

Use Case Story:

Trend Detection Study Finds Why Meat Replacements Are Succeeding

01

Background

Some trends can work in your company's favor, while others may require you to adapt strategically. More so than ever, today's brands need to keep up with rapidly changing consumer preferences - some of which can threaten to impact an entire industry. Synthesio, an Ipsos company, equips companies with the tools needed to understand shifting consumer attitudes: trend detection. One of Synthesio's clients, a global meat processing company, needed to understand the causes and effects of one particular trend: meat alternatives.

This client noticed a slight decrease in sales performance year over year. The team had kept a close eye on vegetarianism and veganism over time, but suspected that non-vegetarians and non-vegans were shifting toward meat alternatives nonetheless. Its team wanted to gain a deeper understanding of why consumers appeared to prefer meat replacements, and what steps it could take to update its brand positioning. Also, the meat processing company had early-stage plans to produce alternative meat products of its own but wanted to understand how existing companies marketed themselves and how it could differentiate its new products.

02

The Challenge

Trends are notoriously tricky to track, pinpoint, and differentiate from fads. While fads are short-lived movements that last no more than a few weeks, if not days, trends are shifts that develop and expand over months and, often, years. Trends change the attitudes and behaviors of consumers, affect the media they consume and the products they buy, and the brands they remain loyal to. Yet even within the realm of social listening platforms, trend detection is difficult to accomplish.

Fortunately, Synthesio's trend detection platform, Signals, is built on the foundation of statistics, data science, and market research. It analyzes billions of online conversations to surface only relevant and statistically significant changes. This process informs brands of emerging trends, dying fads, how global (or local) audiences speak about it, and how brands can better appeal to a population. We used Synthesio's trend detection capabilities to understand the rise of meat replacements in the global diet.

Furthermore, trend detection is further complicated by its tendency to emerge in digital spaces, such as Twitter, Instagram Stories, forums, Reddit, popular blogs, press coverage, and more. This poses an overwhelming challenge to brands and tech companies alike, as the amount of organic online content increases minute by minute. **As the social media intelligence platform that crawls the most data sources worldwide, Synthesio rises to meet this challenge.**



The Synthesio Approach

Step 1: Define Topics of Interest and Objectives

The first step of this trend detection study on meat replacements was to identify the topics that our client wanted to understand most. Above all, our client was interested in three meat alternative brands that had recently made a big splash: Impossible Foods, Beyond Meat, and Boca. The team needed to know:



- Which brand is its top competitor
- What captures audience attention
- How people engage with content

Furthermore, the brand was also interested in:



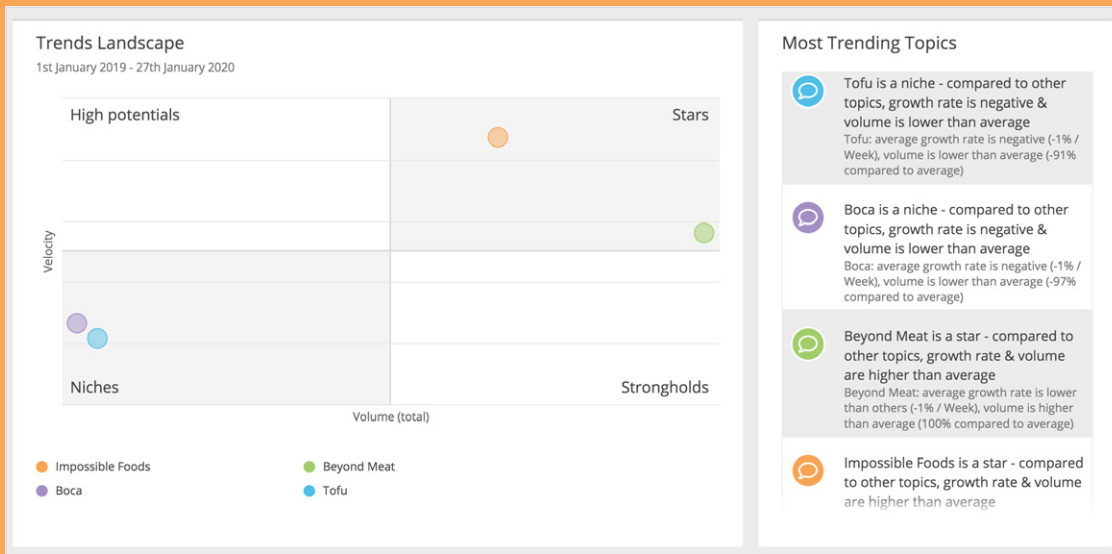
- How tofu, a longtime meat replacement, compared with these emerging brands

