

Under the
INFLUENCE

2020

TREND

REPORT

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Claire Graves, Executive Director
The Webby Awards

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Introduction

At The Webby Awards, we've been looking at the evolution of the Internet since 1996 and have a front row seat to this technological revolution. This year our Academy evaluated 13,000 pieces of work from over 70 countries submitted into The Webbys each year, and each year we're careful to consider the full impact of this work on our personal and collective experiences.

Over the last few years, things on the Internet have changed. It wasn't that long ago that the biggest fight people had was over who is the Mayor of their local coffee shop. And the angriest things on our phones were birds. Now, hate on the Internet is building, fake news is spreading, celebrities are fighting, brands are sniping at each other, people are trolling. People are building bots to troll. Bots are even trolling bots.

That's why for this year's Annual Webby Trend Report, we're exploring how online platforms and algorithms exploit our desire to engage with controversy, by creating a constant feedback loop of provocative content, we are bearing witness to far more fighting on the Internet, with far greater consequences. Our research dives into this trend, exploring why, how, and where online fighting takes place. With our partners at YouGov, we surveyed over 4,000 consumers across the United States to understand how they're responding to this trend both online and in their offline lives.

I hope you enjoy the 2020 Webby Trend Report:
Under the Influence: How the Internet exploits our thirst for a good fight and leaves us wanting more.
The research presented here is included in this year's [Webby Talk](#). This series of thought leadership talks, with thanks to our sponsors WP Engine and YouGov, brings us to visit 200 companies in 16 cities and shares our perspective and Internet trends that will impact the work they are making. Having now met with hundreds of the smartest people, making the Internet around the

world, one thing continues to ring true; whether you're part of a Fortune 500 brand, a media publisher, an ad agency, a tech startup, an artist, or a video creator: There may be a lot of fighting online today, but anger isn't what we as an Industry want to create and it's not what consumers want to see. On the 50th Anniversary of the Internet, let's pledge together to turn the tide to create the Internet that people want to interact and engage with.



CLAIRE GRAVES,
Executive Director
The Webby Awards

Chapter One

WHY ARE WE ALL SO ANGRY?



Fighting is the New Norm

You know that feeling. A distant relative posts something offensive on social media, you blink, and suddenly you've wasted two hours in an endless back and forth with your cousin for two hours.

Alternatively, you log on and your feed is inundated with arguments spanning various topics. The Webby Awards team felt a significant uptick in this over the last year and we started to notice that brands were jumping into the fray more than ever before.

Fighting online feels like a fundamental part of the zeitgeist in 2019. Major media outlets are covering Internet arguments between celebrities, the highest ranking politicians in the world engage in back and forth battle on social platforms, and tricky math problems that seem impossible to answer can result in tension between even the closest of friends.

Fights on the Internet often seem to start with innocent intent. We have fun claiming to know more than others about even the most trivial topics—those that are hardly divisive. The personal preferences of food, triggers our need to take a stand—from the presence of pineapple on pizza to whether or not a hot dog qualifies as a sandwich—we take food seriously. These entertaining fights draw the attention of brands, likely to jump in when it feels authentic and relevant. Merriam Webster Dictionary uses its own social accounts to join these types of clashes like the classification of hot dogs.



Have a great [#MemorialDayWeekend](#). The hot dog is a sandwich.



To Chew On: 10 Kinds of Sandwiches
Yes, the hot dog is one of them
© merriam-webster.com

Brands don't just take on the role of arbitrator when it feels opportunistic; two competitive brands taking jabs at each other is something consumers have seen for decades. However, today's Internet allows a continuous volley between competitive companies: a snarky remark from the social accounts of brands can be entertaining but adds to the ongoing fighting taking place online.

It is the constant onslaught of fighting in our social feeds and access to platforms that allow us to amplify our ideas that has created a climate where we are individually comfortable to throw our unpopular or controversial ideas whenever we have them. At times smart and thoughtful discourse can take place, but often spins into hateful exchanges between strangers.

Anatomy of a Chicken Fight

In August 2019, Chick-fil-A posted a tweet that read:

"Bun+Chicken+Pickles = all the ♥ for the original." A jab at Popeye's new to market sandwich. Popeyes with guidance from GSD&M, who runs their social media, replied with a "... y'all good?"

**Bun
Chicken
+ Pickles
Love**

And that set off what we call the Chicken Sandwich Wars of 2019 - consumers took the bait and chimed in, employing [#ChickenWars](#) and [#ChickenSandwichWars](#). It was an argument that started focused on flavor but celebrated Popeyes for being a less political choice. A reminder that an argument even about a sandwich can take a deeper cultural turn. Apex Marketing Group, an advertising consultancy in Michigan, approximated that Popeyes received \$23.25 million in earned media, **reported by Reuters**.

How Did We Get Here?

Once you log onto the Internet, encountering an online fight or argument is inevitable. While the exposure to so much fighting online may feel a sign of the times, there are factors present in today's digital climate that elevates our exposure to arguments. While food and brand fights are innocent at their core, other arguments are less so. The open access to participate and jump in and take the fight further is seeping into how we communicate and treat each other online and offline.

Why is this happening?

