

Reclaim share of culture through a new approach to social communities.

Insights from our latest research on the power of social business transformation.

March 2024

In the early 2000s, when brands first began to recognize the power of social media to enable new types of customer engagement, many focused on building their own communities on the leading platforms. In that time of simpler social platform algorithms, the approach worked: The more content brands posted, the more they were seen in the feeds of their followers—and the more those followers engaged with and acted on that content.

Social media algorithms have changed significantly since then—and so has the formula for success.

Social feeds on major platforms are now shaped primarily by the interests and recent activities of individual users. Emma “likes” a makeup tutorial video and suddenly her feed is peppered with posts about trending cosmetic colors and links to virtual makeup try-on tools—often from people, groups and brands she didn’t even know existed. She then pauses to read a post about sustainable business practices, and voila: Here comes a link to an article about eco-friendly skin care brands ...

On social today, the world that each user experiences is a world of *their* making, conjured from their demonstrated interests. Communities of users converge and disperse organically—sometimes suddenly—as trends, topics and interests shift, and as social platforms introduce new features that inspire new ways of creating, sharing and connecting. As a result, social media *culture* is shaped and driven primarily by social media *consumers*.

From the consumer’s perspective, this distinguishes modern social media from every other past or present mass communications channel—from newspapers and radio to streaming TV and video games—where media and entertainment brands served as the ultimate arbiters and producers of “what matters.”

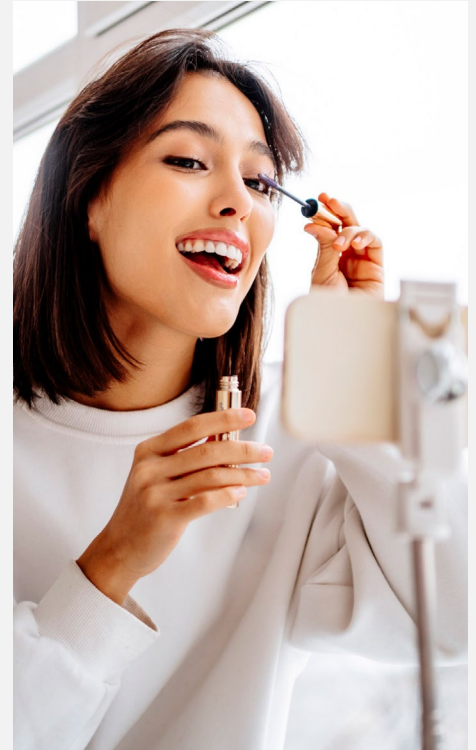
85% OF CONSUMERS SAY THEY JOIN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE LIKE THEMSELVES.



This difference has profound strategic and tactical implications for brands. Traditionally, growing “share of voice” has been the most effective path for brands to expand awareness and reach. (Want more attention? Buy more of it than your competitors.) That approach is insufficient—and often counterproductive—on social media today. Plenty of brands have learned this the hard way by inserting their voices and products into communities and conversations where they haven’t first earned permission and relevance. Emma may turn out to be a makeup enthusiast ... but that doesn’t mean your hotel brand can earn her attention or trust simply by highlighting your bathroom vanities in the ads you show her. Jump into one of her group conversations to suggest lipstick shades to match your hotel decor, and your brand could lose face with an entire target audience.

The good news for your organization is that user-created cultures and user-driven conversations on social platforms produce huge volumes of fine-grained data about individuals and audiences—data that can help you understand and adjust to the tone and content of discrete user communities, and to how those communities expect your brand to participate at both broad and personal levels.

As a result, **share of culture now is earned most effectively through good listening, authenticity and real engagement in user communities.** Let’s explore each of these principles and what our research says about how to make your brand welcome in their world.



A NEW FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH.

In this series we explore how social-first brands are driving innovation and growth through a more comprehensive, connected approach to social media.

Part 1: Social means business. Serious business.

Part 2: Reclaim share of culture through a new approach to social communities.

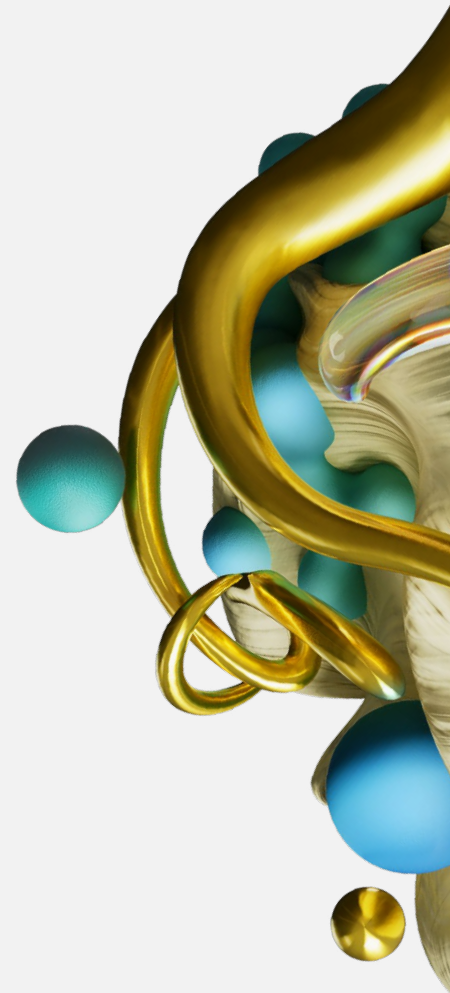
Part 3: The power of letting go: Social-first brands prioritize content co-creation.

