



2021

Social, Influencer Marketing + Analytics Trends Report



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Introduction

Marketing and communications have evolved more in the past year than they have in the past decade.

Pandemic lockdown restrictions have forced companies into tossing out their marketing strategies and reevaluating preferred sales channels, consumer journeys and stakeholder communications. In particular, the past year has seen supercharged ecommerce growth and many new social commerce features on the world's biggest social media networks, including Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

Yet the changes brought on by the global pandemic go beyond technological advancement. Our [Brand Reckoning 2020 study](#) on more than 3,000 Americans and their views on reengaging with the outside world revealed that 45% have changed their brand preferences and 62% say the pandemic has completely disrupted their 5-year plans.

In addition, social justice movements have challenged consumers' values. In our study, 74% cited Black Lives Matter protests as a reason why they're supporting businesses that improve diversity and inclusion. 88% of those Ketchum surveyed believe it's now more important that companies behave ethically.

Purpose and DE&I should be cornerstones of a digital marketing strategy in 2021, but proceed with caution. Brands must close the say-do gap by backing up their words with action. Those that fail to do so could suffer irreversible reputational damage.

The speed of change in society has increased rapidly as well, pushing marketers into becoming more strategically agile than ever. That shift demands more real-time monitoring, measurement and optimization that allows marketers to make quick and informed decisions.

This trends report discusses the most important social, influencer marketing and analytics trends for the year ahead, and how brands can best leverage them.

A close-up, macro photograph of teal-colored feathers, likely from a parrot. The feathers are layered and have a fine, ribbed texture. The lighting is soft, highlighting the intricate details of the feather structure. The overall color palette is a range of teal and light blue-green tones.

Social



Social Commerce Is Going Mainstream

As we enter 2021, we will see the continued rise and evolution of social commerce.

Almost 10 years ago Facebook launched “F-commerce.” It was supposed to revolutionize how we shopped but earned a true “F” in changing our collective shopping habits.

But 10 years later, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and many other social platforms are starting to deliver on the promise many had hoped for previously. **When many small businesses were forced to close their doors due to the global pandemic, they turned to their social channels to keep their customers up to date and drive revenue.**

Instagram, as an example, quickly responded by allowing businesses to not only tag their products in their posts but also enable their fans to purchase their product directly within Instagram by enabling the “checkout” feature.

Additionally, influencers can now tag a brand’s products, connect to their brand partner’s product catalogue and enable their fans to shop directly from their page. Facebook is far from the only one in the social commerce game. TikTok recently formed a partnership with Spotify that enables consumers to purchase products directly from branded and creator TikToks. The list of social platforms jumping on social commerce goes on and on.

Brands were already creating amazing content to sell their products and now these improved features enable consumers to purchase products instantly and natively on the most popular social platforms.

In 2021 we’ll continue to see brands reduce friction in the sales funnel as customers embrace social commerce.



AMIT WADEHRA
SVP, Digital Strategy
Chicago



Social Commerce Content Strategies Will Find Global Traction

One of the most touted consumer behavioral shifts globally through the pandemic has been the acceleration in the adoption of ecommerce.

Undoubtedly, much of the adoption of ecommerce during social distancing restrictions was driven by necessity. But with or without lockdowns, the sphere of influence around purchases continues to become more complex and tightly knit.

China is one of the undisputed leaders of the digital economy and continues its role as a bellwether of global ecommerce trends. One of the most prominent trends of 2020 was livestreamed QVC-style shoppertainment shows to drive click-to-buy sales.

Over Q3 2020, the number of livestream sessions hosted on Chinese ecommerce platform Taobao Live increased 110% year-over-year. The number of merchants livestreaming for the first time increased by 719% over the same period. This trend is now gaining traction overseas, including in the U.S.

China's leadership in this space is built on brands and merchants developing multiple content formats across an ecosystem of platforms: social media, influencer, ecommerce and content commerce platforms. Content in the form of livestream, short video or editorial plus conversation to answer questions and build trust are critical components of the formula.

New consumer journeys will continue to emerge in 2021, and many of these will intersect through social media at singular, or more likely, multiple points. This makes social commerce an important component of a brand's marketing strategy.



SIMEON MELLALIEU
Partner, Client Development,
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Short-Form Video Content + Influencers Are the Future Stars of Social in China

Short-form video apps have gained massive popularity in China with the trigger of 5G infrastructure investment, causing social commerce to boom.

According to research from Founder Securities, **short-form video platforms have attracted over 821 million monthly active users as of June 2019, up 32% year-over-year.**

All indicators point to short-form video apps, like Douyin, Bilibili, Kuai and Red, overtaking long-form video platforms as China's major source of online entertainment.