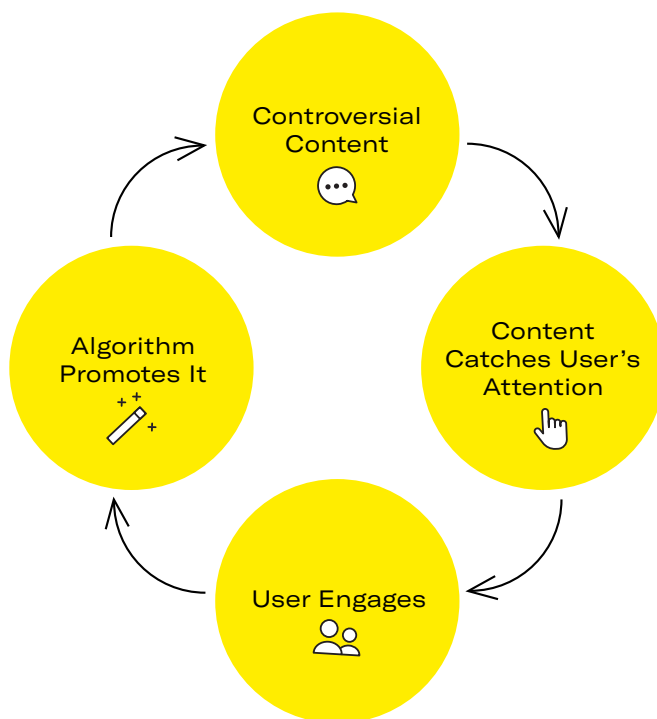
First, it's who we are. We're human, and it's natural to be drawn to fight or watch an argument in real life or otherwise. James Averill, Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst says: "Anger is a residue of our biological past, which under more civilized circumstances we can control only imperfectly."

It is human nature and feels good to protect our ideas and our personal borders, which have expanded dramatically with the advent of social media where users share philosophical, cultural, and religious ideas. This instinct combined with the mass amount of people participating in media means there are more opportunities to fight than ever before. In a 2012 TED Talk, writer and teacher Clay Shirkey said, "The more ideas there are in circulation, the more ideas there are for any individual to disagree with. More media always leads to more arguing. That's what happens when the media's space expands."

So when our attraction to controversy meets our time spent online and the growing population online, there are more ideas circulating, more people clashing with ideas that make them angry, and more people engaging with and watching these clashes.

Let's examine how it works: a feedback loop starts

as individuals or companies create controversial content. It sparks outrage in users. Users engage, even if it's just in the form of following a thread or clicking on a tweet, algorithms don't measure or consider the intent of the engagement and then the algorithm promotes the content into multiple feeds. Companies and individuals then observe this process and see it's working, so they make more controversial content. The cycle begins again.



Chapter Two

RESEARCH

Presented by:



About the Research

As The Webby Awards researched the landscape of fighting on the Internet, we wanted to explore how fighting online was resonating with consumers. With our research partner, YouGov we set out to further understand what's going on here, how the general Internet public is receiving this cultural shift online, and what people want and expect from the industry, The Webbys partnered with YouGov to conduct a survey of 4,000 adults across the U.S.

Our research dives into this trend, why, how, and where it's happening, and the types of work people actually want while living in a culture of conflict.

Highlights

People aren't sure why they've navigated to social media and what they see when they get there doesn't leave them satisfied.

- When asked about the main reasons that they open social media, **47% of respondents said "to pass time or because it's a habit."**
- Meanwhile, **53% of respondents report being "rarely satisfied"** with what they see in their social media feeds.

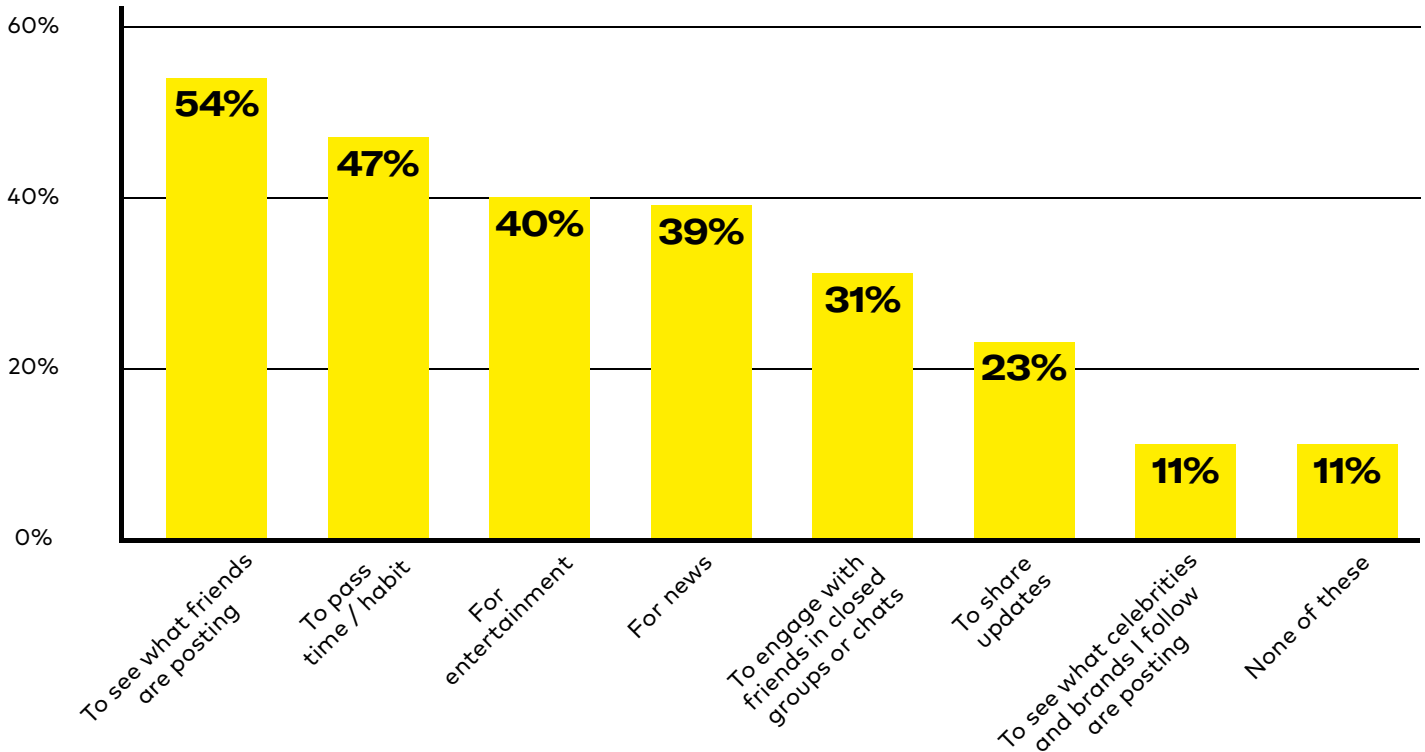
Most people are ready to fight, even if it's not what they've come to do — and it is having an impact on their lives offline:

- While fighting is everywhere you look online, **only 3% of people report actually wanting to see arguments or fights** when logging onto social media.
- However, **54% of respondents say they participate in online arguments.**
- And **31% of people have ended a relationship** due to an exchange online.

