THINK FORWARD

TRENDS SHAPING SOCIAL IN 2019
IDENTITY CRISIS

THINK FORWARD
2019
RECLAIMING OUR SENSE OF SELF THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA
Social media is the ultimate representation of globalisation and its gradual blending of cultures. Apart from a handful of authoritarian states, the world is now ostensibly borderless. The ability to engage in conversations with people thousands of miles away, and share similar experiences with different cultures, has been a driving force behind the proliferation of platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Things have been moving at 100 mph.

But in 2018, the brakes were slammed hard. And some brands – including ones as big as Facebook – were left with their noses bloodied. Huge numbers of people have felt their identities to be under threat – politically, from surveillance and data capture; culturally, from appropriation and homogenisation. Now they want it back. As a result some have rallied against social entirely. Others have used it as a forum for change. Many have engaged in a backlash against big data.

Amidst the crisis, brands are expected to have a voice that speaks directly with consumers, as well as a role in driving cultural change. Online marketing is more fraught than ever. Many brands are struggling to find their place for fear of igniting outrage or alienating their audience. People expect honesty, proper representation, innovation that’s balanced with responsibility.

We connect people and brands in a meaningful way. That’s why our 2019 Think Forward report unpicks the complex and ever-shifting web of consumer identity and looks at the role brands play in reflecting and shaping it. We’ll arm you with everything you need, from insights into raging culture and gender debates to the new rules of data. There’s even AI marketing and a robot influencer or two. Because if there’s one thing we’ve learned about the 2019 identity crisis, it’s that the solutions lie in digital innovation. We’ll see you in the near future.
WHAT’S INSIDE THIS REPORT

Social media isn’t simply a collection of platforms driven by data. It’s a global community powered by people. That’s why our report is built upon the human needs underpinning consumer behaviour online.

THESE ARE THE SOCIAL DRIVERS BEHIND THE TRENDS.
Understanding them will help you understand your audience’s needs.

CERTAINTY
The need for safety and control

CONNECTION
The need to interact with others

BELONGING
The need to feel part of a community

STATUS
The need for validation in society

PROGRESSION
The need to grow, learn and develop

CONSCIENCE
The need to help other people

SOCIAL STANDING
Why you should consider always putting your brand values into practice on social

CONSCIENCE

FAKE AUTHENTICITY
The rise of synthetic influencers, and the potential benefits they bring your brand

STATUS

LOCAL LEGITIMACY
How social media’s hyperlocal targeting could be an advertising game changer

BELONGING

NEW MASCULINITY
Most men are ready for more inclusive messaging and representation on social

PROGRESSION

FAKE AUTHENTICITY
The rise of synthetic influencers, and the potential benefits they bring your brand

STATUS

MEMES GO NICHE
How to traverse the strange, but potentially useful, world of niche meme accounts

CONNECTION

MINORITY IMPACT
Marginalized groups pack the biggest social clout. To ignore them is to ignore culture

CONNECTION

COLLECTIVE AI
The future of crowdsourcing has arrived. Try not to let your brand get left behind

PROGRESSION

LOCAL LEGITIMACY
How social media’s hyperlocal targeting could be an advertising game changer

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DEMOCRATISING DATA
The data game is changing. Consumers are taking the power back. What’s your role?

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Brands are apt to stay quiet in the face of online hatred. But as 2018 turned the volume up to 11, some decided to shout back, no matter the consequences.
In the age of populist politics – of fake news and echo chambers and bot farms – social has been both the arena for and starter pistol to the normalisation of vitriol. A study published in Social Science Research Network found that US president Donald Trump’s anti-Muslim tweets strongly correlate with an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes. Psychologists and technology theorists alike suggest that the confirmation bias fostered by social, alongside the spreading of misinformation, is encouraging extreme values and behaviours.

It paints a gloomy picture. But 2018 was also the year that many brands fought back. Levi Strauss, a company with a firm stance on gun control, brought their values to their consumer-facing comms. They started a fund for nonprofits engaged in ending gun violence, launched alongside Michael Bloomberg a coalition of business leaders who want further gun control, and developed employee initiatives including paid volunteer time for activism work. And they made noise about it, despite public backlash and personal death threats to their CEO. But Levi Strauss has taken unpopular positions before – integrating factories before the Civil Rights Act was passed; offering benefits to same-sex couples long before other companies – and it’s always paid off. In this, as in their previous stances, they’re likely to be vindicated again.