Step 2: Use Synthesio's Trends Landscape To Evaluate Individual Topic Performance

Signals, Synthesio's trend detection platform, works by analyzing all online mentions of queried topics. One of its features, **the trends landscape matrix, compares the volume of topic mentions with its velocity (or growth) to benchmark performance.** For example, low volume and a high growth rate indicate that a topic is popular within a small, niche community. On the other hand, high volume and low growth rates suggest a steady performer but could use a push to increase growth and popularity.

The following matrix breaks down the meat alternative industry. Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat have enormous influence and market share. Most notably, Beyond Meat generates the most online conversations, with an above-average growth rate. And, although there is less online content related to Impossible Foods, the company experiences the fastest growth rate.





On the other hand, Boca is popular with niche audiences but experiences a faster growth rate in online content compared to tofu. Compared to these three major meat replacement players, **tofu demonstrates the lowest growth rate.**

A misinformed belief about who your real competitors are can result in the misused budget, ineffective campaigns, and even damaged brand image. Understanding the overall landscape allowed our client to hone their effort and attention toward significant challengers like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods.

Step 3: Understand the Context Behind Unexpected Shifts

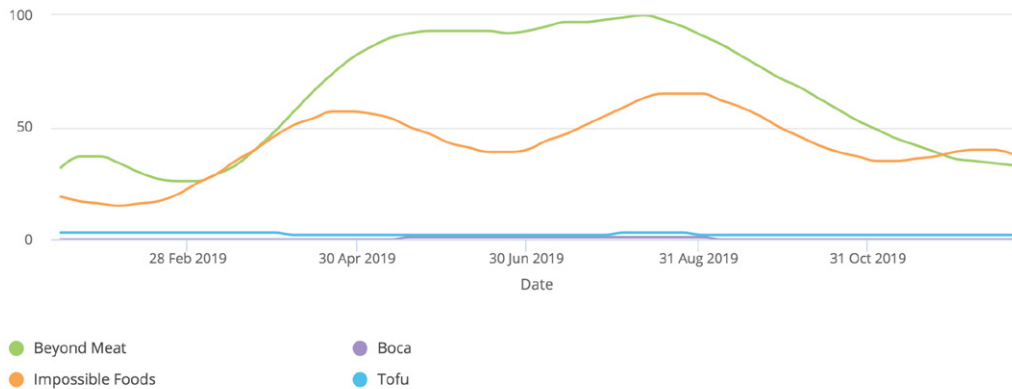
Our client wanted to know the context behind conversations about Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods. It then turned to topic shifts over time. Accurately identifying topic shifts alerts brands of the emergence of a new competitor, changes in a brand's public perception, and changes in consumer needs or preferences.

When Signals analyzed enduring shifts in conversation volume over the past year, it found that **Beyond Meat took the lead in organic online content for most of the year. However, Impossible Foods also had a meteoric rise of its own.**



How Is Online Interest Changing Over Time?

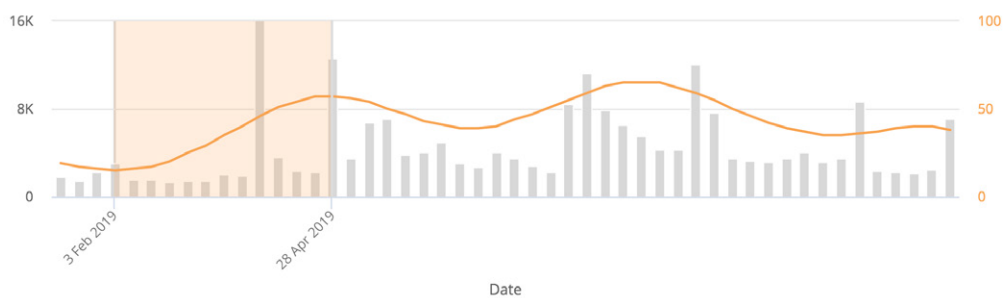
1st January 2019 - 27th January 2020



Signals shorten users' time-to-insights by automatically surfacing meaningful shifts. For example, Signals uncovered a 275% increase in mentions of Impossible Foods between early February and the end of April.