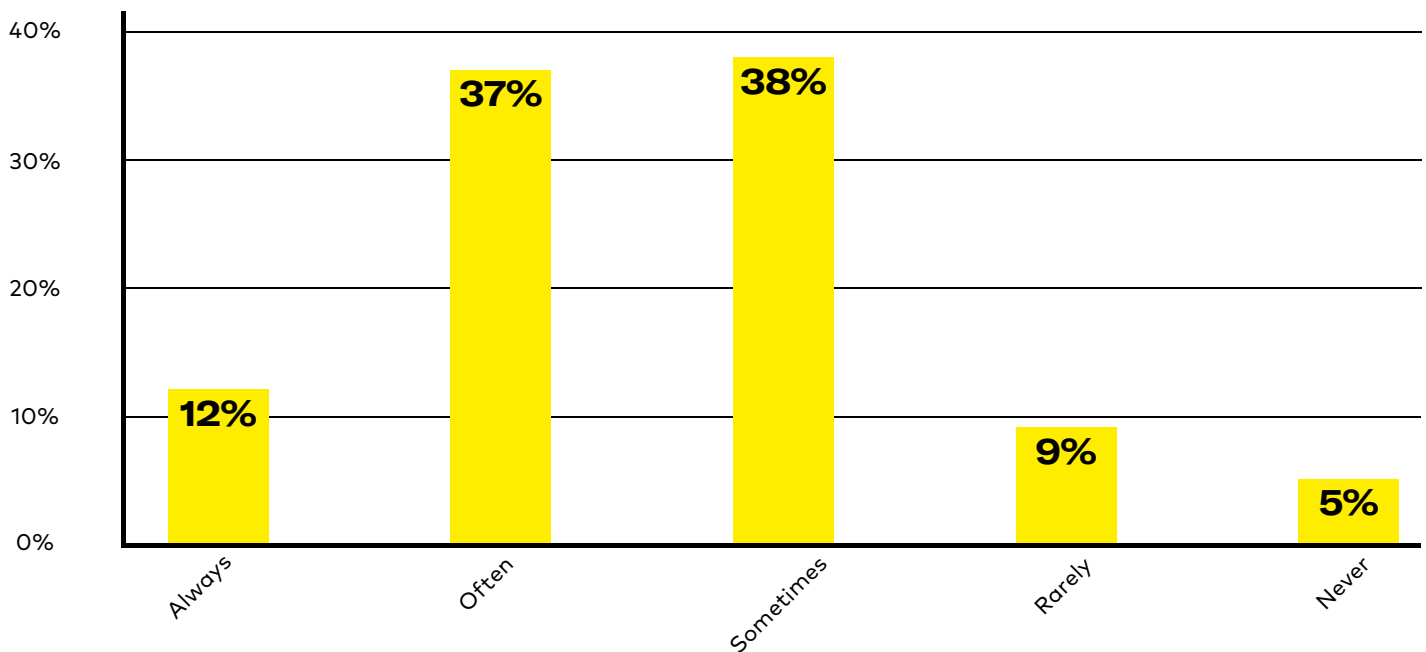
Research

Reasons for opening social media?

(please select all that apply)

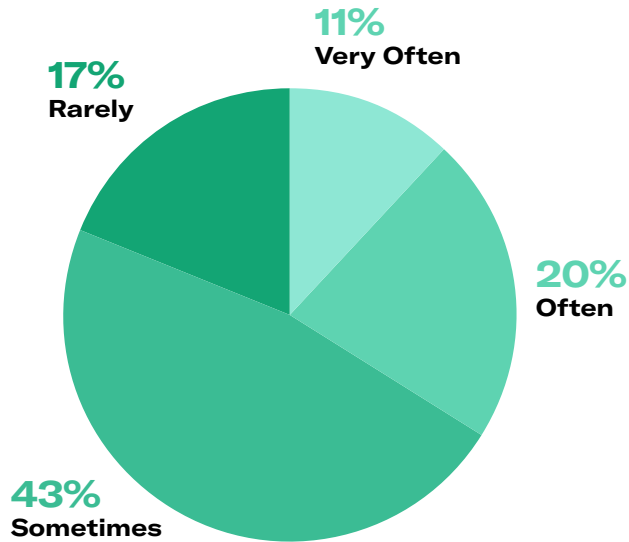


How often are you typically satisfied with your social media feed?