In light of this, brands need to think about integrating their short-form video and influencer marketing strategies in 2021 and beyond. The rise of short-form video content gives way for influencers to explore more creative formats, like live broadcasting, that go beyond traditional social posts and articles to represent the essence of brands and their products.

Taking an audience-centric approach to co-creating valuable, interesting and interactive short-form video content with an influencer is key to long-term influencer marketing partnership success. A deep, shared understanding of the target consumers' interests helps the content creator create dynamic content that pops, resonates and yields high-value returns.

Brands and creators need to tell an attractive story with a compelling hook – one that entertains, informs, and persuades audiences within 30 seconds to 5 minutes.



PRINCE ZHANG
CEO, Greater China
Shanghai



Engaging, Social CEOs Will Thrive

Research shows that high-performing CEOs at Fortune 500 companies are far more engaged on social media than their lower-performing counterparts.

Is their success a result of their social media use, or does social media engagement contribute to a company's growth more generally? The answer is both.

Today's CEOs are required to be the voice and face of their companies. As the front person, they have to embody their company's value system, speak out on political issues and social injustices, and provide stability during global issues such as the pandemic.

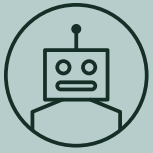
The most successful leaders see it as their core task to communicate corporate values directly to internal and external stakeholders and connect with customers, investors and activists. Social platforms provide the perfect place for CEOs to accomplish that.

That's why it's crucial for brands to develop authentic social media strategies for their CEOs and c-suite. The right channels need to be selected for the right audiences. Content strategies and topics of personal relevance have to be tailored to the individual leader.

And, most importantly, the CEO's personality should be clearly and authentically reflected in their social media presence.



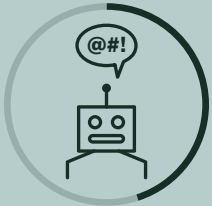
DORIS STEINER
Managing Director, Digital
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The War Against Bots + Misinformation Is On

One of the biggest challenges of 2021 will be to keep the Internet an open and safe place where everyone can contribute.

Through the power of AI, 2020 became the year bots launched an all-out attack on the Internet, and in particular on social platforms, spreading harmful misinformation and spammy comments along the way.



Within the global pandemic's first weeks, discussions on Twitter were hit by as many as 45% contributions from bots.

With more than 50% of social users reporting getting their news from Facebook or Twitter, that poses a critical threat to not only the Internet but also society.

Brands should not only prepare themselves for becoming misinformation targets, they should also use their power to help governments and tech giants end the spread of misinformation. Those that succeed will be seen favorably by consumers.

Besides, being a victim of misinformation comes with serious consequences. Hyper-nervous stock markets can burn billions in seconds, and winning back stakeholder trust is a slow and costly path.



FREDERIK TAUTZ
Global Partner,
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Grab Your Joysticks, Gaming Is Going Mainstream

In 2021, gaming will continue its transition from trending industry to vital slice of digital life.

Gaming has become more attractive than ever in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, an era where virtual experiences take precedence over physical. The gaming industry hit record peaks at the start of imposed lockdowns last March, and the summer and fall months have shown sustained viewership and traffic over the previous year – a trend marketers can expect to continue.

According to the Economist, video game internet traffic, including mobile games, has increased 75% in the U.S. Elsewhere, [Steam](#) saw an 11% peak increase in concurrent players, and [Twitch](#) has seen its average viewership more than double. From a consumer standpoint, [HubSpot and Talkwalker report](#) that 32% more people identify as gamers versus 13 months ago, with [data showing mothers as the largest growing segment](#).

With traffic on the rise, it's logical that brands would look for opportunities to capitalize. But before jumping in, consider that this audience values authenticity and transparency over overt brand messaging.

In October 2020, for example, over 400K viewers watched Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar join popular Twitch personalities Hasan Piker and Imane Anys to play "Among Us" while, of course, chatting about the election. Viewers knew exactly what they were in for and ate it up anyway (that 400K number isn't too far off from Twitch's Drake-assisted record of 600K). Pairing the right personalities at the right time with the right title will be an unbeatable combination in 2021.



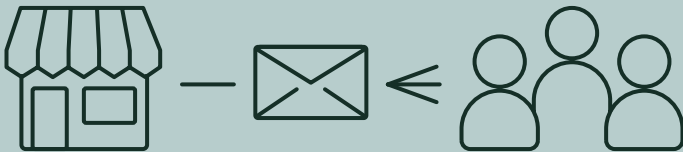
ALEXIS REZA
Senior Digital Strategist
New York



You Can't Afford Not to Be On Substack

2020 accelerated the rise of needing only 100 true fans. In 2021, this phenomenon will continue to fragment traditional media landscapes while giving rise to new business models.

