



CRACKING SOCIAL

HARNESSING THE CONTAGIOUS CREATIVITY OF INFLUENCERS

Thought Piece
2016

It is clear, that when it comes to connecting meaningfully with audiences on social media, there is still a lot to learn. At Ipsos Connect we've been exploring how brands can maximise their impact in this space. Our starting point was in depth examination of the people who are getting it right in order to identify what we can learn from them.

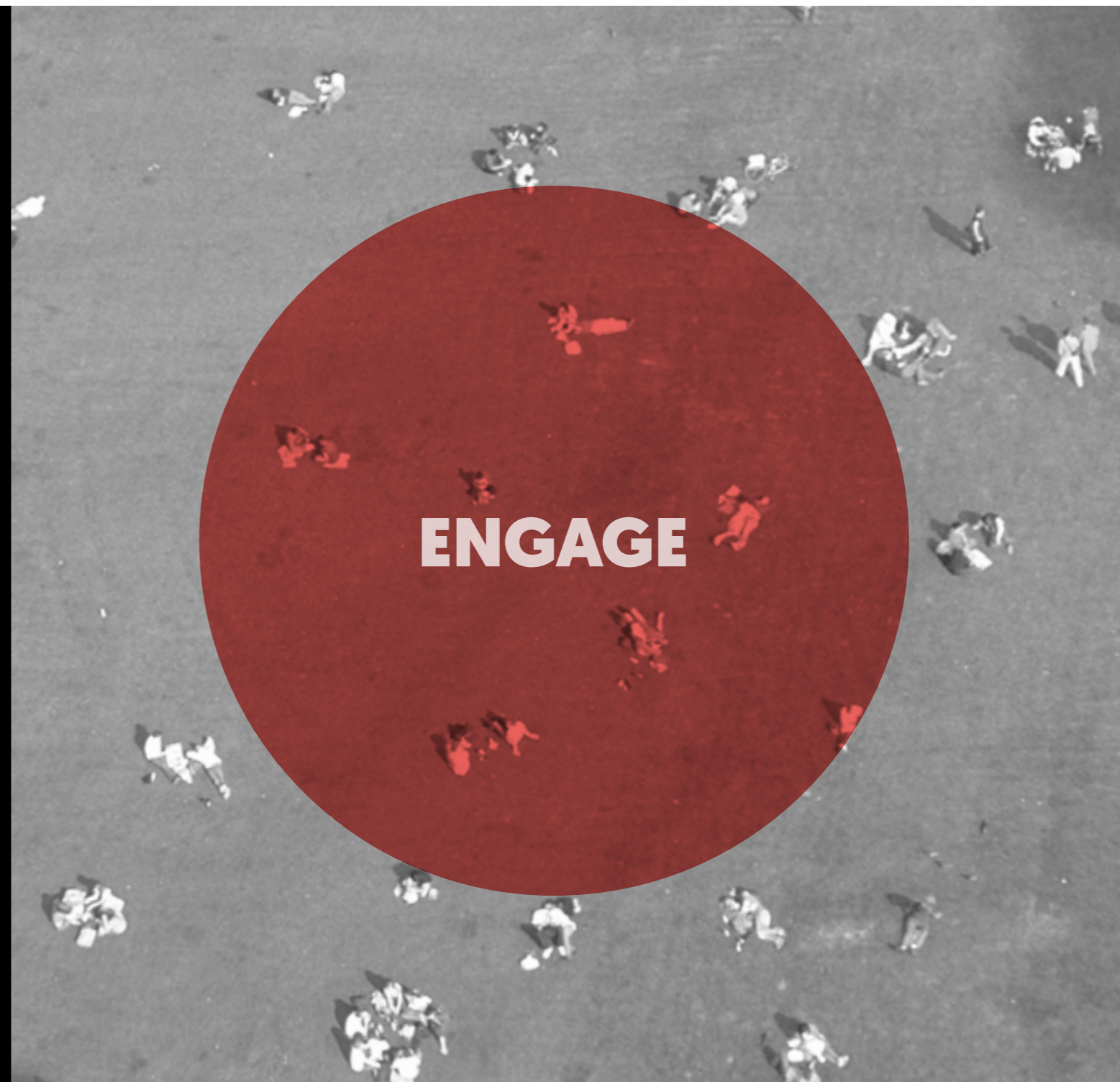
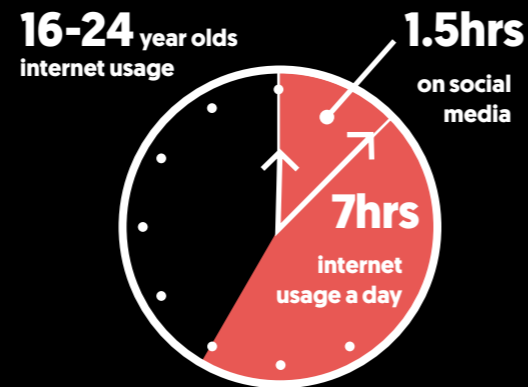
We held in depth interviews with eight social media experts and influencers. Indeed, many of our interviewees were both – having built their own reputation as influencers they were well placed to advise others in the art of social. We explored with them what it takes to truly engage your audience.