If the Levi Strauss backlash was severe, then that other Nike’s Colin Kaepernick campaign was vicious. Since taking a knee in protest during the US national anthem, Kaepernick has become the poster boy for standing against the rise of bigotry – online and IRL. Brands would usually steer clear of this kind of controversy – particularly around a subject as sensitive as race – but Nike chose to take a knee with him.

“Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything,” the campaign slogan read. It looked like Nike sacrificed a lot. Incensed consumers used social media to show themselves destroying Nike products with the hashtag #justburnit.

But their public stance on hate speech paid off. A chunk of their customer base decided to boycott the brand. But the increase of $6.38 billion to the company’s sales – and the consequential stock surge – suggests that leaving them behind was not only a branding power move, but a profitable one to boot.

Others have gone a step further, not only bringing hate speech to the front of their comms, but to their product as well. Diesel – a fashion house never far from controversy – decided to quite literally wear their heart on their sleeves with their recent Hate Couture campaign. Amassing troll comments received by the brand and some of their celebrity ambassadors, Diesel created limited-edition garments emblazoned with some of the hate speech, later worn by the likes of Nicki Minaj and Gucci Mane in a series of films shared online.

Here, Diesel has not only actively engaged with vitriol, but turned the discourse on its head – despite the backlash – and made policing social channels not just a public act, but a fashionable one at that.

As business leaders with power in the public and political arenas, we simply cannot stand by silently when it comes to the issues that threaten the very fabric of the communities where we live and work.”

(Chip Bergh, Levi Strauss CEO)
6.25% Nike’s stock value increase in the wake of the Colin Kaepernick campaign
Honesty is currency in social. But 2018 was the year we cashed in on deliberate fakery and fictional personas as well. This fakery poses some very real questions for brands.
Miquela Sousa – or Lil Miquela as she’s known to her 1.5 million Instagram followers – is, in paper, your run-of-the-mill millennial influencer. Shudu’s edgy, listens to the latest music, endorses aspirational products and sports the kind of thumb-stopping outfits likely to make you part with your cash. She’s even released her own single.

All that in-sta fame, despite being a complete fake. Her endorsements may be legit, but Miquela isn’t real at all. She’s a digitised fiction, the brainchild of a artist whose anonymity leaves his or her motivations unclear. Miquela is perhaps the natural progression of online personas, an avatar with large – albeit an entirely lifelike one – who’s sat upon an Instagram empire. This poses a very real question for brands. If consumers back Miquela, then does fakeness even matter?

“Miquela is a pertinent cautionary tale as to why. The highly curated, impossible set-up of Scarlett London’s bedroom, and the incongruous placement of the Listerine product among her ‘aspirational’ paraphernalia, left Johnson & Johnson in a social media storm. The ad went viral and consumers were floored. It came with a painfully earnest message and – despite the ballons, despite the impossible breakfast, perfectly made-up face printed on it – was delivered with what we were meant to believe was authenticity. We were supposed to see it as real. But it was duplicity in the way only influencer fakery can be. Something that social-savvy consumers are more than wise to.

And yet they welcome the likes of Miquela and Shudu with open feeds. It feels like a paradox. But the learning for brands here – it’s apparent that, done properly, both – is that virtual influencers can be something that social-savvy consumers are more than wise to. And yet they welcome the likes of Miquela and Shudu with open feeds. It feels like a paradox. But the learning for brands here is not necessarily one of fake versus real – it’s apparent that, done properly, both are fine – but rather one of intentions. Put out comes with the intention of duping consumers and suffer the consequences. From the negative responses to the backlash against a Listerine influencer ad is a pertinent cautionary tale as to why. The highly curated, impossible set-up of Scarlett London’s bedroom, and the incongruous placement of the Listerine product among her ‘aspirational’ paraphernalia, left Johnson & Johnson in a social media storm. The ad went viral and consumers were floored. It came with a painfully earnest message and – despite the ballons, despite the impossible breakfast, perfectly made-up face printed on it – was delivered with what we were meant to believe was authenticity. We were supposed to see it as real. But it was duplicity in the way only influencer fakery can be. Something that social-savvy consumers are more than wise to.

