of employees voted in favor of sending it and several employees provided their input on the message.⁴⁶

By ending the email with a note encouraging people to message him directly on Twitter—whether they agreed with him or not—Barrett helped redirect some of the reaction on social media toward himself, instead of hiding behind the brand's main accounts and letting the social team take the heat.

Social listening data from Hootsuite Insights shows that social mentions for the brand shot from 50-100 typical mentions per day to over 30,000 mentions in the 24 hours after the email was sent and 17,000 the following day.

While sentiment was both negative and positive, Expensify's social team was ready for the firestorm that inevitably followed, because the actions of their leader made it very clear as to where the brand stood in a divided time.



What you should do in 2021

→ Create or revisit your social media policies

During a crisis, a social media policy that provides guidelines for your entire organization will give everyone the ability to act quickly and confidently. Your policy should be comprehensive, covering how your brand and employees are expected to use social media whether in a time of crisis or not.

If you don't already have one, start today. But if you do have a social media policy for your organization, the start of a new year is the perfect time to revisit it. Social media is in constant flux, and we've seen how quickly new and unanticipated issues can bubble up (for example, how your brand should communicate during a global pandemic). If you're starting from scratch, get a head start with our [social media policy template](#).

→ Set up a social media crisis communications workflow

Having a cross-functional plan in place can help save valuable time and keep everyone focused when a crisis bubbles up on social media. Here's what the Hootsuite social team put in place in 2020:

1. A crisis "tiger team" that includes members of the social team as well as representatives from external and internal communications, brand, and legal. Make sure this group has a dedicated channel for communicating in real time (such as Slack or Google Chat).
2. Reporting documents for senior leadership and communications teams, so that the social team can track sentiment by the hour and include analysis as to why certain topics or keywords have spiked.



3. Team members assigned to specific social networks to monitor the situation as it unfolds, as the conversation can differ greatly from one network to the other.



Use social listening for intelligence, not interrupting

Marketers have long turned to social listening to monitor keywords, track sentiment, and find opportunities to insert their brands into trending conversations. But the crises of 2020 have underscored the importance of using social listening as an intelligence tool, helping organizations make smarter decisions based on changing customer needs and pain points.

66% of respondents in our Social Trends survey say social listening has increased in value for their organization over the past 12 months.

For example, during lockdown, Clarins used Hootsuite's social listening partner Brandwatch to review and analyze customer conversations and realized that interest in makeup had faded rapidly. This meant that their previously planned content would miss the mark—but it also presented substantial new opportunities, as the new insights revealed that customers were using lockdown to focus on skin care.

Based on trending conversations in search and social channels, the team developed a social advertising strategy that focused on highlighting skincare deals that would appeal to cash-strapped customers. By the end of the quarter, social ads drove 30,000 website visits, with a low cost per click and click-through rates well exceeding their benchmark.

This agility and hyper-awareness will remain critical beyond the pandemic as organizations continue adapting to the accelerated pace of digital transformation.



“Brands have heaps of first-party data but struggle to get access to feedback on their products and services, especially unprompted qualitative feedback,” said Joe Rice, developer and enterprise solutions at Twitter. “And as it turns out, Twitter is a great place to gather just this kind of feedback and better understand the voice of the customer.

“These insights can then be used across a business to improve customer service, influence product development roadmaps, and even prioritize digital transformation initiatives. For example, if you’re an insurance company and people are experiencing issues with the quote process for a new policy, that feedback tells you to start transforming that process first.”

This was echoed by Elena Melnikova, CMO of Talkwalker. “By connecting conversational intelligence with organizational KPIs and metrics, social media becomes much more than just a publishing tool. It becomes a powerful source of fuel for your brand decisions. Social data changes as the conversation changes, and that gives you the flexibility you need in this current climate when public opinion changes so suddenly. It enables brands to think on their feet, whether that means protecting their reputation, instantly measuring their impact, or understanding their consumers' concerns.”



You've read the trends. Here are the tools to help you conquer social in 2021.

Hootsuite offers a full suite of tools to help you manage every aspect of your social presence. **Request a demo** to learn how Hootsuite's content publishing, social advertising, deep listening, ROI reporting, and advocacy solutions help you succeed with social. Or pick your plan and **get started right away**.



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