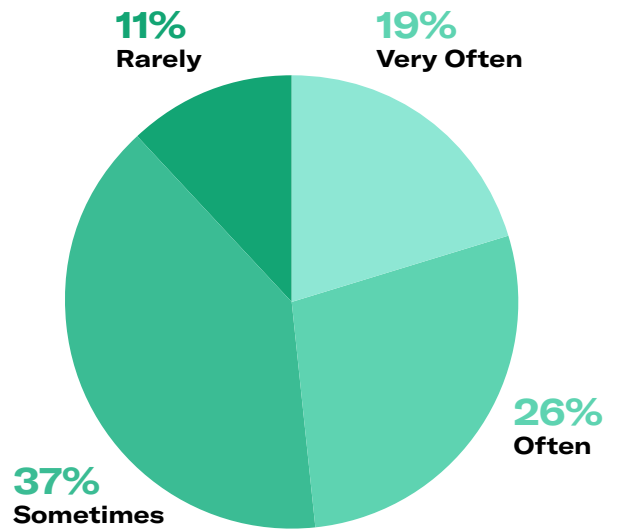


Research

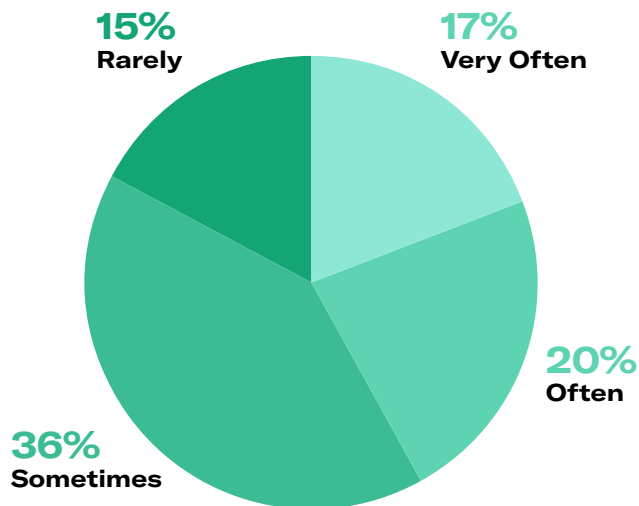
What do consumers see in the feed?



How often do you see content on your feed that is controversial to you?



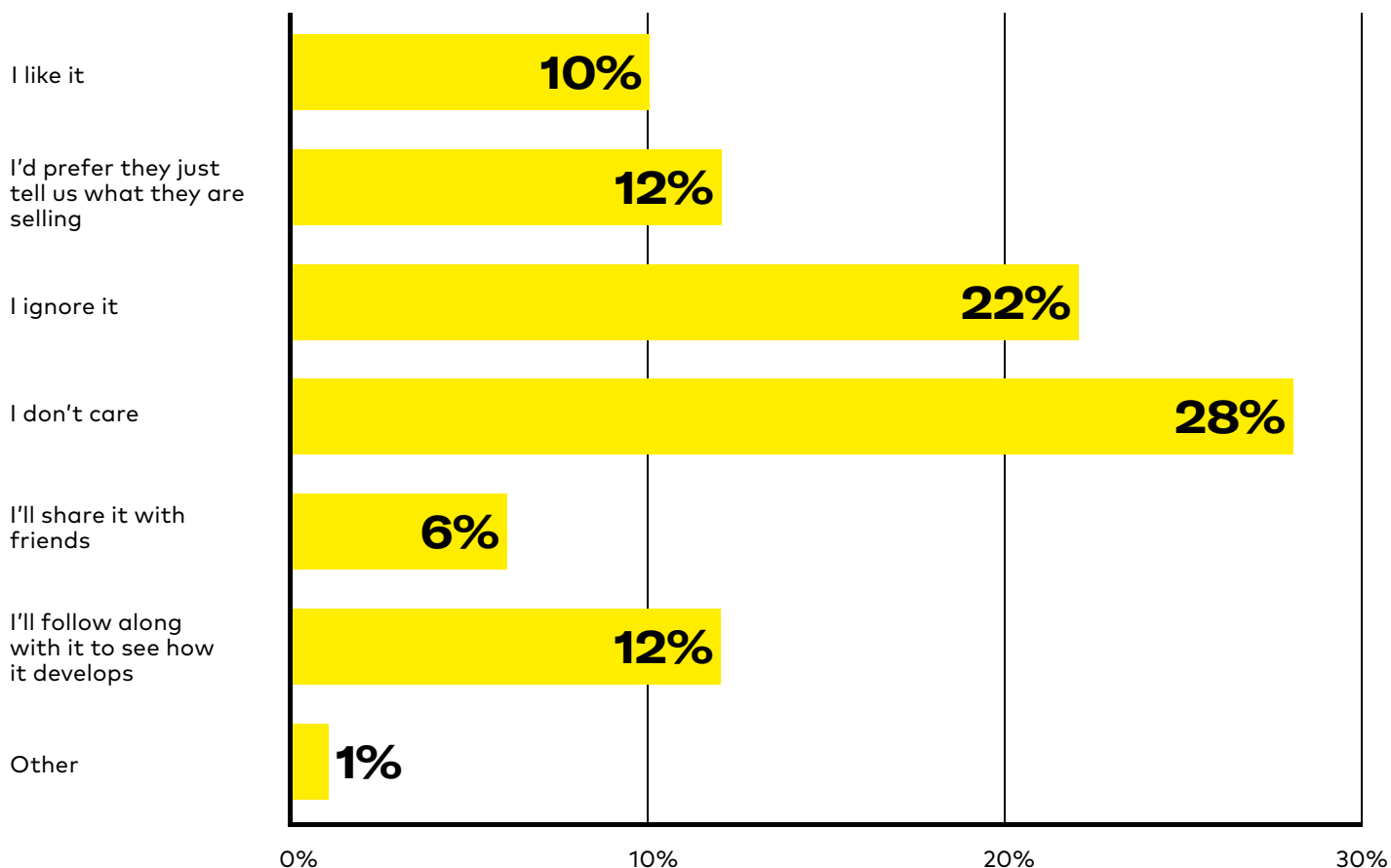
How often do you see content from people or brands that you do not personally follow?



