

# Ketchum

## Point of View



## Technology and Social Permission: How is COVID-19 Creating a New Normal?

And What Should Brands Prepare to Do  
About It?

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Before COVID-19, the technology industry was facing a new era of scrutiny relating to trust and social permission. Issues like consumer data privacy and security as well as calls for more transparency and regulations on how technology is omnipresent in our lives were growing in intensity. This is an area we've monitored closely for the past two years via [Ketchum's Technology and Social Permission study](#).

Post COVID-19, will we think differently when it comes to technology in our lives – and the expectations for consumer control over that technology? Ketchum continues to monitor and evaluate online search trends and social engagement on key topics like data privacy and healthcare. We see this crisis unfolding in four phases of what we call the Ketchum Disruption Life Cycle: 1) impact, 2) regroup, 3) rebound and 4) the new normal. As we progress toward the new normal, there are considerations around technology and social permission that brands need to begin preparing for now. The Disruption Life Cycle will bring new expectations for how technology brands communicate.

## Hyped Technologies Need to Show How They Are Helping in the COVID-19 Fight or Face Being Ignored (for a while)

### Big Data. AI. 5G.

For years, these technologies and the “promises” they hold to improve society from healthcare outcomes to smart cities to autonomous vehicles were the gospel of the technology industry. In 2019 we began to see reporters grow more skeptical of touted future benefits – they wanted to see real life use-cases not more hype. “Show us this is making a difference now,” – we heard from reporters. Now the stakes are even higher.

How are these technologies being used to solve COVID-19 and improve human outcomes? How are they being deployed to set us up better for future global

crises? Telling those stories later in the year will be vital to continuing the interest in and coverage of these technologies. The excitement around these technologies – and money for investment in them – will dry up if they aren’t framed as real tools in the fight against the global pandemic. And the media, which will be strained for the coming year, will be looking for outcomes. Brands that can show how they’ve harnessed these technologies for good during a global pandemic will rise above the others. Communicators need to be thinking about these cases now – and consider the right time to start talking about them.

## Scrutiny Over Brands that Don't Protect Consumers from Data Scams Will Grow

Millions are already out of work. Increased government support to make ends meet is on its way. Anxiety is high. Many people will struggle financially for a long time. Small businesses are hanging on by a thread. This is ripe territory for scam artists and security breaches with people's normal defenses low.

Our research shows that concerns over data security are high to begin with, with 66% of Americans expressing concern. But for the most part, consumers have been willing to forgive brands over data breaches and scams in the past – after all, everyone was a victim to outside criminals. Our studies show that after a data breach, half of people (51%) believe a company when they say they have fixed the issue. But the stakes are now higher. With dire needs for government assistance checks, small business loans, mortgage payment deferments as well as assurance of

healthcare coverage, criminals will be out in full force trying to take people's money, identity and faith in brands. Key industry groups and brands need to step up now and help consumers protect themselves. Banks, mortgage lenders, insurance companies and others will face harsher backlash than in the past if they don't do more to educate and protect their consumers for scams when people are at their most vulnerable.

As the recent hacking of a video conference company has shown, the quick flight to embrace technology to keep working, communicating and surviving has also opened up many cracks for criminals to exploit. Brands need to be working harder to ID vulnerabilities and empower their customers. New communication programs will be necessary.

## If Data Privacy Is Relinquished to Improve COVID-19 Health Outcomes, Results Better Be Apparent

People seem willing to allow their data to be used to fight a deadly pandemic. In fact, our study shows that even prior to COVID-19, two-thirds of people (69%) were willing to give up their data privacy connected to their health or genealogy tests to cure major diseases (e.g., cancer, dementia). But if companies begin sharing this private data with governments to fight COVID-19, the public will expect results. If those results never come (or people don't hear about them), the

public will feel duped. It is important to communicate often and transparently about how data is being used, how it is protected and how it is leading to real results. Otherwise, the outcry for regulation and control will accelerate post COVID-19. If real results are proven, a new era of data sharing could arise for public good. But communication will be critical to this process.

## Big Tech Providers Become the New Utilities

Big tech will get bigger as smaller companies don't make it in a COVID-19 reality. From streaming services to social media to education and online commerce, these services will be seen more and more like electricity or water – basic human rights that must be in every home. People need them to survive in modern society, to maintain their jobs, order basic supplies, and educate their children. Everyone is now more reliant upon them than ever.