Know your avatar

PLAY A DIFFERENT GAME

For a recent SS campaign, Louis Vuitton used the main female character from the video game series Final Fantasy to model their collection. The heroine was, in the brand’s own words, the perfect avatar for a heroic woman in a world in which social is woven into our lives. Digital avatars abound – in games and CGI films. Consider them for your campaign. They could be more cost-effective than real-life celebrities, too. The legal and moral lines upon which virtual influencer marketing testers are still being drawn. Until its use becomes commonplace there’ll be pitfalls on either side, so be as clued up as possible when considering your influence. Knowing who’s behind the influencer should be priority one. If, for example, it turned out that the mysterious Lil Miquela was a Banksy-style statement on the shallowness of influencer culture, associated brands could end up with their reputations put through the shredder.

Know your influencer

Keep your fakeness real

Synthetic authenticity is honest fakery. We know from the negative responses to some influencer advertising that people are fed up of overly contrived stories purporting to be ‘real’ content. Instead, be honest in your intentions. Being deliberately fake, and indeed owning it, speaks to avatar culture and will have a better response than inauthentically trying to make the impossible look real.
Lil Miquela’s Instagram following
At a time when many consumer groups are resisting globalisation – on social and IRL – tapping into locality could mean more meaningful connections with your audience.
As globalization seems to hit critical mass - when people are tightening borders and making nationalism great again - many have started to fight back against the homogenisation of culture and our seemingly non-existent societal boundaries. At the forefront of this, individuals are rekindling - or perhaps finding for the first time online - a love for locality. Not just for countries but for cities and towns as well. Place, it seems, will matter more in 2020 than it did in 2000. People are identifying with subcultures based entirely on locale. And individual identities are becoming more localised as a result.

It’s perhaps most apparent in grassroots movements that protect local environments and businesses against gentrification and corporate invasions. People give voice to and businesses against gentrification and movements that protect local environments. It’s perhaps most apparent in grassroots.

Peckham is a London district succumbing to gentrification. Peckham Shit Again even finding its way onto highly Instagrammable clothing. The hero TV advert was a huge success. Nothing Beats a Londoner - a campaign showcasing all quarters of the city as part of Nike’s urban culture story, wholly predicated on the pillars of identity and local legitimacy. The hero TV advert was a huge success. Nothing Beats a Londoner - a campaign showcasing all quarters of the city as part of Nike’s urban culture story, wholly predicated on the pillars of identity and local legitimacy. Nike found out after backlash from the Southern Asian community who, despite being a big part of London life, felt they weren’t represented in the ad. Understanding local nuances requires a more granular approach to research. If you’re going to do it, make sure you’ll turn up valuable local insights.

Through social media you can access the world. You can travel without travelling, and have friends all over, which makes you more careful about your local surrounding and your localness too.

Aiming local can be beneficial on a smaller scale, too. While most companies are all about big data, going niche is increasingly desirable. Nike, an intelligence company that integrates city data from multiple departments and systems, seeks to help governments understand things on a smaller, more localised scale so they can have a bigger, more localised impact.

Meanwhile, platform innovations like dynamic ads are making localised content more seamless. Aiming local can be beneficial on a smaller scale, too. While most companies are all about big data, going niche is increasingly desirable. Nike, an intelligence company that integrates city data from multiple departments and systems, seeks to help governments understand things on a smaller, more localised scale so they can have a bigger, more localised impact. Meanwhile, platform innovations like dynamic ads are making localised content more seamless. Should your brand be involved? Definitely. Putting it into practice when you have a centralised strategy can be challenging. But as social media breaks down borders, mirroring this consumer leaning towards localised content and stories could boost your cut through.

You don’t have to be a small business to have local legitimacy. If any of your brand stories are rooted in a local area then you can leverage this with content tailored to its populace. adidas does this well with adidas Runners - a global community, broken up into urban teams. It celebrates real people and their cities, giving the brand local legitimacy around the world by using legitimate locals.
How many people feel that the area they live in is important to their sense of identity – Foresight Factory study

64%
As we converge and combine our behaviours and intelligence online, the ability for machine learning to find solutions to brand needs is becoming an essential advantage.
Understand the trend

The robots are taking over, but not in the way you might think. Instead of machines trying to subjugate humanity, we have machines learning making our lives easier. And as we become more and more connected – amassing our collective behaviours and desires and intelligence online – the potential for AI to see patterns and find trends and constants – of which there were many – the system was logging the anomalies. With AI, machines are able to find people who were literally standing out from the crowd. These people were tagged as trend setters and gifted a free pair of Nubuck trainers. New Balance effectively turned machine learning into a headline-grabbing PR stunt.