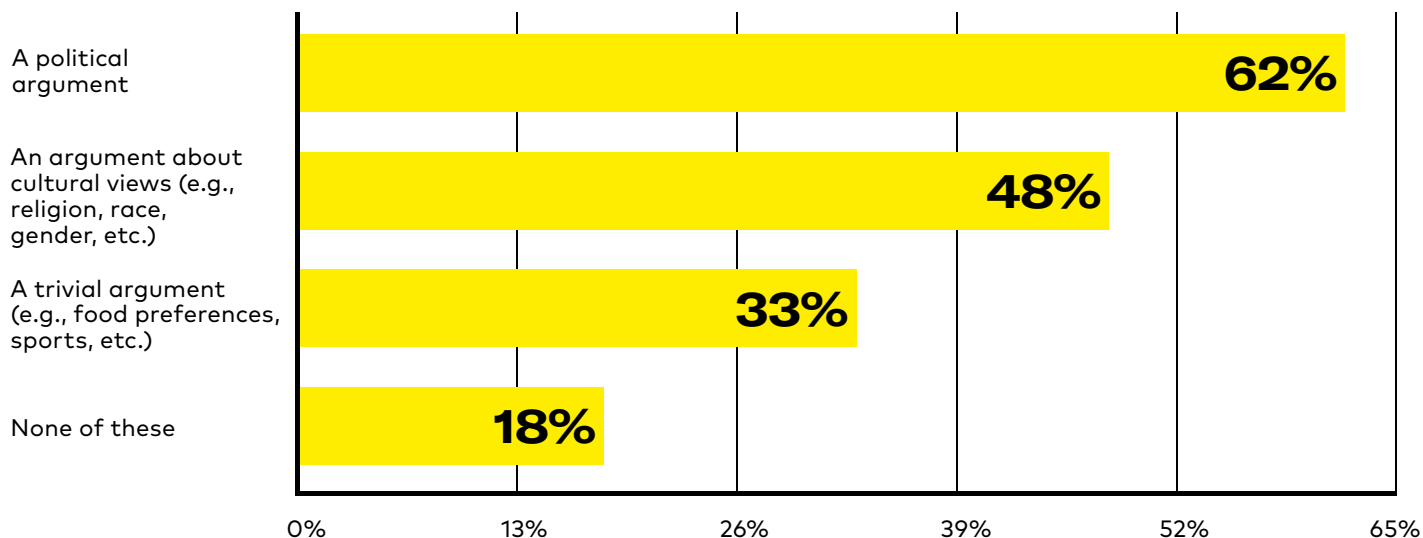
Do you think you miss out on some content because of what social media chooses to show in your feed?

Research

Thinking about when companies use social media to "argue" with each other online. Which, if any, of the following describe how you usually react? Please select all that apply.

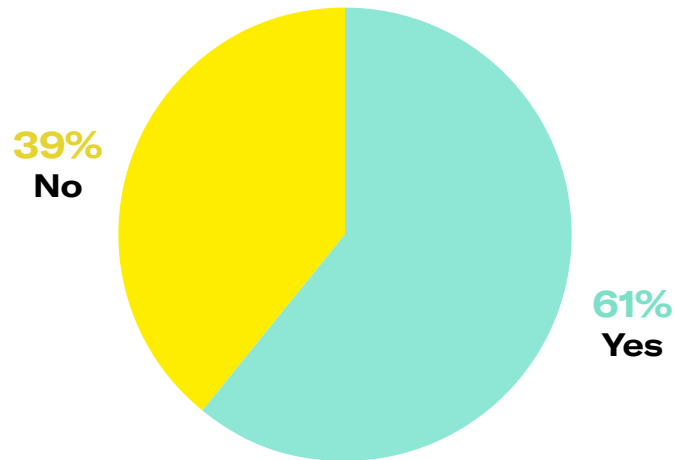


Which types of arguments have you had on social media?

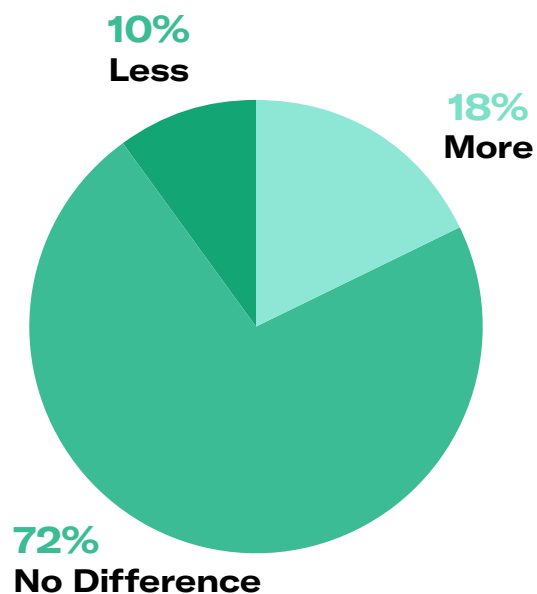


Research

Do you ever watch/observe online arguments without participating?



Do you feel social media makes you more or less combative in your offline life?