Impossible Foods: increase of mentions between early February & end of April

Mentions increased by 275% between early February & end of April



To help businesses get the big picture at a glance, clients can click into every data point within Signals to identify top words and hashtags, platforms, countries, user sentiment, and more.

It was Signals' contextual report that gave our client insight into the cause behind this dramatic increase. The answer was quickly found by looking at the most-used words and hashtags.



Top-words during shift

2019/02/04 - 2019/05/06

WORDS	FREQUENCY
king	1.9K
whopper	1.4K
plant-based	1.1K
new	1K
vegan	892
beef	765
products	672

Top-hashtags during shift

2019/02/04 - 2019/05/06

HASHTAGS	FREQUENCY
#vegan	100
#impossibleburger	86
#plantbased	70
#burger	44
#vegetarian	39
#burgerking	37
#food	30

The popularity of the terms *king*, *whopper*, *#impossibleburger*, and *#burgerking* allowed our client to connect this shift with the partnership between Impossible Foods and Burger King.

To test this theory, our client looked at top online content during this unexpected shift, which provided further evidence.



CNET
2,510,000 subscribers

04/01/2019 4:00 AM



Trying Burger King's Impossible Whopper

Burger King has become the largest restaurant chain to embrace plant-based meat in a headline way. See what Impossible Foods had to do to win over the king. Subscribe to CNET:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CNETTV> CNET playlists:

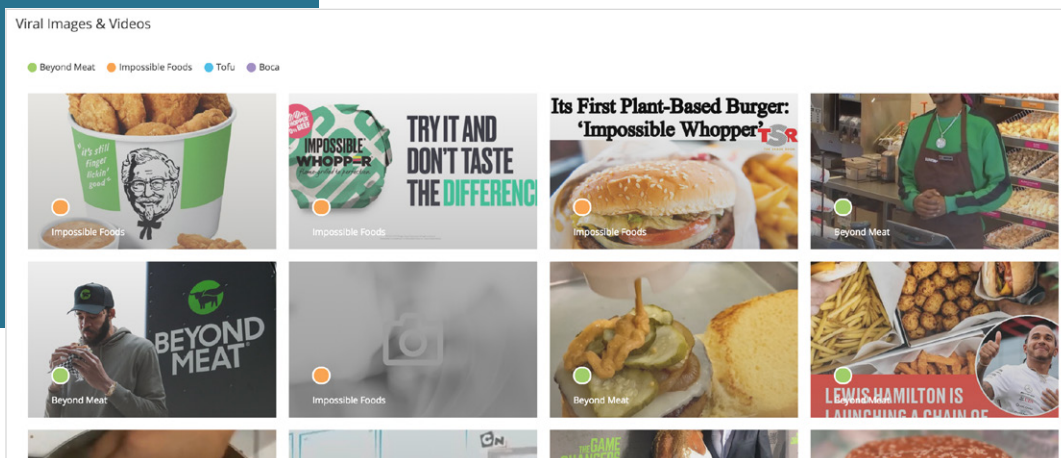
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CNETTV/playlists>

Show more

2M 17K 2K 7K metrics ?



Another method for getting a bird's-eye view of the meat replacement industry involves looking at the year's top top-performing content, displayed below in an engaging Media Wall. Here are the strategies our client discovered by examining viral content:



Fast-Food Chains

As we shared earlier, meat alternative brands have invested significantly in partnering with fast-food chains. The most popular post comes from Hypebeast, a popular men's streetwear website. It posted about Beyond Meat's vegan chicken alternative at KFC and emphasized the mission to "bring in vegan customers and those who are cutting down on their meat intake."

Beyond merely a vegan audience, Beyond Meat and KFC were targeting people hoping to reduce the amount of meat in their diets. This gave our client valuable intel on the unique target audiences of the meat replacement industry, as well as their motivations to eat a more balanced diet.



In addition to KFC, we again see Burger King's Impossible Burger appear in 2019's top content, which reinforced the impact of these partnerships with our client.