“Instead of replacing marketing functions, [AI is] taking on the drudgery and heavy lifting, saving time, and hopefully enabling marketers to focus on what really matters.”

Matt Jarman - director of data, analytics, insight and visualisation, Caci

Instead of combing the crowd for trends and instead of what it means to you as a brand. Instead of replacing what you do, use what it means to you as a brand. Instead of replacing what you do, use what AI can offer. Machine learning could be – and in many ways already is – the evolution of consumer research. New Balance’s NYFW learnings were a PR stunt at heart, but no less useful for it. Consider how AI could be used to supercharge your data and spot trends going forward. And indeed if there are practical real-world applications of AI to market your product, the content it recommends to its audience, tailoring individual feeds based on the end user’s tastes. In this sense, AI is helping to give a more streamlined and personalised UX.

Whether your priority is expediency or security, deeper customer learnings or broader crowd insights, plugging into the power of crowdsourced machine learning is in essence gifting them a crystal ball.

Companies like Unanimous use this to help brands predict accurate outcomes in product development and sales forecasting. In essence giving them a crystal ball.

The superior speed of machine learning over human analysis can have practical results on product production, too. Fast fashion brand Mango used their AI technology Rapid to spot and react to market trends. Their programme successfully reduced the turnaround time between spotting a trend and getting product to customers from 180 days to 35 days. In the fleeting world of fashion, this level of reactivity is a game-changer.

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The manipulation of data is a hot topic (see Democratising Data on p54). It pays to be transparent when handling the information you have on consumers. Exercise caution when gathering it, too. A fun PR stunt will always be received more positively than cookie mining. Look to brands with an open dialogue with how they use AI. Your comms should focus on the benefits it brings to your customers, instead of what it means to you as a brand.
Myntra's time reduction in getting product to customers after using AI to react to trends
In the wake of #MeToo, masculinity has become an explosive topic. Brands must promote a more inclusive message if they hope to resonate with men online.
"When your [brand’s] reason for being is predicated on inclusiveness, you can’t ignore that many men in our society are made to feel like they don’t fit in."

Joseph Saroufim - creative director of the #EvolveTheDefinition campaign

In a way, advertising’s hyper masculine ‘ideal’ has both reflected and contributed to the formation of what’s recently been dubbed ‘toxic masculinity’ – the catch-all term for extreme gender performance in men, covering traits like dominance, emotional unavailability and sexual aggression. It took some choice words from Donald Trump (“Grab ‘em by the pussy”) and the combined efforts of #MeToo to thrust this new wave of gender warring into the spotlight. The result has been a bit of a mess. And a polarised mess, at that. Some men have entrenched their positions and see these issues as an attack on masculinity itself. Others believe not enough is being done to combat toxic masculinity and want more. It’s not all doom and gloom and biceps.

It’s a frustrating moment for feminism. A confusing time for young men. And a precarious landscape for brands trying to understand how masculinity should be portrayed in their marketing, which can often end up caught in the melée. Should you sensitise your content or risk it being perceived as a generalised representation of men? Or do you throw your brand into the fray with one firmly held stance?

It’s all too doom and gloom and biceps. In the midst of online aggression, calmer heads can prevail by promoting a message of inclusivity. One that presents a more complex, layered version of masculinity. Perhaps the best role for brands is one of stealthy mediation.

Bonobos – a fashion brand built on being for men on a daily basis, it’s the collective responsibility of brands to focus on the similarities between the genders, not the differences, and to build on the multifaceted masculine realities, instead of reductive – and outdated – ideals.

Mercedes. It certainly serviced the product objectives, but to properly challenge preconceptions and redefine toughness, the ads focused on things like ruggedness and strength – with a new vision of what masculinity means. In place of brown, the ads focused on things like resolve and strength of character.

This progressive exploration of modern masculinity serviced a male consumer who had long felt ignored. One who’s sick of Action Man and buff superheroes. There’s a growing understanding of how a man’s mental health is affected by impossible ideals. There’s a growing understanding of how a man’s mental health is affected by impossible ideals in the same way as a woman’s.

If as a brand you decide to stand against toxic masculinity, be nuanced in your messaging, as it could backfire. Not all masculinity is toxic. And many men feel attacked by the backlash. Social media often becomes a battleground for this debate. Don’t let your channels get caught in the crossfire.