Social media is now almost as ubiquitous as the TV set in the corner of the living room. 70% of UK internet users have a social media profile, and four fifths of these people visit it at least once a day. 16-24s are spending 6-7 hours a day online and 1.5 hours of that time is spent on social media¹. According to Ipsos Connect's Tech Tracker Q2 2016 it is the second most popular activity, after email, on smartphones in Great Britain².

In some ways it's surprising that social media ad spend isn't higher, although it has risen exponentially – up 45% year on year to be worth £1.25 billion³. But knowing how to 'get it right' continues to be the big question for marketers.

The realisation that the online metrics of 'likes' and clicks don't equal success for brands has led to a shift towards branded content and influencer marketing, both of which help to address concerns around ad blocking⁴.

Social and influencer led marketing is complex and measuring success even more challenging. Despite this the influencer market is booming⁵. But how can you make it work for your brand? We've identified some very clear recommendations for building brand engagement in these spaces.





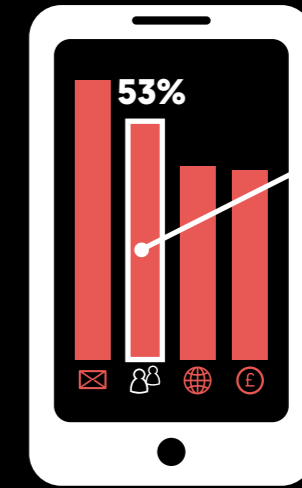
UNDERSTANDING

What do we need to think about?

The first and most important point, is the need for a new kind of audience understanding. Traditional profiling and segmentations don't deliver the kinds of insights that lead to powerful brand engagement on social media. Powerful engagement comes from something more nuanced and less tangible. What are the conversations they are having? What are they thinking about? What are they worried about?

My first interview was with the [very witty] editor of the Daily Mash, Tim Telling. The Daily Mash is a highly successful parody news website which is most widely read on Facebook, but the website alone has a monthly unique reach of 2.5 million. He said,

“The Daily Mash is a kind of marketing person's nightmare. We have no marketing strategy, we don't advertise ourselves, we're not hot on having a fancy brand or whatever, the website doesn't look cool and we never have any meetings. But we have twelve writers ... and we exist to be funny. It exists to be funny, people are bored in offices, they want to be entertained and we're in a position to provide that”.



Social media is the second most popular activity on smartphones

When the team are writing stories they try to pre-empt what might be just beneath the general national consciousness – a story that will make people think they wish they'd thought of that – a kind of 'aha' that's me story, or my neighbour, or my annoying co-worker. Brands need to be thinking in this kind of way. How can I be slightly ahead of what my audience want or are thinking about? They need to be closer to the cultural zeitgeist than ever before. The Daily Mash team are an example of precisely what is important on social media – a nuanced understanding of who your audience is and what makes them tick. The more shared a story is, the more they know it has resonated with their audience. People share posts to indicate to others what is important to them; so, in essence, a shared post is the digital equivalent of a badge on a lapel.

Understanding what function an influencer serves, or need they fulfill, in the eyes of their audience is key to building engagement and followers. Successful social media stars know why their audience is coming to them and then ensure their content and tone meets these needs.

As well as having a finely tuned understanding of how to fulfill a particular need state, successful influencers also understand how to use different platforms to their best advantage. As Andrew Bruce-Smith a social media consultant said,

“Content must be tailored to the usage and audience behaviour of individual platforms”
[Andrew Bruce-Smith]

“There is still a tendency for brands to think that just because they’ve heavily invested in one channel and format that they can, for example, take a 30 sec advert and post it on Twitter. They need to tailor by platform and must have a channel strategy either internally or using an agency”.

“The best content is unique, different, creative and shared, regardless of who made it.”

[David Levin]

All our interviews underlined the importance of storytelling. Lily Pebbles, a beauty vlogger, described how a day in her life would be covered in different ways on different platforms. She’ll Tweet to say what her schedule for the day is, take a Snapchat on her travels around London and Instagram something she bought for reviewing later on YouTube. ‘It’s like a story that links together...and you’re letting people into your life’.

