

Social Media - UK - May 2021

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This report looks at the following areas:

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

The issue of handling harmful content has grown following the suspension of former US President Donald Trump across social media and the prevalence of COVID-19 misinformation. Challenging some preconceptions about cancel culture, younger people are less likely to want people banned for misinformation. Just 15% of 16–24 year olds favour this action for political misinformation and 17% for COVID-19 misinformation, compared with the average of 34% and 37% respectively. Younger people are more likely to favour content labels and the removal of harmful content.

Most platforms have seen a boost in recent usage due to the additional time at home during the pandemic. TikTok has experienced the strongest growth, from 8% recent usage in March 2020 to 18% in March 2021, rising to 50% among 16–24 year olds. While the high usage rates may fall back as lockdown restrictions are eased, we will see more content creation as users socialise and travel more.

Social media is coming under increased scrutiny, with Facebook in particular in dispute with regulators in Germany and Australia. Regulatory changes could hit revenues, while concerns over data-sharing could hit brand perception. The handling of misinformation is also a pertinent issue, with 54% of social media users having seen COVID-19 misinformation on social media. Failure to manage harmful content is a bigger threat than ever in such a competitive market of platforms offering increasingly similar features.



“Social media has enjoyed a surge in use with people seeking entertainment and connection throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns, although time online looks set to fall as restrictions are eased. The majority of Brits want action on false claims and social media platforms' reactions could be an opportunity to restore trust in their brands.”

– Rebecca McGrath, Senior Media Analyst – May 2021

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Widespread new feature launches provide the opportunity to keep users engaged and on platforms for longer periods, ultimately boosting advertising revenues. With several platforms launching short-form video to compete with the growth of TikTok, alongside increased audio and video chat integration, users will be less likely to leave an app to perform these functions elsewhere. This could also strengthen the potential for in-app shopping, with 27% of social media users saying they are interested in purchasing directly within social media apps.



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