In a series of 172 interviews, Bonobos asked real people – including men, trans men, and women who identify as masculine, across a spectrum of races and age – how they define masculinity. The answers were as varied as they were poignant, and included more inclusive, accepting definitions that challenge many of the traditional preconceptions propagated by advertising and entertainment media.

Similarly, Mercedes’ Tough Conversations campaign in Australia – a country with strong traditional masculine ideals – aimed to challenge preconceptions and redefine toughness. The strategy was to breathe new life into the tired utility vehicle (ute) category – one dominated by images of ruggedness and strength – with a new vision of what masculinity means. In place of brown, the ads focused on things like resolve and strength of character.

The role brands play isn’t a sanitise your comms of anything that could portrayed in their marketing, which can often end up caught in the melée. Should you sensitise your content or risk it being perceived as a generalised representation of men? Or do you throw your brand into the fray with one firmly held stance?

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It’s clear, then, that men are ready for the marketing they consume to be dragged out of the 80s and into a more inclusive discourse. The role brands play isn’t a meagre one. As content producers that speak to the intrinsic motivations driving men on a daily basis, it’s the collective responsibility of brands to focus on the similarities between the genders, not the differences, and to build on the multifaceted masculine realities, instead of reductive – and outdated – ideals.

It certainly serviced the product objectives, too. The campaign yielded a huge ROI for Mercedes.

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The number of leads for the Mercedes ute after the Tough Conversations campaign

100,000
‘Niche memes’ have become a way for young people to close off outsiders and share vulnerabilities as well as in-jokes. Some brands have used them to foster deeper connections with hard-to-reach audiences.
Memes are a tricky territory for brands. Used well – like Hein’s highly successful meme-focused campaign ‘Fruit or Vegetable’ – they can improve brand perception and be a way into some of the biggest conversations on the internet. But using them incorrectly is the social media equivalent of telling everyone, “I’m not a regular mom. I’m a cool mom.” As a result you might find that your audience consists of very young millennials instead.

While on the surface they appear to be throwaway nonsense, memes are often complex ways for people to communicate in an organic, inherently social way. Niche memes are different to regular memes in that they don’t have mass appeal – which is exactly the point – and they take the communication to a deeper level still.

Niche memes started as anonymous Instagram scrapbooks – comprised of cluttered, clipart-style unaesthetic images – for young people to express themselves with highly personal, moment-specific moodboards. They allow teens to express themselves in a way they felt was impossible in school and at home. Memes, emojis and the Instagramification of culture is one already embraced by niche meme culture.

Users vent the stresses of things like school life and the realities of being a teenager. Gaudy compositions comprised of images ranging from emojis to products to brand icons sit under titles like, “What I actually do when I go to bed.” These convey moods and, ultimately, identities.

Chat rooms used to be the places teens would retreat to converse with relative anonymity, expressing themselves in a way they felt was impossible in school and at home. Memes, emojis and the Instagramification of culture prove we now tend to express ourselves more visually. It stands to reason that niche memes are the natural progression of the sanctuary found in digital anonymity.

From this outlet has sprung an entirely new platform for young people to express themselves, and in ways that aren’t just focused on mental health. Many niche meme accounts now boast huge reach, impacting millennials as well as teens. The Instagram account ThrowbackMachine, which has over 100,000 followers, uses the niche meme format to deliver content specific to people born in the ’90s, most of which wouldn’t be understood by an older audience.

More niche still are the parody accounts following this form. 207PoundsofShrimp is a comedy Instagram account dedicated to shrimp-related content. It’s a collection of bizarre, crudely designed meme jokes. The text is often completely nonsensical and bizarre, crudely designed meme jokes. The text is often completely nonsensical and

Danny DeVito to a stock photo of a gherkin. Niche memes are designed to speak only to the audience that gets them, and to leave everyone else behind. Despite being niche, these accounts are fast becoming a big way for Gen Z and millennials to connect with like-minded people through content deliberately designed not to appeal to everyone. Some brands have succeeded in involving themselves in these stylistic and conversational oddities. But much like any teen party, turning up uninvited is never a good idea. Brands have a challenge if they want to end up on the guestlist of an area teen party, turning up uninvited is never a good idea. Brands have a challenge if they want to end up on the guestlist of an area teen party, turning up uninvited is never a good idea. Brands have a challenge if they want to end up on the guestlist of an area teen party, turning up uninvited is never a good idea.