Part 4: The future of search—and commerce—is social.

DOWNLOAD THE FULL SERIES:

<https://response.deloittedigital.com/stateofsocial>

The insights in this series are based on Deloitte Digital’s 2023 B2C survey of marketers and consumers (please see Methodology p. 6), in addition to other research and our client experience.



Listen with intent.

Effectively fitting into social communities depends, first and foremost, on understanding the culture and norms of each platform—and how your desired audiences are using those platforms. Even the same person will turn to different platforms for different reasons and with different expectations. Brands therefore need to show up and engage in context-appropriate ways. Yet only 1 in 3 surveyed respondents said their brand mostly or always creates platform-specific content.

AI-powered social listening tools serve a vital purpose by helping to identify not only where desired audiences are, but also to capture nuanced trends, themes and behaviors at the platform, community and subcommunity levels. Social listening is also vital in helping to identify customer care needs as they

arise, product and service improvement opportunities as they emerge, and misinformation as it begins to spread.

Social-first brands are listening—and acting on what they hear. They're 4.3x as likely as low-maturity brands in our survey to say they have all the data they need to make informed decisions about their social media activities. As a result, they are able to not only find their desired audiences, but also to test and refine the most appropriate quantity, tone and form of brand-generated content and other engagement activities.

We are no longer in a world where you can represent your brand in exactly the same way everywhere. What's more important now is finding where you can engage within communities—and subsequently learn how to drive impact for your brand.

THE NO. 1 CHALLENGE BRANDS FACE IN ACHIEVING THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS: UNDERSTANDING TARGET AUDIENCES.

Make meaningful connections.

In brand relationships as in personal relationships, authenticity can only be achieved when you connect who you are, what you say and how you act. Social-first brands recognize this. Compared to low-maturity brands, they're 2.5x as likely to say "increasing customer trust" is extremely important to their social strategies, 2.5x as likely to say "humanizing our brand" is extremely important, and 2x as likely to say "personalizing experiences" is a moderate or very high priority.

In social media communities, it's about understanding that your brand isn't at the center of the community but rather a member among others; and focusing your actions on providing *value to the community*. Act in ways that provide that value, and brand advocacy and loyalty will be the return.

Here too, good listening is key, helping you to understand the tone and focus

within specific social communities—and to act in context-appropriate ways. An earnest, heartwarming video about your brand's commitment to social causes may be appropriate in one social media community—but on a platform built around short-form entertainment content for young gamers, that same video might become a meme for all the wrong reasons. Authenticity isn't just knowing yourself, it's also knowing your audience and your relationship with that audience.

But you also need to get your actions noticed. Social-first brands are much more likely to manage paid and organic budgets together. The reason? When authentic actions shine through and gain traction, paid tactics can help amplify that impact—helping you gain even greater brand permission in the communities you engage.

Be engaged.

As discussed above, a “push”-oriented strategy on social—sending out messages and hoping they produce results—is ill-fitted to how social algorithms work (and can work for your brand) today. Instead, brands should establish processes and programs aimed at serving the needs of social communities—and of individual customers. After all, if customers find you on social media and buy from you on social media, they will naturally expect to *get service from you* on social media.

The challenge is that customers don't always seek service in the same ways on social. Some post negative barbs on their own feeds. Others comment on ads for products that they've previously purchased from your brand. Still others reach out via chat. That means you need the ability to see and rapidly react to customer feedback—no matter where it shows up. Prior Deloitte Digital research showed

that most customers expect a brand to respond within 24 hours after lodging a direct complaint—and 54% expect a response within three days after posting a negative comment about a brand on social media.¹ But our new research indicates that enabling real-time engagement is the No. 1 *organizational* challenge for brands on social media, with most reporting data lags of more than a day. As a result, those organizations are often unable to meet the response expectations of customers.

Organizational silos often stand in the way as well. Both marketing and service need to have insights into customer feedback and messages on social media. And both should have input into how you address what customers say. “Your products don't work”—is that a message for marketing to address, or service? For that matter, is it input for your research and development organization? In many cases the answer will be ... *all the above*.

Social-first brands know this. **They are 4.6x as likely to use social platforms extensively as channels for customer care / service**, compared to low-maturity brands. And they're significantly more likely to cite effective collaboration on social media initiatives between marketing, service, e-commerce, data analytics and other teams.

53% OF BRANDS STRUGGLE TO MANAGE REAL-TIME CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS DUE TO DATA LAGS OF MORE THAN A DAY.