Whether it's influencers now becoming retailers, as my colleagues have pointed out, or your Substack being a true brand marketing channel, **using tools like newsletters and SMS to develop direct 1:1 relationships between a brand and their customers will continue to be the new landscape of opportunity in 2021.**



The cost of reaching a desired audience on social platforms only gets more expensive every year. Brands who aren't already investing in new ways to communicate and market to the people who care most will be paying that premium for years to come.

With our physical networks pulled apart by a pandemic, the individual rose to the occasion and cashed in on the passion economy. 2021 will be more of the same.



JOHN RATCLIFFE-LEE
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Augmented Reality Is Set to Thrive... Again

Augmented reality was prophesied to have a great future after the phenomenal success of Pokémon Go several years ago.

But repeated attempts at replicating its success across other applications have largely failed. Tech companies' failed attempts to deliver AR-driven wearables like glasses has been another setback for the promising technology.

Even if the world emerges from the global pandemic in the near future, this shift will remain popular in 2021.



The global pandemic is being blamed for a tempered 35.3% growth in spending on AR worldwide, up from \$7.9 billion in 2019 to \$10.7 billion in 2020 according to IDC research.

Despite everything, the AR market outlook remains optimistic and can still blow up 2021. But it'll likely happen in unexpected arenas. Although live entertainment and usage is facing difficulty due to pandemic restrictions, education, tourism, medical, industrial, and other segments are poised to continue growing their AR usage. AVRA (Augmented and Virtual Reality Association, Russia) recently [shared a case of commissioning complex foreign equipment with AR support](#), and such types of technology usage are cause for serious optimism within this sector.

Another growing AR field lies in ecommerce, particularly in the retail space where some brands are leading the charge. Consumers are able to virtually sample furniture, clothes, makeup and much more in a safe and convenient manner.



IGOR CHELOTKANOV
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Influencer Marketing



As Ecommerce Grows, Influencers Will Take the Driver's Seat

Combating retail closures and stay at home orders, U.S. online sales are projected to increase by over 30% by the end of 2020.



In Q2 2020, \$1 of every \$5 spent by U.S. consumers came from an online order.

Who's playing a major role in this growth? Influencers. With consumers spending more time than ever before shopping online, influencers will play an increasingly critical role in that sales ecosystem, driving product referrals and using their influence and storytelling abilities to sway consumer decisions.

The shift in marketing spend to influencers also means it is increasingly important to be able to predict sales conversion ability as well as track and attribute sales back to individual influencers.

To capitalize on this explosive growth, brands should focus on building influencer marketing programs that support the user journey and drive to trackable, attributable purchase.



MARINDA YELVERTON
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Influencers Will Fuel the Social Commerce Evolution

As social commerce continues to gain traction in the West, the big social ecommerce story of 2020 concerned Facebook and Instagram's innovations in the space.

2021 will present additional opportunities for both brands and influencers to drive sales by enhancing their grasp of the tools that will continue to be refined and expanded by these social media giants.

To name a few recent success stories, London-based interior design influencer [Beata Heuman](#) is already selling via Instagram Shops with shoppable content expected to be rolled out across IGTV and Reels in the near future. From a brand perspective, beauty retailer Sephora is leading the way by letting their 20 million followers shop from more than 80 brands via Instagram.

Influencers and brands will take the lead from stories like these to continue capitalizing on what these tools have to offer, giving Facebook and Instagram further incentive to deepen their resources.

The challenge in 2021 will be that many influencers may not be ready to transform their Instagram feeds into virtual shopping malls for brands. With that in mind, expect to see more examples of a test-and-learn approach that leverages influencer assets in shoppable ad content, boosted via brand accounts on Facebook and Instagram.



STEPHEN FARRELL
Associate Director,
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London



Influencer Campaigns With Frankness, Passion + Purpose Will Lead the Way

Big influencer marketing budgets and creativity alone is no longer enough. 2021 will be the year of purpose-oriented influencer marketing projects.

According to [The Purpose Pulse 2020 report](#), 55% of two generations who together accumulate approximately two-thirds of our population – millennials and Gen Z – believe that having a clear purpose beyond profit is important to them when considering which brands to buy from. Talkwalker and HubSpot interviewed 70 global experts and frontline professionals on their thoughts and predictions for the year ahead.

