
What does coronavirus mean for brands on social media?

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Brands Are Under Fire



Lil Floozy Shirt @StephMcNasty · Mar 16

The Coronavirus is really showing what companies care about their employees and what companies care about profit only.



zoi
@zoe_sunahara

companies profiting off of pandemics at the sacrifice of their employees' health and safety is disgusting



Charlie Warzel ✓
@cwarzel

i am a simple man. i don't ask for much. but i beg you, please do not send me email with information about what brands are doing in the age of coronavirus.



Jane Marie ✓ @SeeJaneMarie · Mar 13

This thread will link to companies **profiteering** during the COVID-19 pandemic. Boycotting them all is a good use of your time during isolation. Send tips to DMs! I'll start: @youngliving and @doterra



Asad Hamir @asadhamir · Mar 14

This is so **#irresponsible** @Deliveroo
Why would you want to **#scaremonger** by offering deliveries and leaving at the door?

You have not mentioned ONCE about enforcing drivers or restaurants workers with mild symptoms not to work. **#coronavirus #opportunistic #techgonebad**



Tarah Campbell @MsCampbellT · Mar 16

Replying to @cogeco

Okay, so while Bell, Telus, Rogers, and TekSavvy are all suspending data overages, @cogeco is saying, "here's our gift: use as much data as you want and we'll LET you pay later! (Please do rack up those fees so we can make a huge profit when the time is right!)" **#opportunistic**



Ben Norton ✓ @BenjaminNorton · Mar 13

Insane. The CEO of **Whole Foods**—which is owned by Amazon/Jeff Bezos, the **richest** man on Earth, with well over \$100,000,000,000 in wealth—sent an email to employees suggesting they should give their days off to sick colleagues, amid the coronavirus pandemic

A Make Or Break Moment

The coronavirus pandemic represents uncharted territory for businesses. Companies are being challenged on multiple levels with consumers asking questions not just about their advertising, but also about their core values, how they treat their employees and factory workers, and how they're contributing to the cause.

Modern consumers are savvy. They demand transparency and see through posturing. As social specialists, we sit close to culture and are exposed to feedback and critique. Social media provides consumers with a direct line to brands, and consumers are using that to question and challenge us.

However, while businesses are under scrutiny and even at risk of bankruptcy, the coronavirus pandemic also offers an opportunity for brands to rise to the occasion and make a memorable impact.

Should We Go Dark?

Under immense pressure to deliver, some brands are going dark on social. Purell, Clorox and Lysol paused all social ads starting on March 11th. The Drum published a piece called [*Why Most Brands Are Keeping Their Hands Clean.*](#)

However, unless the nature of your product inherently puts your brand at risk of coming across as insensitive, opportunistic or profiteering (e.g. Purell), ***we do not recommend going dark.***

Instead, take this moment to re-evaluate your approach to social media marketing. Steer away from hard-sell content that directly promotes product, and shift focus to how your brand can provide value for consumers.

How Should We Act?

People's health, livelihoods and wellness are being impacted by coronavirus. Think about the state of mind and changing behaviors of your audience right now, and make sure that your brand is following these five principles:

1. Listen First.

Listen to what consumers are saying then respond.

2. Be Sensitive.

Re-evaluate content for tone and message.

3. Be Transparent.

Communicate openly and take feedback.

4. Adapt Your Strategy.

Adapt your strategy based on new behaviors.

5. Rise To The Occasion.

Consider ways your brand can help.

Listen First.

Listen First, Then Respond.

The coronavirus pandemic is causing consumers to experience mixed emotions, leaving them unsure of how to think or feel. Every reaction to the pandemic is marked by an equal and opposite reaction. With such a sensitive and anxiety-provoking subject, it's more imperative than ever that brands **listen first, then respond**. Here are three trends we're seeing so far on social.

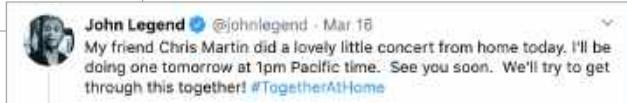
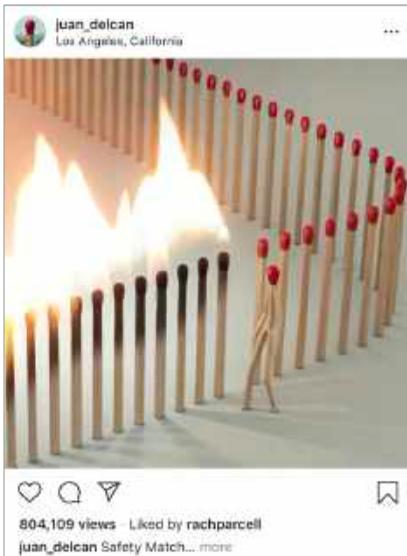


Panic: Stocking Up and Striking Out

General panic has led consumers to stockpile supplies and engage in “panic buying.” #Coronavirus has become a trending hashtag on TikTok filled with videos like [this one](#) that illustrate users showing off their stockpiles as they would a clothing haul on YouTube. In reaction, others have taken to social to beg people to only buy what they need, citing that panic buying puts those without the same resources at a severe disadvantage.