FROM SOCIAL COMMUNITY CHATTER TO BUSINESS INSIGHTS.

A single community conversation can have implications and spur meaningful action across your enterprise. Take, for example, a comment from Trey, a colorblind person who can't read the red-on-yellow type on your product's packaging.

"I can't read the ingredients, the colors all look the same to me."
—Trey, Denver

Customer care: Immediately respond and provide an ingredient list in ADA-compliant colors. Thank Trey for his suggestion and promise new changes based on the input.

R&D: Test all product packaging for accessibility based on color combinations and redesign where needed.

Marketing: Highlight packaging changes in social ads and content targeting colorblind social communities.

Meet them where they are, serve them what they need.

Based on our research and client experience, here are some key moves that can help grow permission, influence and trust through customer service and community engagement on social.

PROCESS

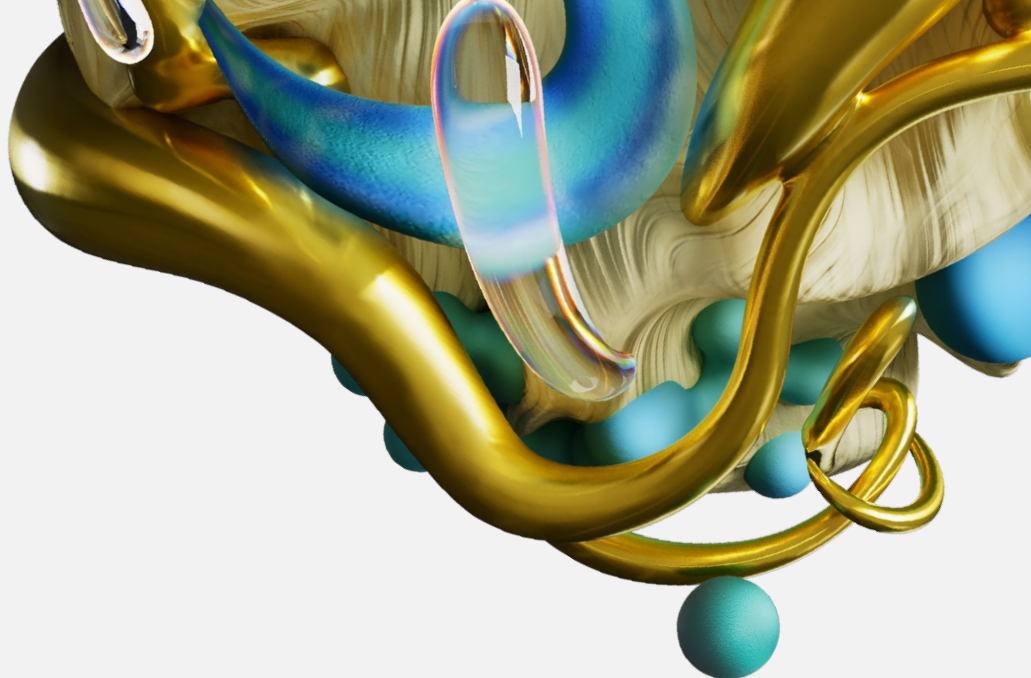
- **Leverage social listening as a key data source:** With the right listening tools in place, social can provide a world of insights that impact every organization within the enterprise. To be an effective listener you should put processes in place to turn what you learn into what you do—rapidly and at scale.
- **Deploy customer care teams to meet consumers where they are:** As social becomes more central to the digital lives of consumers, brands need to be ready to provide support there—no matter where customers show up with questions, complaints, requests or suggestions.

PROGRAM

- **Nimble engage communities in conversations at the intersection of your brand and their culture:** Through social listening and rapid response frameworks representative of marketing and customer care teams, your organization can quickly address customer care issues while also engaging proactively in conversations about and adjacent to your brand. Along the way, work to meet customers where they are instead of relying on a single help handle.

PEOPLE

- **Recruit, hire and deploy hybrid talent and/or hyperintegrated teams across marketing, social community management and customer care to ensure consistency of engagement:** Customers don't think of brands in terms of discreet functions (marketing, sales, service). Your social talent strategy shouldn't be siloed either. Find people and build teams that can meet customers wherever they are and provide whatever they need across the full journey.



METHODOLOGY

Original research results in this report are based on a blind survey conducted in May 2023 by Lawless Research on behalf of Deloitte Digital. Respondents included marketing leaders at 450 US business-to-consumer companies across a range of consumer industries and sectors, plus 1,000 US adult consumers. Building on this research Deloitte Digital developed a proprietary maturity framework to define and score social media effectiveness. In this series we refer to the most effective quartile of respondents as “social-first brands” and the least effective quartile as “low-maturity organizations.”

ENDNOTES

1. Deloitte Digital, *Exploring the Value of Emotion-Driven Engagement*, May 2019, p. 9, <https://www.deloittedigital.com/content/dam/deloittedigital/us/documents/offerings/offerings-20190521-exploring-the-value-of-emotion-drivenengagement-2.pdf>.

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