No. 1 in their report: Audiences will be more socially conscious. That means consumers are now more aware of global issues and how brands tackle them.

Whether it's for social justice, sustainability, climate change or poverty reduction, purpose-driven campaigns will

resonate with influencers who will be happy to participate, even on a non-commercial basis, if they share the values of the initiative.

The major challenge for brands will be to select opinion leaders who are authentically passionate about the purpose of the campaign and will be 100% sincere while communicating with their audience. The choice should not be based on the number of followers, engagement rates or any other popular metric.

Brands should invest considerable resources into finding truly credible influencers who employ a consistent personal brand publicly and privately, and ultimately help them communicate their purpose initiatives in ways that resonate.



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Top Micro-Influencers Will Be Powered by Diversity, Equity + Inclusion

Known for their remarkable ability to authentically engage with their followers, micro-influencers should be an essential part of a brand voice and marketing strategy in 2021.

Creatively and naturally, they can produce native social content that drives sales by tying their personal brands to company products, acting as trusted advocates leading conversations with potential customers.

A study on followership and engagement revealed that micro-influencers with a following of 1,000-5,000 garner the highest engagement rate at 8.8% among all influencer levels.

When forming micro-influencer partnerships, it's important to note that brands are now expected to include diverse representation in all their initiatives. Not only is diverse representation critical during every brand campaign for the company, every influencer partner of the brand should uphold the same standard in their own content. Companies that fail to ensure there's diverse representation in their own campaigns and that of their partners risk serious backlash.

Consider partnering with LGBTQ+ and minority groups to co-create discussions around topics unrelated to the groups they represent. When done authentically with consideration for the influencer's audience, such initiatives can foster lasting emotional bonds between consumers and brands.



CAIO BAMBERG
CEO, Brazil
São Paulo

Analytics



Measurement Needs Will Increase

It's no longer enough to report big impressions and follower growth.

Now more than ever, marketers are required to listen, understand, and guarantee that the data available is being collected, measured, analyzed and applied on a business level in a continuous, optimized process.

In 2020, the global pandemic abruptly changed worldwide digital consumption and behavior, and only increased this need. In Brazil, the perspective for 2021 is that companies will continue to gradually shift campaigns from offline to online.



With that evolution follows an expectation that more online-driven initiatives will bring increased need for data analysis.

Marketers and communicators must therefore upgrade their measurement frameworks to ensure they're consistently bringing insights to the table that yield business results.



RAFA LUCAS
Digital Solutions Director
São Paulo



AI-Derived Insights From Visual Content Will Be Key to Measurement Efforts

To this point, social media listening has largely focused on text analysis (who said what on social media, and how many times?).

The rise of online video content – Cisco predicts that by 2021, 80% of online content will be videos – is driving a new wave of AI-powered technologies to unlock insights from visual content:

70%

of market researchers believe that video analysis technology will play a major role in the future of market research.

Over 3 billion images, GIFs and videos are shared on social media every day. **With this visible shift from text to visual, brands can't afford to monitor only text mentions. Fortunately, AI technology makes analyzing visual content a breeze.**

However, brands should proceed with caution. AI is a complex set of technologies, and hype surrounding it can lead to brands investing in a tool they might not need.

To make the most out of image or video recognition software in 2021, we recommend brands avoid generic offerings and instead invest in technologies that have been customized to their specific industry (vertical AI) or use case (bespoke AI).



GIUSEPPE POLIMENO
Head of Research and Analytics
London



Results That Resonate With the C-Suite Will Be More Important Than Ever


For communicators to have a seat at the table, we need to ensure we're presenting results that resonate with the c-suite.

Impressions, reach or other volume metrics can seem impressive at a first glance but they don't explain how programs help companies achieve business objectives. In a more competitive world, where budgets are tight and being scrutinized, **the onus is on each of us to evolve and demand more accountability for dollars spent on communications.** Upping the sophistication of communications metrics and how they're presented is critical to succeed in 2021.



Results of communications programs should hold up against other marketing channels. Connect people who are exposed to the work with meaningful business metrics such as those related to brand health, sales, and/or market share.

And don't just present metrics, make sure you're telling a story around the results you're presenting. Critically, and quite often missing, is the storytelling element. Data and more importantly measurement should be prescriptive.



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About Ketchum

The winner of 105 Cannes Lions and PProvoke's Global Creative Agency of the Year, Ketchum is the most creatively awarded firm in our industry.

We're equal parts human-centered and business-focused, empathetic and intelligent. As a 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.

For more information on Ketchum visit ketchum.com and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Facebook](#).