Solidarity: #TogetherAtHome

Despite physical social distancing, people are still seeking social community. As more people begin to feel the stress of staying home, virtual communities are popping up on social. The WHO and Global Citizen developed the “Together, At Home sessions” and Chris Martin, lead singer of Coldplay, performed a live concert streamed for his Instagram followers. Additionally, fitness trainers around the world are providing livestream fitness classes.



Levity: A Need To Laugh

With non-stop media coverage about coronavirus, social users have tried to find a way to add some humor back into their lives. Coronavirus memes abound, ranging from jokes about Purell to political commentary. Social users have mixed emotions when making light of such a serious issue, but many explain that humor is their only way to cope with the persistent anxiety. Leave the humor to the people, though; brands have a bigger responsibility to tread lightly.



Developing A Listening Process

If you haven't done so already, put in place a process to listen first, then respond. Educate your team on what to look out for and how to reply. Update your guidelines and FAQ's to ensure that social messaging is consistent with other channels.

Here are three areas to consider:

1. **Listen to the Landscape:** Conduct daily social listening. Pay attention to how your brand is being talked about on social, and stay tuned to the larger social conversation around the coronavirus and how it's impacting people's lives. Set up google alerts, and align on a list of key words and hashtags for social monitoring. Bookmark live dashboards like [THIS](#) one from Sprinklr.
 - a. **Keywords to monitor include:** your brand name and hashtag, coronavirus, #coronavirus, COVID-19, #COVID-19, #covid19, Covid19, Corona Virus, #CoronavirusOutbreak, coronovirus, #coronovirus, #covid2019, #Covid_19, #Coronavid19, #flattenthecurve, #socialdistancing, #coronapocalypse, #QuarantineAndChill, #coronavirususa, #covid-19, #coronapocolypse, #HighRiskCovid19, #coronavirusupdates, #stayhomesavelives, #IStayHome, #Handwashing, #SafeHands, #HandWashChallenge, #WashYourHands

2. **Listen to the Conversation on Your Owned Channels:**

Decide on guidelines and a criteria for hiding and responding to comments related to Coronavirus.

a. **Hiding Comments:** We do not recommend you hide or remove general comments about Coronavirus.

However, content that is untrue, suggests cures, or spreads false information should be hidden.

b. **Responding to Comments:** Anticipate questions or comments your brand might receive and prepare pre-approved responses, for example:

- What steps is your company taking to protect employees/factory workers?
- Questions about employees who may have contracted the virus.
- Questions about product supply and shortage concerns.

3. **Listen to the Conversation on Paid Ads:** Keep an eye out for shifts in consumer behavior on your ads. Be prepared to pause ads, shift budget or revise creative based on consumer response. Also be prepared to adjust any projections based on actual cost pers/rates in media plans.

Be Sensitive.

Use the checklist below to evaluate your brand's live content, upcoming posts, opportunity moments, and organic content. Consider pausing or revising content that may not be well received in the current social climate.

Check List

- Is there a risk our brand may come across as profiteering or opportunistic?
- Will this content contribute to a sense of panic?
- Does this content encourage or depict dangerous social behaviors, like face touching or group gatherings?
- Does this content make assumptions about my audience's current lifestyle, situation, or access to resources?
- Will this content impact the reputation of any partner (e.g. an influencer or another agency)? Should the choice to pause or continue marketing efforts be a joint decision?
- Is the tone of my content appropriate in this context? Does my content make light of a serious subject?
- Does my content provide value for consumers?
- Is my brand in a position to contribute to CSR initiatives in a meaningful way?

Three Brands That Pivoted

Below are three brands that listened to consumer feedback, and pivoted effectively.



KFC Pauses 'Finger Lickin' Ads

KFC has paused its latest "Finger Lickin' Good" campaign in the U.K. amid concerns that ads encouraging customers to lick their hands are ill-timed amid the global spread of the novel coronavirus. OOH placements and a content series on "finger lickin' etiquette" were scheduled to run over the next few months, but will return at a later date. KFC's ad campaign goes back to the 1950s and has been updated regularly over the past several decades.



Nikita @sgtcurrypants · 4h

everyone else : wash your hands We have a pandemic over here !

KFC: It's finger lickin good

Geico Pauses "Perfect High Five"

Geico paused their "Perfect High Five" spot after it received criticism on social for sending the message that "Geico doesn't care" amidst coronavirus fears. This backlash illustrates how sensitive brands need to be during this uncertain time. It is no longer business as usual.



Tom
@tmcork

@Geico needs to pull it's "high five commercial while we have the coronavirus here. It might not seem like much but the commercial sends the message that geico doesn't care.