Celebrity Endorsement

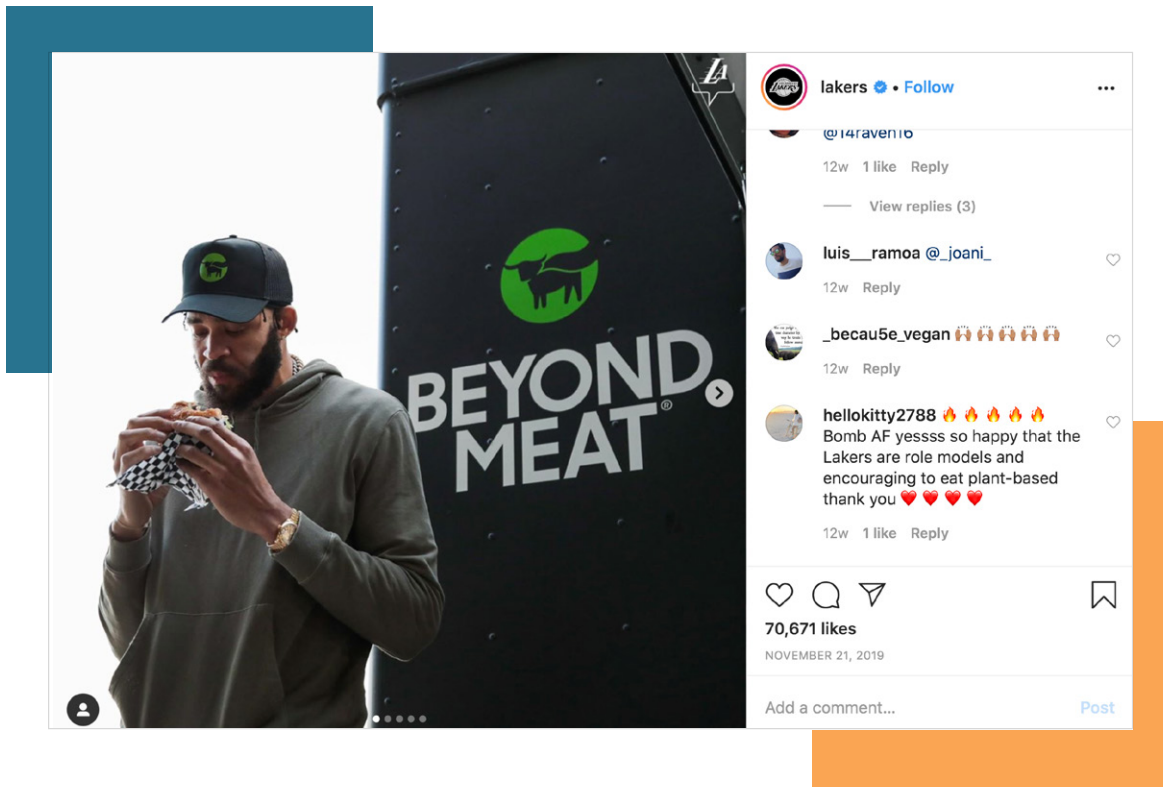
Another piece of top content featured Snoop Dogg serving customers at Dunkin', as the coffee giant launched its Beyond Sausage Sandwich.

Beyond Meat
November 6, 2019 · 🌐

"You want that plant-based great taste?" - SnoopDogg
The Beyond Sausage Sandwich is officially nationwide at Dunkin' 🍔

YOU WANT THAT PLANT-BASED GREAT TASTE?

In addition to partnering with Snoop Dogg, Beyond Meat also partnered with NBA team Lakers. The post made a huge splash on social media.



By taking a look at the top content of the past year, our client was able to understand the positioning of meat replacement companies and the strategies that they use to increase brand visibility. **Buzz words, partnerships with fast-food chains, and celebrity endorsement are the most popular tactics - and they work.**

04

Results

Through this trend detection analysis, our client discovered their most prominent competitors and their competitors' strategies for product promotion. After gaining this valuable intel, this leading meat processing company implemented some changes of its own.

The brand updated its messaging and marketing content to reflect audience interests in healthy, high protein foods. With the new positioning, the brand decided to target their ads at adults aged 18-35 who are interested in fitness and wellness, as well as parents between 25 and 40 years of age who often cook for their young families. **Since this change, the company has seen a 15% increase in sales, as well as an 18% increase in online mentions.**

Furthermore, the study confirmed our client's early-stage plans to release meat replacement products. The soaring growth and popularity of top players in this industry convinced its product development team that it was time to invest in their own line of meatless products. The brand has since engaged in talks with fast-food chains for potential partnerships.



Both B2C and B2B companies need to pay particularly close attention to consumer trends, which emerge at a moment's notice and can influence purchasing behavior for years. Our team can show you how trend detection can make a difference for your company.

Request a demo to see it in action.