But perhaps the most significant and challenging behaviour that was common amongst all of our interviewees was the need to be risk taking and vulnerable. This is at the heart of creative storytelling. David Levin, CEO of social media agency, That Lot, argues that a large part of the appeal of social media is down to the way in which content and talent is democratised.



STORYTELLING



CONVERSING

In recent months, the UK has been immersed in a frenzied conversation around the EU Referendum, which Ipsos has been heavily involved in. We explored what it meant for brands to have a 'view' or indeed get involved in any kind of conversation around the referendum. It can seem risky and difficult and therefore not worth doing. But we think getting involved in the national conversation is always worth exploring. One example of this is the incredibly simple tweet that Birdseye posted during the infamous Thames 'boat off' between Nigel Farage and Bob Geldof. It was completely unexpected, funny and matched the moment of relative lightness during a difficult period in British political life. And as a result it was warmly received.



Birds Eye UK @BirdsEyeUK

@MarinaHyde @MichaelPDeacon Is everything ok? Need us to send The Captain down?
#Thames #flotilla

Brands that want to engage their audiences in the social media space need to behave like all the best content creators. To be successful brands need to focus on three key areas:

Think social first: It is rarely enough to make content and then simply put it out on social media. Have a social strategy and think about how to tell stories across platforms in the same way that influencers use social to communicate with different audiences. Be nimble and fleet-footed. It's easier to take risks on social media, people expect it and want content that is unpredictable and different. Be open to getting involved in national conversations but do it in a way that is meaningful and truly fits with your brand purpose, be vulnerable and honest. "Don't lead with a paid idea – lead with something that gets you earned attention", [Michelle Goodall, Expert].



Create "cor blimey" moments to talk about in the pub.



[Michelle Goodall]

Cultural Capital: A social strategy is nothing if you don't know your audience inside out and back to front. Cultural capital is more important than ever before. You need to know what your audience is thinking about, before they've even thought it themselves. The emphasis for brands needs to be on investing in understanding the culture in which we inhabit. To start conversations with your consumers, or to even participate in those conversations, you first need to know the conversations your audiences are having.

One of the best examples of this that we've seen is from the US 'outdoor adventure' chain REI. On Black Friday 2015, they took the decision to shut their stores and implored their audience to #optoutside. This bold and risky decision tapped into a zeitgeist – a cynicism amongst their audience towards hyper-commerciality. It was a big success for the company, in multiple ways – building trust and empathy with its audience, gaining vast amounts of earned coverage and a 25% uplift of traffic to their online site.

Collaborate: To truly and meaningfully engage on social media, brands need to become forward thinking and future focused. What is on the cultural horizon? How can we create content that will be talked about and remembered? More than ever, brands need to be in the creative space, collaborating with influencers in all fields especially film, art, music and tech, as it is here we find the producers of content that is most valuable in social.

Brands need to think beyond their category competitor set, throwing out the rule book and embracing the new world order. To be a part of the conversation they need to relinquish control to these creators, enabling them to integrate the brand in organic and engaging ways.

As social media continues to evolve and diversify, the role it plays in people's lives will only grow. New technologies such as virtual reality promise to make social platforms ever more experiential and exciting. To ensure brands are part of people's cultural lives and conversations, advertisers need to embrace and invest, more than ever before, in meaningful and risk taking content. Using creativity to harness the full power of social influencers.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT:**

QUALITATIVE DIRECTOR



Hanna heads up our Ipsos Connect Closer team and is a highly experienced qualitative and quantitative researcher. She is particularly interested in how social media can be harnessed as a force for good.

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COLLABORATE

SOURCES

- 1 Ofcom 2015
- 2 Ipsos Tech Tracker Q2 2016 53% use smartphone to access social networking sites, second only to 62% who use it to read or send emails
- 3 IAB/PWC Full Year 2015 Adspend
- 4 A recent KPMG survey found that 44% of UK adults are planning on using an Ad blocker in the next six months
- 5 <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Influencer-Marketing-Rapidly-Gaining-Popularity-Among-Brand-Marketers/1013563#sthash.h53EXs5C.dpuf>



Ipsos Connect

ABOUT IPSOS CONNECT

Ipsos Connect are experts in brand, media, content and communications research. We help brands and media owners to reach and engage audiences in today's hyper-competitive media environment.

Our services include:

- **Brand & Campaign Performance:** Evaluation and optimisation of in-market activities to drive communications effectiveness and brand growth.
- **Content and Communications Development:** Communications, content and creative development from early stage idea development through to quantitative pre-testing alongside media & touchpoint planning.
- **Media Measurement:** Audience measurement and understanding.

Ipsos Connect are specialists in people-based insight, employing qualitative and quantitative techniques including surveys, neuro, observation, social media and other data sources. Our philosophy and framework centre on building successful businesses through understanding brands, media, content and communications at the point of impact with people.

