

# 5 social media megatrends for 2021

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As traditional media strategies faltered, 2020 highlighted the growing relevance of social media marketing and the need for businesses to relook customer engagement. Social media usage soared - both in number of users and amount of time spent on social media platforms.



Image by [Gerd Altmann](#) from [Pxabay](#)

In July 2020, social media users surpassed 4.75 billion, which is more than half the global population, with 346 million new users joining in the 12 months prior.

We look at the social media megatrends for 2021, and what brands need to do to flourish in this space.

## 1. Offer up valuable content for free

Social media users have always been spoiled for choice when it comes to online content and brands to follow. However, quantity doesn't always mean quality. To stay relevant, brands need to bump up the amount of value offered. A stale social media calendar populated with #MotivationMondays and #ThrowBackThursdays is not going to cut it.

As a brand, you have your finger on the pulse of your industry, and this deep industry knowledge is valuable to your ideal

customer. Anyone can find anything online, at the cost of their time, so brands need to provide information in easy, snackable formats. It doesn't mean giving away trade secrets, but rather about providing enough value so that your brand stays top of mind. If someone has a question or is looking for more detailed information, why not provide articles or white papers to aid their search?

There are several ways to provide value; free information, collaboration with users, product insights, industry knowledge and tips, tools such as useful calculators and downloadables.

The fierce competition to add more value has inspired brand owners to create online learning, webinars and long-form videos where users engage more deeply with a brand. If you're not adding value right now, weave in this critical ingredient into your 2021 social media plans.

## 2. Be an authentic brand, with integrity

Users crave authenticity and real, genuine engagement and interactions with brands. As the digital world becomes more pervasive, we demand the "human touch" in our online experience.

Although cancel culture, where people boycott users, brands and even social platforms, is thriving, many people still turn to social media for solace, community and connection. This is where brands can step in and be the hero.

Don't be afraid to humanise your brand. For example, show what happens behind the scenes. Selling a product? Share stories about how you make it, where the inspiration came from. Don't forget to talk about the people behind the brand. Respond to user queries in a warm, human tone.



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Being authentic means staying true to the purpose of being a brand and a business, not hiding behind insincere and irrelevant content. If you are selling, which you should be doing, sell authentically. Authentic selling means effectively communicating the value of your service or product. When a consumer can clearly see the value, it's easy for them to buy.

## 3. Lean in to online complaints with empowered customer service

This past year undermined most physical customer experiences, with some estimates indicating that South African online retail sales grew by around 40% during the last year. Social media will continue to evolve into true sales channels but will need impeccable customer service levels to succeed.

Online customer service is the glue that holds this new online dynamic together as users compliment, complain, enquire, shop and engage with brands. Users now, more than ever, use their online voice to ensure that brands deliver on what they promise.



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They don't like waiting on hold to talk to a representative. Social presents an opportunity to wow customers by answering questions far more quickly and efficiently than the phone. You can stand out if your community managers are empowered to resolve queries and respond quickly. This means giving your online community managers the tools to make decisions

that leave customers smiling.

#### 4. Decide on and communicate your business' purpose for long term sustainability

People are looking towards the private sector to make a positive difference to the planet and their communities. They seek out brands that care and fearlessly expose those who don't.

Purpose-driven companies that care about sustainability will be on the right side of history. But becoming purpose-driven is not something you can mimic on social media by just following popular trends or newsworthy topics.



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As users hold higher expectations for what they expect businesses to contribute to the world, social media statements alone can't make up for a lack of true brand purpose. It's truly time to "put your money where your mouth is." and in doing this, it could really pay off.

Many brands stumbled in 2020 with the need to respond to public pressure and positively contribute to societal conversations ending up in knee-jerk reactions, many of which were called out as hypocritical. Businesses need to decide on a cause that makes sense to their brand and ideal customer, and stick to it for the long-term.

For South African brands, supporting local products, companies and individuals is one way to become more sustainable and appeal to a local-conscious consumer.

#### 5. Embrace your customers by embracing the data

This past year gave brand owners a renewed appreciation for social media, which became the bridge to connect with customers after other traditional media strategies failed.

The downside of investing in a strong social media following is that you never really own this following. Platform algorithms change and technical glitches happen. There is a massive drive for brands to own their follower data.

Brand owners need to push social media engagement into a database. According to Hootsuite's 2021 Social Trends survey, 85% of organisations that integrate social data into other systems have confidence in their ability to accurately quantify the ROI of social media.

If you own your follower data, you can reach out to offer valuable content or special offers. Email marketing remains a highly effective, if underrated, communications tool to nurture potential customers. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, e-mail marketing is up to 40 times more effective than social media promotion. Promoting on social media is a great way to build up an email database.

To build that precious database, you must provide a high-value item – users are not going to give out their contact information for anything less. Gone are the days of a useless PDF guide that has no real value.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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