Prior to COVID-19, Ketchum's research indicates that 89% of consumers called for increased legislation around data privacy, and 59% believed that large tech

companies should be broken up. Post COVID-19, these types of sentiments, coupled by our increased day-to-day reliance on technology will lead to governments accelerating review and regulation of Big Tech. This industry was on a path to more regulation and is getting a breather during COVID-19. But when the pandemic begins to subside, the regulatory train will move faster than ever. Brands need to be prepared now to navigate their path forward. How will technology companies prove they don't need too much regulation?

## Employers' Relationships with Employees Will Change Forever Because of Technology

We all agree – COVID-19 proved that many of us can work from home. It may be the death sentence for certain types of business travel and even trade shows. There may be fewer actual offices for people to go to. But how is this experience changing the employer/employee relationship?

We believe distance will force employers to use more surveillance and tracking technology to guarantee productivity. Not now – even IT

budgets and investments are being cut. But, when earnings and the economic fallout become systemic in a few months, employers will be watching their people like never before. Their collection of data will increase. There is a risk of backlash from employees who feel their every digital move is being watched. How are the best employee brands preparing? How will they be transparent? Communication will be critical to build trust.

## Parents' Embrace of Technology Supersedes Concerns

A major bright spot for technology companies is the tremendously important role products and services are playing in supporting families with children during COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, Ketchum saw evidence that parents were growing less and less concerned with older issues like screen time or video gaming and embracing technology as a real helper in improving the quality of family time. According to our research, only about a quarter of parents felt worse about their child's screen time (26%) or video gaming (21%) compared to 12 months ago. Additionally, 65% of consumers say time spent with their children is better because of technology. With COVID-19, families are now even more reliant on technology for entertainment, communicating with loved ones, schooling, working from home and shopping than ever before.

Despite some concerns, we believe parents and families will now adopt technologies in home at a more rapid pace than ever. And this will be a new normal. The value is proven. In many cases, technology is the hero in the home now. Brands that continue to show tangible ways technology products will continue to provide safety, family time enhancement and real linkage to the outside world will be in demand. The biggest challenge will be getting people to pay for new technology in the second half of 2020 when household budgets will be more strained. Showing economic value and long-term dollar savings will separate some brands introducing new products from others. Helping families afford new technologies will be a key business strategy.

# The Aging Will Continue to Suffer from a Technology Gap – Family Members Will Have to Help

Elderly consumers are at a real disadvantage when it comes to technology acceptance. Ketchum found that most people are very worried about their aging parents' or grandparents' ability to keep up with technologies that are central to basic tasks like banking, healthcare or communication. According to our research, the majority of people (80%) provide some sort of assistance to their parents when it comes to technology, whether it's setting up devices, answering questions or showing how to use gadgets. Even more alarming, most people are very concerned about the elderly falling victim to scams that technology disruption in everyday life makes possible. One aspect of our research examines consumers that both manage technology concerns for their children (having a child under 18 in their home), while also assisting their parents when it comes to technology. Within this subset, 87% are at least somewhat concerned about parents falling victim to tech issues (e.g., hackers, scammers,

phishing attacks, etc.), and 83% agree older adults have more risk of tech disruption.

With COVID-19, many aging people are cut off from family and the ability to community face-to-face. Many are struggling to keep up. Some are learning how to use new technology – which is a bright spot. But there are gaps, especially for people whose cognitive and physical abilities are slowing down. Their children are being forced to spend time and mindpower making sure their parents keep up and don't become victims.

Brands that help the aging with technology disruption are needed. Brands that help adult children keep their parents safe and functional will be the winners. Those who ignore the needs of the aging, especially as the aging population explodes, will face new backlash. A whole new category of technology communications and marketing for the aging will explode post COVID-19.



# What does this all mean to you and your company?

At Ketchum, we have been tracking **Technology and Social Permission through quantitative research** since 2018 to determine **how these trends impact brand communications and trust**. In this rapidly changing environment, we are here to partner with you and navigate how to protect companies and your consumers.

## About Ketchum

Ketchum is providing data intelligence and coronavirus communications counsel to clients in Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada and the U.S.

As a leading global communications consultancy, we combine the deep industry and specialty expertise of boutique firms with global reach to find unexpected connections that lead to lasting relationships and work that matters. The most creatively awarded firm in our industry, we're equal parts human-centered and business-focused, empathetic and intelligent. For more information, visit [www.ketchum.com](http://www.ketchum.com).

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