Research

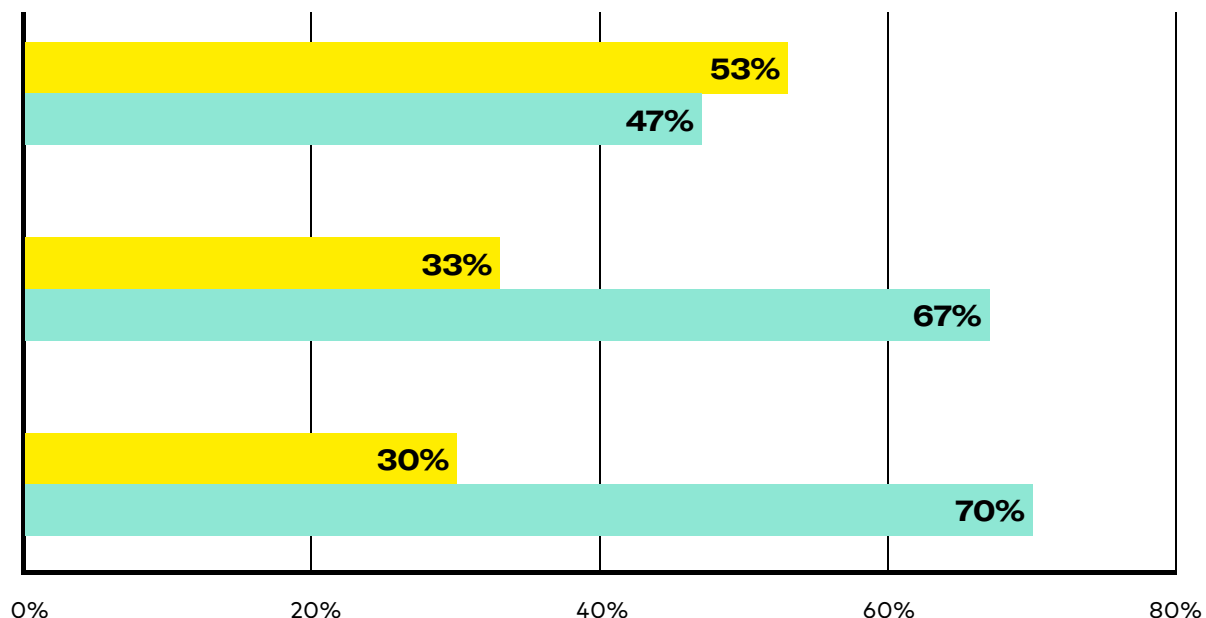
Are we losing friends?

Yes
No

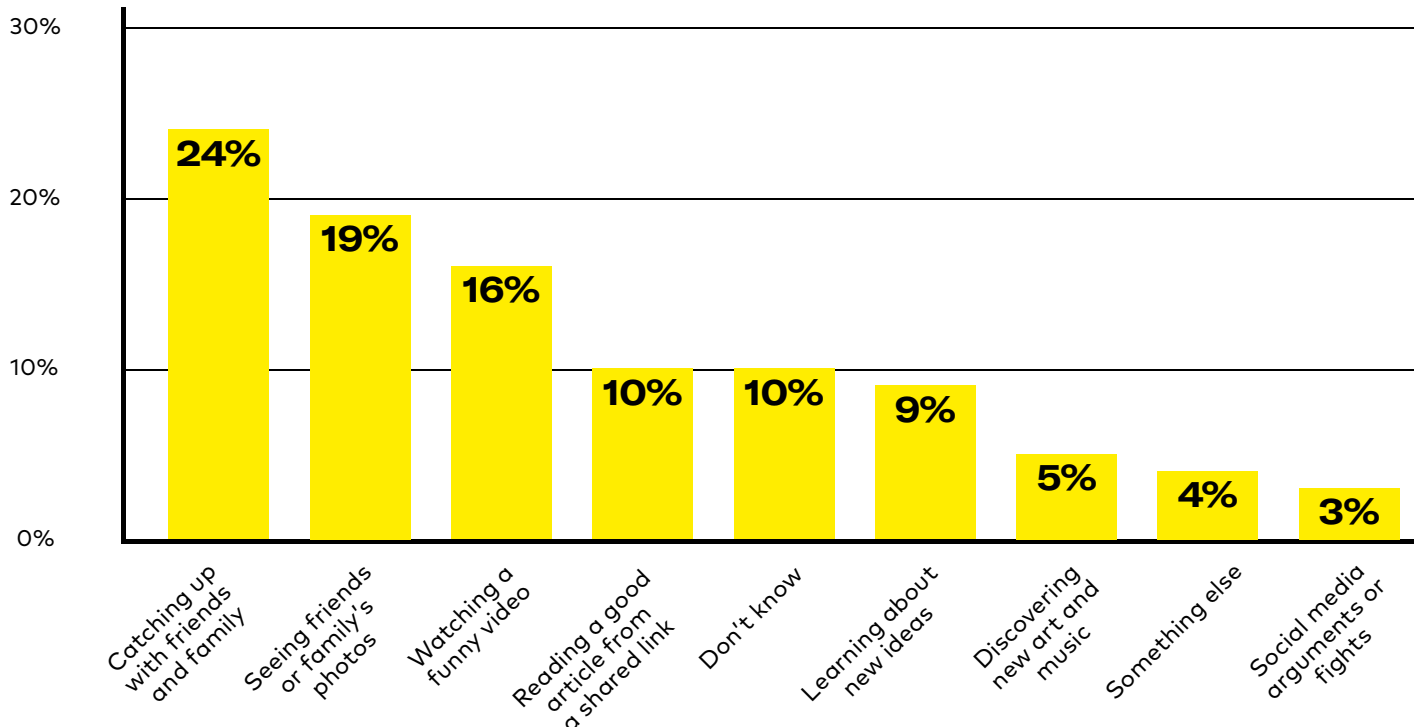
Have you ever muted/blocked someone you know personally, online?

Do you still interact with anyone you've blocked offline?

Have you ever ended a relationship due to an exchange on the Internet?



What do people want to see when they open social media?



Methodology

This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc panel of 1.2 million individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be "US adult population" or a subset such as "US adult females"). Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data. YouGov plc make every effort to provide representative information. All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information.

Chapter Three

**GIVING
CONSUMERS
MORE...**



Giving Consumers More...

It feels like all we see in our feeds is fighting - but our research shows it's not what consumers are turning to their platforms for with stats that only 3% of people want to see fighting in their feeds and only 10% of people enjoy watching brands fight.

Brands have an opportunity to lean into what people expect to experience when turning to social media. If companies give them what they want and do it by being innovative and thoughtful, users will engage and without controversy the brand will win. The real win will be getting people excited about a brand without clogging the feed with more conflict.

The following pages showcase recent work including Webby Winners and Nominees that give consumers what our research shows they are looking for.

More Fun: When consumers logon, they are there for more entertainment, more pure fun - we gathered examples that showcase how companies are rethinking their platforms to deliver that to users, others are utilizing the trendiest platforms to further their mission in innovative ways, while other examples showcase how a company can tell a clever story that can tell a bigger story about your brand.



