Social Media: Inc Impact of COVID-19 - UK - July 2020

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"COVID-19 has seen social media platforms take a stronger content moderation role, such as overtly promoting trusted sources and banning users that are spreading misinformation. This comes as platforms face more pressure from consumers, governments and advertisers to tackle the issue of fake news, as well as hate speech and other harmful content."
– Rebecca McGrath, Senior Media Analyst

This report looks at the following areas:

What you need to know

Nearly nine in ten (87%) social media users think that social networks should warn users if a news story is likely to be fake, demonstrating that people feel networks have a responsibility to protect users from content on their platforms. This has been particularly important during the outbreak as social networks have been attempting to tackle the problem of COVID-19 misinformation.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a surge in use of social media platforms, with features such as livestreaming and messaging performing particularly strongly. A drop in digital advertising revenue has, however, prevented the platforms from feeling the full benefit of this increased use. Networks have taken a very strong stance on tackling the spread of virus misinformation by promoting trusted sources, such as the WHO, and flagging or banning users that are spreading fake news about COVID-19.

Social media platforms are under ever increasing scrutiny from consumers, regulators and advertisers over their potential societal harm, from the spread of misinformation and hate speech to concerns over their negative impact on users' mental health. An advertising boycott, principally of Facebook, which began in June 2020, demonstrates how advertisers are increasingly worried about consumer backlash from appearing alongside controversial content on social media.

High engagement during the pandemic is, however, providing a good opportunity for platforms to introduce new features that are likely to be particularly well received during this moment, such as e-commerce, livestreaming and video chatting options. TikTok has also entered the mainstream over the last few months, with the platform showing significant potential to rival the current top five networks.

Key issues covered in this Report

- **The impact of COVID-19 on social media**
- **Key development from the major social media networks over the last year**
- **Frequency of use of different social media networks**
- **Consumers' social media priorities and perceptions of the major networks**
- **Consumers' attitudes towards social media**

Products covered in this Report

Mintel defines social media networks as any network focused on facilitating person-to-person interactions or sharing media with other users.

The 'Top Five' social media networks refer to the group of platforms which take up the largest sections of the market – Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.

DID YOU KNOW?

This report is part of a series of reports, produced to provide you with a more holistic view of this market

For a more specific focus on social media influencers and creators see Mintel's Influencers – UK, January 2020 Report.

Market Context

This update on the impact that COVID-19 is having on the UK was prepared on 9 July 2020.

The first COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the UK at the end of January, with a small number of cases in February. The government focused on the 'contain' stage of its strategy, with the country continuing to operate much as normal. As the case level rose, the government ordered the closure of non-essential stores on 20 March.

A wider lockdown requiring people to stay at home except for essential shopping, exercise and work 'if absolutely necessary' followed on 23 March. Initially, a three-week timeframe was put on the measures, which was extended in mid-April for another three weeks.

On 10 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced revised guidance, recommending that people who could not work from home should return to the workplace, and gave people more scope to spend time out of the home. Further relaxations to lockdown rules were announced in the week of 23 May, including the gradual re-opening of non-essential retailers, and increased opportunities for social interaction across households. Hospitality businesses, such as pubs and restaurants, and other public places were re-opened on 4 July 2020. On 9 July 2020 the government announced that leisure facilities and beauty services were to open at select dates throughout the rest of the month.

At the time of writing, 9 July 2020, the FCO still advises against all but essential international travel for an indefinite period. Some countries, including much of Europe, were made exemptions as of 4 July 2020 as they were judged to be "no longer presenting an unacceptably high risk to British people travelling abroad".

Economic and other assumptions

Our economic assumptions are based on the illustrative scenario included in the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Report, released on 7 May 2020. The scenario suggests that UK GDP could fall by 14% in 2020, recovering by 15% in 2021, and that unemployment will reach 8% by the end of the year, easing slightly to 7% by the end of 2021. The current uncertainty means that there is wide variation on the range of forecasts however, and the numbers presented in the BoE's illustrative scenario are at the more pessimistic end of the spectrum.

We are working on the assumption that a vaccine will be available by mid-2021, but that there will be continued disruption to both domestic and global markets for some time after that. As long as there is not a second wave of infections, social distancing measures should be gradually relaxed over the course of 2020, but we don't expect industries such as spectator sports, tourism or foodservice to return to any kind of normality until a vaccine is introduced.

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