How brands can dodge fake news and become trusted sources

An Ipsos Point of View

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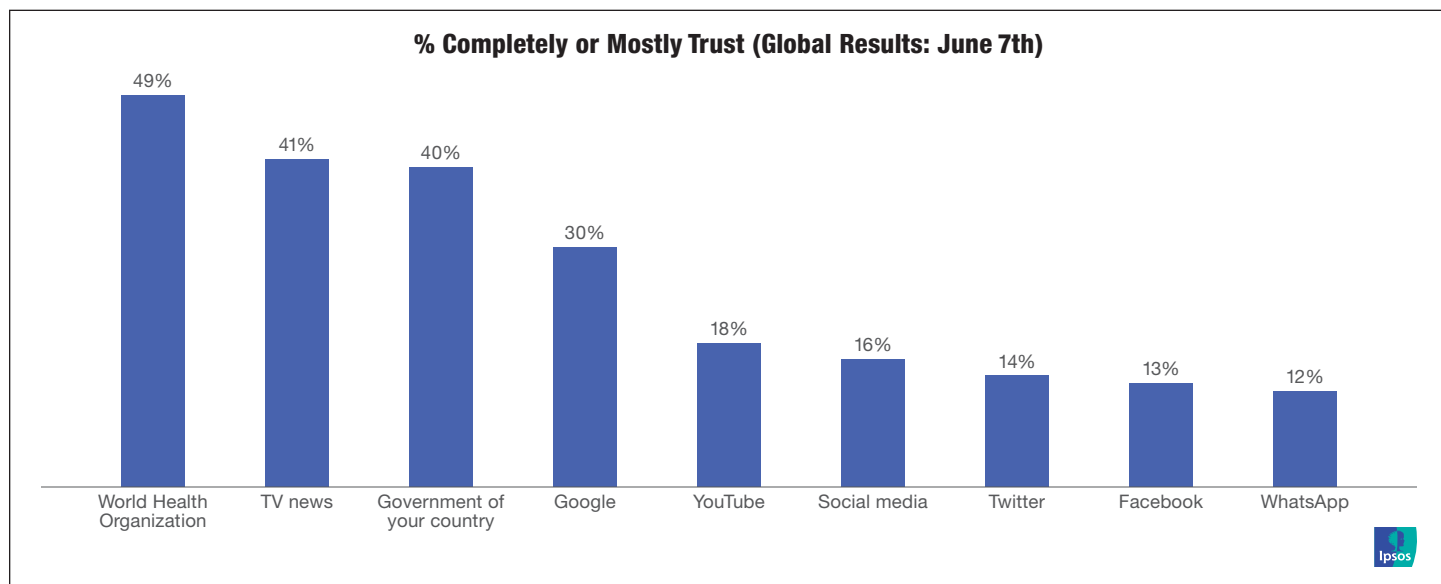
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Consumers no longer expect brands to merely market their products, but also to provide reliable and accurate information, take a stance on social issues, and make a positive contribution to society and the community. At the same time, people are increasingly concerned about the spread of fake news, which impacts their perception of media channels, social media platforms and brands. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that fake news spreads about six times faster and is 70% more likely to be retweeted than the truth, according to a study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology published in *Science*.

How can brands maintain and even earn more trust with their customers in this complicated landscape? Especially as consumers demand brands take more of a role not just in a "purpose-driven" way but an evolved way that includes supporting roles for the consumers themselves and a host of social issues.
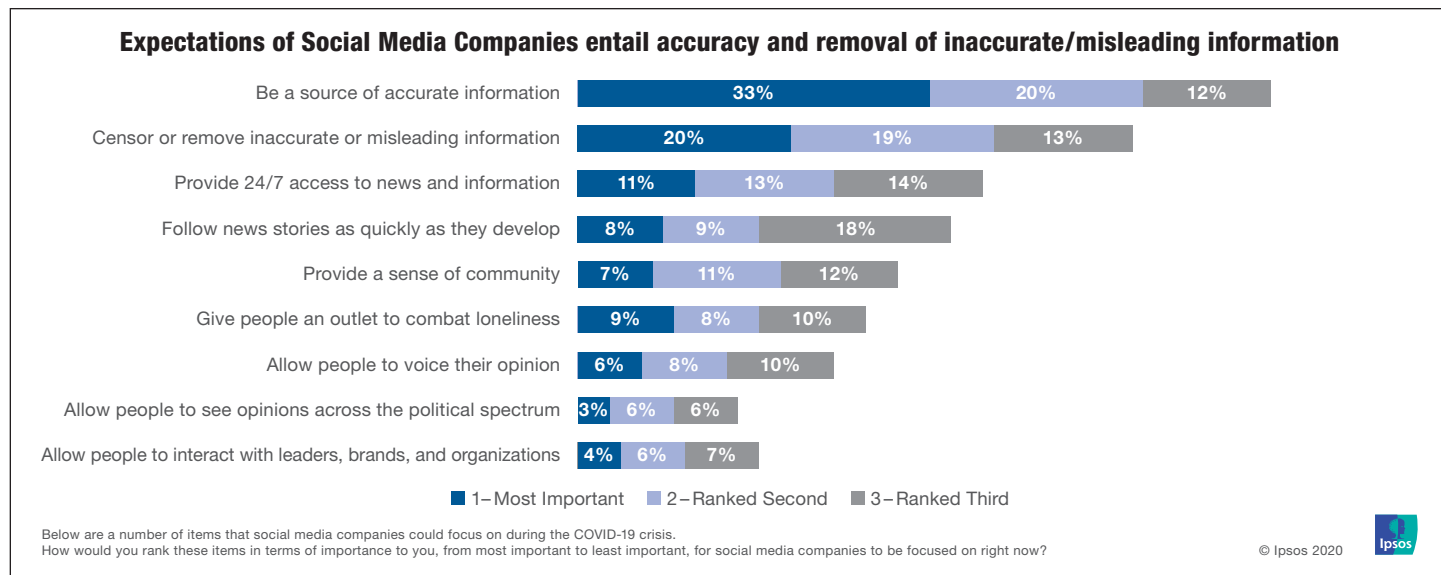
In this POV we will share some of the latest Ipsos research and suggestions for how brands can build even more value with their customers.