The glaringly obvious problem with using niche memes as an outlet for your marketing is the look and feel. The visual language is deliberately lurid and tadored. As an environment it could be inimical to your objectives. A cobbled-together moodboard might not be the best place for a luxury fashion brand, for instance. Prioritize how an association would look in the long term over the potential short-term reach.
The number of impressions Heinz garnered with their meme marketing campaign, Fruit or Vegetable?
Marginalised groups are becoming the most influential microcosms on social. Brands who ignore them could be left out of the conversations driving culture.
Crucially, the language of the internet is not just a tool for expressing ourselves, but a means of creating and maintaining social belonging. vernacular is paramount. 

We can even attribute most internet-specific vernacular back to its members. On Twitter, language is the currency of engagement. It's within these groups that many of the internet's most important conversations begin. But from one in particular. While the most important conversations from Black Twitter have been around issues of social justice and hate, it's also considered the internet's most impactful content machine. In this sense, Black Twitter is a cultural force in its own right. Now, black folks on Twitter aren't just influencing the conversation online, they're creating it. 

Social media groups have been staggering, even in their absolute nascency. Consider that fact, the next time a fashion designer makes a headline trend. They should instead be treated with derision and embarrassment for attempting to co-opt these groups. The first step towards avoiding a backlash is to remove any potential triggers.
The number of Black Panther mentions on Twitter, making it the most tweeted about movie of all time.
We’re in the midst of a revolution. As individuals become the gatekeepers to their own data, it’s essential that brands find access on the right terms.
Relinquishing control of data has become such an unconscious process that it’s hard to imagine ever regaining it. It’s been the cost paid for Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Email and search engines, too. Since these supposedly ‘free’ platforms come into being, consumers have been divulging their personal information like money to the electricity meter, without ever looking at the reading.

But user behaviour – and indeed the data game itself – is changing. The recent Cambridge Analytics scandal – and in its wake the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – ushered in greater consumer awareness. Data has gone from being something brokered in the background to a currency discussed in the open.

And it has been a polarising topic: consumers are either wilfully ignorant, scatter-gunning left clicks on the cookie ‘accept’ tabs in lieu of transparency, or they’re very much left clicks on the cookie ‘accept’ tabs in lieu of transparency and puts the seller in control of when – and indeed if – a buyer can ever see their identity. The uptake of individuals selling their own data is small but growing.

A tremor caused by the increase in data awareness was recently felt as far as Wall Street, with Facebook’s customary dominance rocked hard. With the report of 2017-18 user growth coming in at way under what was expected – in no small part due to questions around the company’s use of data – Facebook lost 23% of its value in less than two hours. Of course, this was a blip, and they continue to make inordinate profits. But this backlash certainly made some important people in Silicon Valley nervous.

But this backlash certainly made some important people in Silicon Valley nervous. And it’s only gaining momentum.

This traction poses a big question for the brands who rely on consumer info for their sales and marketing: if attitudes towards data continue to change at the current pace, and if simply being seen as a business that uses data to its own benefit is developing negative connotations, what does all that mean for the ways in which we buy, sell and utilise it in future?

As this trend spreads and normalises, more and more people will expect greater transparency not only from the likes of Google and Facebook, but all brands who store and use data. The #deleteFacebook movement has shown the scale of the potential backlash. Soon, consumers may be able to request what they have on them. As transparency is one of your core values, and you wish to be seen as a brand taking real steps towards it, then give more than the obligatory cookie accept pop-up on your website. Avoid the legalese. Instead use self-effacing humour and conversational language to outline what data you gather and how you use it. Acknowledging it with a knowing tone will help build consumer trust.

Some have gone so far as to delete Facebook entirely. Over 390,000 people have discussed doing so online. The responses from social media companies have been to draw back the curtains that have been hiding data collection for so long. "Personal data is the new oil of the internet and the new currency of the digital world." - Meglena Kuneva, previous European Commissioner for Consumer Protection

Many people see these recent attempts at greater transparency as tokenistic efforts. The likes of Facebook and Instagram are now allowing users to download their data to see exactly what they have on them. But the files are limited – they contain stats related to their personal information like money to the electricity meter, without ever looking at the reading.

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Some have gone so far as to delete Facebook entirely. Over 390,000 people have discussed doing so online. The responses from social media companies have been to draw back the curtains that have been hiding data collection for so long.
The amount per year the average US citizen could make through monetising their data – Wibson
In 2018, livestreamed video snared consumers and kept them hooked long after the content had finished. Now brands have a chance to reel them in.
Social media consumption is changing. Consumers aren’t identifying with throwaway content as much as they used to. Studies show that as many as half of social natives – people who have grown up with smartphones – are seeking relief from traditional social media. Many are gradually moving away from newsfeeds towards more meaningful content.