More Community: People crave connection online just as they do in other areas of their lives; they want to see what those they know are doing or build new connections. This set of examples taps into the core functionality of legacy and emerging social media platforms and takes a smart approach for how brands should behave in those environments.



More Discovery: People want to explore and discover more of the Internet's jewels, the endless newness of being online. Projects that deliver are those that experiment with emerging technology and create never seen before products.



More Experiences: Experiential brand pop-ups are at a fever pitch - we are seeing more offline life and online life come together as our primary place to share is social media. There has been an overwhelming amount of executions that push people to experience something in the real world that they are compelled to share online - and that pays dividends for the brands behind the experience. This collection shows how big brands all over the world have built projects that inspire positive content from their fans and media outlets alike - celebrating.



More Fun

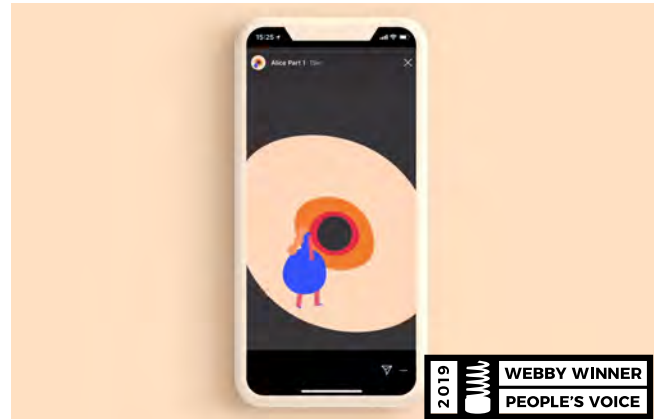
Tinder - Swipe Night



Tinder's Swipe Night is squarely aimed at Gen Z.
Tinder

Tinder debuted Swipe Night, an interactive digital experience that greeted users every Sunday night during October when they open the dating app. Users who opted to participate in Swipe Night joined a party featuring an interactive video that quickly devolved into apocalyptic chaos. Using the app's swipe feature, they were asked to make a number of choices that determine what happens next, and were only given seven seconds to make each decision. Swipe Night led to a 20% to 25% increase in "likes" and a 30% increase in matches.

NY Public Library - Insta Novels



The New York Public Library worked with Mother New York to offer long form classic books in the least expected place: Instagram Stories. They did this by sharing the full work along with original illustrations by artists selected to fit the theme. They furthered the library's mission "to advance knowledge by providing free and open access to materials and information." This resulted in 140K new followers - a 75% increase - and the books had more than 300k views!

Ceros - Breaking Down Seinfeld



In honor of the anniversary of the show's finale, Ceros analyzed scripts from all of the 173 episodes of Seinfeld and created a visually addictive layout of the interesting data points focused on things like character interactions and catch phrases. This data centric endeavor was funny, engaging, and showcased the power of the Ceros platform to potential users.

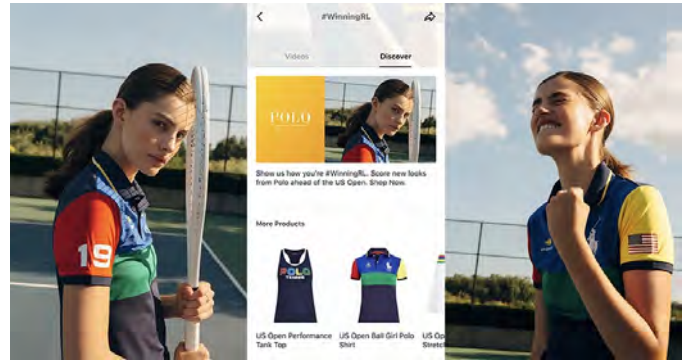
More Community

National Geographic - Women of Impact Facebook Group



To extend the message of the National Geographic Women of Impact edition, National Geo also created a Women of Impact Facebook Group working with Deloitte as the sponsor. The space was created to "celebrate world-shaping powerhouses" and made for anyone "invested in and passionate about women breaking barriers in their fields, changing their communities, and exploring the world." The 66,000 members share their own work, work that inspires them or pose questions to the group.

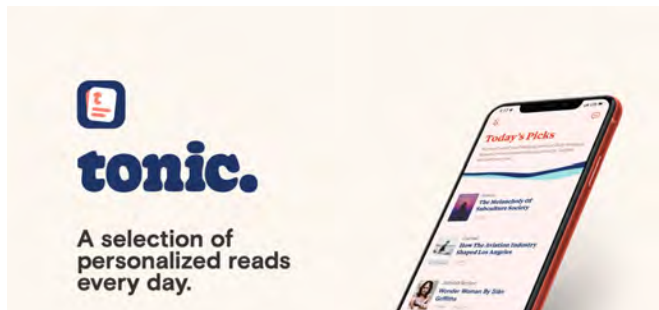
Ralph Lauren - #winningRL TikTok Campaign



Ralph Lauren started a TikTok campaign aimed at winning over the next generation of consumers. They aimed to bring together fans of the US Open via a sponsored hashtag on TikTok, asking users to participate and show off a time they won a real-life challenge and then integrated a brand new shoppable component allowing in app purchases of the Ralph Lauren US Open gear. The campaign's hashtag including their own video and all of those created from the public have over 700 million views. Ralph Lauren zero'd in on TikTok because 54% of TikTok users do not participate on any other platform - the program reached an entirely new audience and held their attention in their most comfortable platform.

More Discovery

Canopy - Tonic



Canopy, a personalization engine, needed to show that personalized technology isn't always a privacy issue and showcase the power of it being used in a smart way. They launched the news reader app, Tonic. Tonic lets you view, change, and even reset your personalization settings whenever you want, and only you—not the company—can see these preferences. Each day they comb the Internet for the best content and deliver recommendations without simply sending you breaking news or hot takes, according to the team at Canopy, "the rest of the Internet has that covered."

