

(More) digital trends for 2021: Influencer- and user- generated content

ARTICLE | **JANUARY 12, 2021**

Jeremy Goldman

In December, we released our report “10 Key Digital Trends for 2021.” It contained some of the top trends to watch in the year ahead, from the rise of Disney as a streaming powerhouse, to the enactment of a federal privacy law, to the ascent of first-party data—and more importantly, what these developments mean for marketers. But what of the cutting-room floor?

The eMarketer team deliberated extensively to get to that final 10; in fact, we began with a list of 43 potential trends to spotlight. Which of those narrowly missed the cut? Here’s our first in a series of *additional* transformative developments that ought to be on your radar in 2021.

Influencer- and user-generated content

In the year ahead, there will be a big pivot to more user-generated content in marketing. That’s especially true given how hard it’s been for brands to produce assets that are slick and aspirational during the pandemic. Brands have discovered in the past year that not-so-slick works, so they’ll do a lot more of it in 2021. They are taking content created for one instance and repurposing it, perhaps because many companies aren’t doing production right now. There’s

not a lot of original content being produced by advertising agencies because of the pandemic.

This trend also reflects a general climate of polarization in the US: Consumers are less trusting of the mainstream media and slick corporate marketing, turning instead to user-generated content and influencers to find their own truth. Another adjacent development contributing to influencer- and user-generated content's growth is this: AI-based services are now helping brands create ads from these assets in a frictionless manner and target them to the right audiences as well. Inclusivity in marketing is itself a trend to watch, and consumers want to spend their dollars on brands that portray people like them in their advertising. A greater asset library would help marketers meet this need for inclusion.

Admittedly, this shift was already underway before 2020, but the pandemic put it into high gear. Influencer- and user-generated content is cheap, easy, and quick to create—and consumers (so far) have been receptive to it. Why would brands spend more time and money on large-scale productions when this option exists, particularly in a world where content must be created and shifted quickly?

Unable to release as much high-quality ad creative, brands are increasingly aware that they can deploy this type of creative more effectively and at less expense. This shift will continue because consumers have been responding to such repurposing of influencer- and user-generated content.

With user-generated and influencer-driven content on the rise, and tied ever closer to performance marketing, there will be pressure on marketers to get better at measuring influencer impact. This may convince more brands to embrace micro-influencers, who often generate a better ROI than do macro-influencers, whose audiences are more diffused.

To see which trends made the final cut, Insider Intelligence subscribers can read our report:

Report by Jeremy Goldman Dec 09, 2020

10 Key Digital Trends for 2021