12:21 PM · Mar 10, 2020



Philips Avent Pauses Soothie snuggle Hygiene Ads

Philips Avent made the decision to pause social ads focusing on the hygiene of baby pacifiers. These ads featured a pediatrician, Dr. Natasha, sharing statistics on the dirtiness of pacifiers and stressing the importance of washing your baby's binky. Philips chose to pause these ads so as not to contribute to a heightened atmosphere of panic.

Adapt Your Strategy.

Unsurprisingly, with increased self-isolation comes increased media consumption. 85% of Chinese consumers reported an increase of at-home screen usage during the crisis, and 84% said they tried at least one new service for the first time – ranging from online doctor consultations (34%) to online education courses (33%) and online banking (13%).

The US appears to be heading in a similar direction. According to a March 2020 GWI survey, 39% of US consumers already say they are reading the news more frequently, 29% say they are checking social media more frequently, and 28% say they're shopping more online in light of the virus.

Adapt your strategy based on shifting consumer behaviors. Revisit your channel mix and ad spend based on evolving consumer behaviors and performance results.



Rise To The Occasion.

A global crisis at the scale of coronavirus can be a make-or-break moment for brands — testing not only their values and commitments, but also their agility, creativity and spirit. Consider whether your brand is in a position to contribute to CSR initiatives in a meaningful way. Is there an opportunity to calm mass panic or provide value to consumers?

Even if your brand is not in a position to donate money, sometimes an **exertion of effort** can mean even more. You may be able to use your expertise, resources, facilities or platform to contribute to solutions or share helpful information.

Canon: Donated X-ray CT diagnostic equipment to Wuhan City: Spread of new coronavirus infection



After Closure, the Met Opera Offers Free Streaming of Past Performances

Smithsonian Magazine
4 hours ago

Coronavirus: Louis Vuitton owner to start making hand sanitizer

© Reuters

© Reuters



CBS News @CBSNews
Distilleries are making hand sanitizer and giving it out for free to combat coronavirus cbsn.ws/2U7qdlid



Planet Fitness to offer free online classes due to coronavirus



Amazon working on delivering coronavirus test kits



Our platform partners are stepping up and taking action. These companies are doing things like banning ads that seek to capitalize off the pandemic, facilitating the spread of reliable information, sharing brand guidelines and making donations.



Facebook is banning ads that reference coronavirus and stockpiling of supplies. See announcement from Mark Zuckerberg [HERE](#) and Social Media Today article [HERE](#). Facebook is also working with the United Nations Foundation and the WHO to start a COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, for which Facebook will match up to \$10 million in donations. Facebook will also match \$10 million in donations for the CDC Foundation, which will launch a fundraiser in the next few weeks focused on combating the outbreak here in the US. More [HERE](#).



Instagram is making coronavirus prevention techniques more accessible, by placing information front and center on your feed. When you search for #coronavirus or #covid19 on Instagram you will see a message asking you to go to the WHO website for up-to-date information. Read more [HERE](#).



Twitter published a piece of thought leadership, stating that the coronavirus is “not a marketing opportunity.” See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Twitter adjusted its inappropriate content policy to include any content related to Coronavirus, with the exception of government and pre-approved fact-checking entities. Tweets specifically naming #coronavirus and #covid19 will not be eligible for paid promotion.

Twitter created a custom handwashing emoji that can be triggered by using the hashtags #handwashing, #SafeHands, #HandWashChallenge, and #WashYourHands. This campaign is backed by the World Health Organization [HERE](#).





YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki said the company is donating ad space to official health agencies to promote useful information. “We’re using our homepage to direct users to the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” Wojcicki said, “and other local authoritative organizations around the world to ensure users can easily find updates.” Google is also working to support increased demand for public livestreaming on YouTube.



Google is more strictly enforcing a policy that was already in place which restricts ads that capitalize off the Coronavirus. See [HERE](#). Google has also rolled out free access to their advanced Hangouts Meet video-conferencing capabilities to all G Suite customers globally through July 1, 2020.

Joint Statement from Facebook, Reddit, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Twitter, and Youtube

We are working closely together on COVID-19 response efforts. We’re helping millions of people stay connected while also jointly combating fraud and misinformation about the virus, elevating authoritative content on our platforms, and sharing critical updates in coordination with government healthcare agencies around the world. We invite other companies to join us as we work to keep our communities healthy and safe.

FACEBOOK Google LinkedIn Microsoft reddit Twitter Youtube

Joint Industry Statement from Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Reddit, Twitter and YouTube

Thank You

Ogilvy | **Social.Lab**

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Resources

Twitter [Brand Communications in Time of Crisis](#)

Adweek [Twitter Gives Brands Advice on How to Communicate](#)

Adweek [How to Survive a Brand Quarantine During Coronavirus](#)

Ogilvy [Asia Making Brands Matter During Turbulent Times](#)

Ad Age [Regularly Updated List Tracking Marketers Response to Coronavirus](#)

Sprinklr [Live Dashboard](#)

Buzzfeed [Pinterest Is Blocking Coronavirus Searches](#)