While we’re not seeing full-blown platform migration – people are of course still glued to Facebook and Instagram – this attention shift does raise an important question for brands wanting to connect with consumers via social: where on earth are they going?

The short answer is nowhere fast. But people moving away from traditional content does appear to correlate with a growing preference for live. Facebook says 20% of the videos on their platform are now via Facebook Live and that users are moving away from traditional content creating watercooler moments on social as well as RL.

[Live is] one of the most genuine ways to connect with an audience and allows for levels of personalisation that the marketing industry has never seen.”

Just look at the internet-breaking impact of Drake x Ninja’s livestream on the gaming channel Twitch. Ninja – a gaming influencer with 3.5 million Twitter followers – invited hip hop virtuoso Drake to play with him on his livestream of the in-vogue battle royale game Fortnite, which garnered a platform record-breaking live audience of over 40,000 people. But that was just the beginning. Influencers, celebrities, magazines and fans went crazy for this moment. And the subsequent conversations on social channels went on for weeks.

It shows that people are converging around passion points more than ever, and that social is allowing for that at an unprecedented scale. When YouTube livestreamed Coachella this year, a global audience of more than 4 million people tuned in to watch, shattering YouTube streaming records. The conversations after the event were as varied as they were passionate, but mainly focused on Beyoncé’s performance.

Jeremy Clarkson may be less glamorous than Beyoncé, but the Battle Cars event live-streamed to promote the new series of The Grand Tour was an explosive watercooler moment in its own right. To promote the show with users of the platform, popular Twitch personalities faced-off against each other in a game driven by live participation from viewers. On a live-sized game board rigged with explosives linked to the live chat, influencers and viewers were able to blow up ‘90s cars. The objective, according to the agency behind the stunt, was to capture new viewers on a global scale. The massive participating live event made that possible.

While people do still consume a huge variety of content, many are looking for more. More passion points they can engage with and discuss on social. More from the content producers and brands they follow. And more impact from the video they choose to watch. Not everyone is there yet. But more and more, people are looking for more. The mass-participating live event made that possible.

People need a reason to tune in. Consider what’s important to your brand and how you can create a groundswell around it with a live moment. It could be stunt-based like the Battle Cars event or more celebrity or influencer focused like Drake x Ninja. First and foremost how that watercooler moment in mind: what would stir up conversations on social and IRL? People need a reason to tune in.

Consumers are choosing the parts of themselves they most identify with and learning into them more strongly. Live is an opportunity for your brand to tap into those things as well. Try not to be shallow in lots of areas, but deeper in a few. If a genre of music is aligned with your brand values, for example, consider how you could be involved in a YouTube livestream event through sponsorship or an ambassador.
How much more time people spend watching a live video compared to a pre-recorded one.
KNOW IT
Many consumers feel duped and want to retake control of their own data
USE IT
If something else has a viable fate policing your website, and be ready to put it into practice on social

KNOW IT
Leading brands have taken a hard line on hate and publicity stands by their values
USE IT
If you’re not doing the same, have a visible hate policy on your website, and be ready to put it into practice on social

KNOW IT
Brands are utilising big data and machine learning to tap into trends
USE IT
You can now use machine learning services for the most effective crowdsourced market research

KNOW IT
Marginalised groups are driving social’s biggest conversations and defining culture
USE IT
Never co-opt. Instead look to these groups as the trendsetters in which future conversations germinate

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KNOW IT
The masculinity debate is raging. Some brands have become passive mediators
USE IT
Look to your representation of men in your comms and ensure you offer an up-to-date message

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KNOW IT
Live video has left pre-recorded behind and created IRL watercooler moments
USE IT
You can make a splash around a campaign using live, either with a stunt or by using an ambassador

KNOW IT
Consumers are doubling down on their local identities in the face of globalisation
USE IT
Try platform innovations like dynamic ads to tap into local cultural narratives on a national scale

KNOW IT
Synthetic influencers like Lil Miquela prove that deliberate fakeness can be positive
USE IT
Consider using a digital avatar in your marketing, but ensure you truly know the creator

KNOW IT
This branch of memes offers insights into hard-to-reach audience behaviours
USE IT
Look to brands who’ve entered niche meme conversations in a genuine way to ensure you’re welcome