Who Do We Trust?

The 2020 U.S. election has amplified the public's concerns around information as people try to discern if the content they consume is not only truthful but also neutral. A timely example is a global pandemic that has prompted people to seek more information, more often. So, what are their trusted sources? An Ipsos Essentials survey asked participants from 16 countries to what degree they trust the following entities to deliver information on the Coronavirus.

% Completely or Mostly Trust (Global Results: June 7th)

World Health Organization	49%
TV news	41%
Government of your country	40%
Google	30%
YouTube	18%
Social media	16%
Twitter	14%
Facebook	13%
WhatsApp	12%

Interestingly, traditional TV news outlets are on par with a respondent's national government, followed by Google and lastly, social media platforms. Another Ipsos survey on divisive content fielded in July shows that the public expect social media outlets to validate that the information made available on their platforms is truthful and accurate. For a long time, both consumers and marketers have looked to social media platforms to take the responsibility for brand safety. Moving forward, brands must take responsibility for the content they provide and associate with.

Expectations of Social Media Companies entail accuracy and removal of inaccurate/misleading information

	1–Most Important	2–Ranked Second	3–Ranked Third
Be a source of accurate information	33%	20%	12%
Censor or remove inaccurate or misleading information	20%	19%	13%
Provide 24/7 access to news and information	11%	13%	14%
Follow news stories as quickly as they develop	8%	9%	18%
Provide a sense of community	7%	11%	12%
Give people an outlet to combat loneliness	9%	8%	10%
Allow people to voice their opinion	6%	8%	10%
Allow people to see opinions across the political spectrum	3%	6%	6%
Allow people to interact with leaders, brands, and organizations	4%	6%	7%

Below are a number of items that social media companies could focus on during the COVID-19 crisis.
How would you rank these items in terms of importance to you, from most important to least important, for social media companies to be focused on right now?

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Three Things for Brands to Do

1. Brands should not associate with fake news

In an effort to reach larger audiences, brands often associate themselves with the most popular stories, whether these are true or fake. Publishers that propagate fake news often take advantage of advertisers by placing mainstream ads next to misleading articles, because known brands make the content look more credible. Brands should therefore be more discriminating in their approach to brand safety. That is, brands can't merely ban specific keywords but must carefully select the publishers they advertise with instead.

2. Brands must provide content to educate and inform the public

With the exception of a few niche categories such as luxury, brands can no longer expect consumers to just fantasize about owning their products. They must also inform and educate the public. For example, Whole Foods puts posters around its stores that explain how to choose sustainable seafood. Its sustainability ranking has been created through a science-based, peer-reviewed approach, that was done in partnership with the Blue Ocean Institute and Monterey Bay Aquarium.

In the tech sector, Google offers free training, tools, and resources to help people grow their digital skills, careers, and businesses. In particular, Grow with Google can help business owners rebound from the pandemic by teaching them how to manage their business remotely, create a website, and connect directly with their customers.

3. Brands can inform and help tackle social issues

When appropriate, brands can speak out about social issues, although they should focus on contributing to change rather than making a vague, washed out statement. For example, Ben & Jerry's has a long history of championing social causes such as marriage equality and climate activism. Most recently, the ice cream brand teamed up with Vox Media and the Who We Are project to create a podcast that will look at segregation and the violence Black people face in America.

In a similar vein, Uber has recently launched a racial injustice ad campaign, the tagline of which is "if you tolerate racism, delete Uber." The related billboards state that "Black people have the right to move without fear."

The lines between news outlets, social media platforms, and brands are blurring. This makes the public increasingly wary of accessing reliable and accurate information, no matter the source. To earn the respect and trust of consumers, brands will increasingly have to inform, educate, and act on economic and social issues. Aside from marketers and advertising agencies, brands should retain journalists, scientists, and educators to help them shape their message.

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