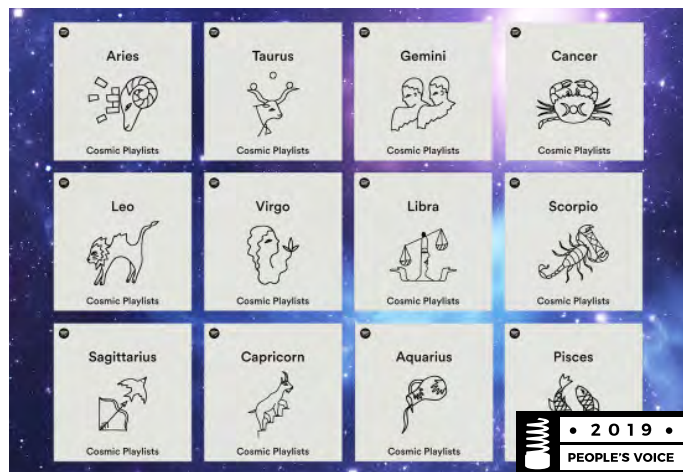
iCandi Apps - Night Sky



Night Sky is a stargazing reference app, where a user can explore a virtual representation of the night sky to identify stars, planets, constellations and satellites above by simply holding an iPhone, iPad or Apple Watch to the Night Sky. The app "sky-rocketed" to the top of the paid reference app charts soon after being established. This incredibly

well designed and intuitive app gives users an entirely new understanding of the "Night Sky" by pulling together data visualization and other information available across the Internet into one interface.

Spotify - Cosmic Playlists



Spotify teamed up with astrologer Chani Nicholas to create Cosmic Playlists - sign-specific playlists on its platform. The twelve playlists include songs and artists that parallel the particular sign's theme of the moment. The personal touch drove each of these playlists to gather 70K-90K followers.

More Experiences

We Are Social - Calling All Will Smiths



For Bright from Netflix, We Are Social teamed up to get the real Will Smith to recruit other "Will Smiths" to help promote the movie in Australia. The actor recorded a video asking others with the same name to stand in for him. They selected applicants and flew them all to a secret location to train them before dispatching them to promote the film. The social campaign made over 13 million impressions in Australia alone.

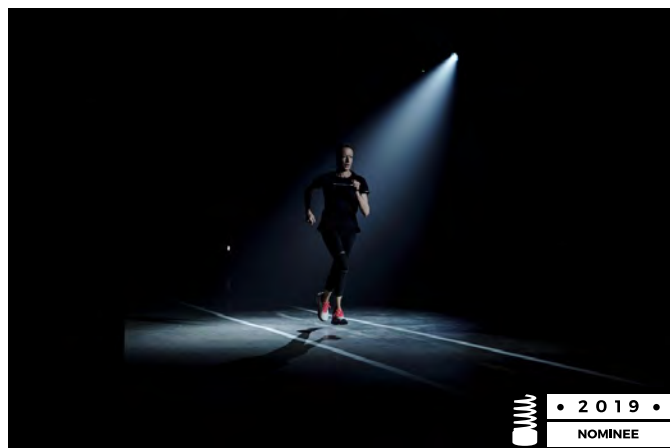
Amazon Prime - The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel Carnegie Deli pop-up



Amazon Prime and The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel transported New Yorkers from 2018 to 1958. Fans in NYC got to experience a piece of 1958 New York, when the show brought the Carnegie Deli back to real life through a pop-up replica restaurant. The menu, pricing and decor was all authentic and looked as it was depicted in The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, and there were even sandwiches named after the main characters. 11K people were served

by the pop up, they donated \$20K to the Lower East Side Girls and they had a reach of 70.03 million on social media.

Edelman UK & Unit9 - ASICS Blackout Track



ASICS, with Edelman UK and Unit 9, created a runner's track to "train the mind." An indoor track was created with no music, pink noise, no tech and no finish line to show how important not only the body, but also the mind is. They had runners including Olympians try out the track and athletes saw a decline in their 5k times by an average of 60 seconds showing how much performance is affected by psychological conditions. The experiment positioned ASICS as a brand that cares about runners complete state and resulted in 176K downloads and 2.2 billion media impressions.

Conclusion

Conflict online, innocent hot takes to deep political arguments are impacting human beings and our society and leaving consumers looking for a deeper experience. Our research shows consumers are looking for core themes in their Internet usage and if brands execute on them, people will pay attention.

When considering how to move forward in a culture of conflict, remember:

- Fights seem pervasive on the Internet, but not at the demand of the consumer. Only 3% report wanting to see conflict during their social media visit, and only 10% enjoy seeing it, so tread carefully and be authentic.
- While the easiest path to reaping audience rewards from bots and algorithms may indicate that you should lean into controversy, that isn't the only way to gain attention. Creators making digital work should listen to what the consumer wants and aim to deliver.
- Research shows that audiences are looking for and will respond to entertainment, community and experiences; all powerful alternatives to arguing and perpetuating fighting online. The Internet may exploit our love of participating in or watching a good fight, but contributing to that exploitation isn't the only way to earn engagement.

About the Webbys

The Webby Awards is the leading international award honoring excellence on the internet.

Established in 1996 during the Web's infancy, The Webbys is presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences (IADAS)—a 3000+ member judging body. The Academy is comprised of Executive Members—leading Web experts, business figures, luminaries, visionaries, and creative celebrities—and Associate Members who are former Webby Winners, Nominees, and other Internet professionals.

Additional Resources

Questions about the research? Email **Angela Carola**, Managing Director, International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences and Industry Relations at acarola@webbyawards.com



24th Annual **WEBBY AWARDS**

Final Entry Deadline: December 20, 2019

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