



*The Fourth
Edition of*

The Changing Face Of Executive Reputation

November 2020



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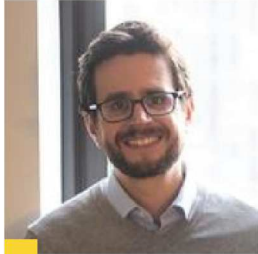
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Foreword

The Fourth Edition of The Changing Face of Executive Reputation research study captures the accelerated nature of digital change in the COVID-19 era. Several of the core trends that we saw in 2019 such as the rising importance of LinkedIn and Twitter continued. However, we see some platforms like YouTube and elements like video coming to the fore. The 2020 study reflects the mindset of professionals who because of the pandemic are rapidly increasing and upgrading their online activities to stay connected and relevant. Also, this year's whitepaper is the culmination of our most ambitious research study to date with the largest sample of senior executives (1000+) from around the world.

Special thanks to Emerson College in Boston and The Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations-Ramon Llull University in Barcelona for their continuing partnership via the Blanquerna Emerson Center for Global Communication. This global study is fast becoming a benchmark study for anyone exploring the topic of executive reputation and professional online presence. Also, thank you to the incredible team at Qnary that managed and analyzed the mountain of data for this report from around the world.

Qnary's core business thesis is that your professional online presence matters for generating opportunities, professional validation, and growing your business. In a world where we are working from home and conducting business via one Zoom meeting after another your online professional presence matters more than ever before. The 2020 Whitepaper findings reflect this new digital reality. If we were evolving to a more virtual work model until January of this year, we are now sprinting to a new model for work and communications.

Dr. Bant Breen

Introduction

Qnary's first study, the 2017 *Professional Digital Presence Study*, documented the importance of professional social media for executives' careers and current companies. The 2018 paper, *The Changing Face Of Executive Reputation*, explained exactly how executives are shaping their companies' public image through their social media, whether they know it or not. Last year's report, the 2019 *Changing Face of Executive Reputation*, detailed the specific social media practices and channels that executives use to establish themselves as leaders in their field, and how their online presence plays a crucial role in the brand of their organizations. This year's report builds off of these insights to show how crucial a dynamic and consistent social media presence for professionals continues to be, especially in the time of a global health crisis.

3 Key Insights at a Glance

Our 2020 report reflects three major trends in the world of professional social media:

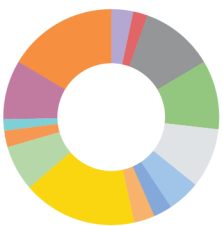
- 1 | Covid-19 and remote work has greatly accelerated social media's significance for professional objectives
Over 38% viewed a social media professional presence to be more important during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2 | Managing a professional online presence is more important now than ever for many aspects of a business strategy
65% of 18-44 year-old professionals surveyed are more likely to buy from the brands or companies represented by professionals they follow.
- 3 | Video content continues to increase in importance in terms of professional reputation significance; multimedia content must be prioritized to craft a superlative digital presence
33% of business professional follow other executives on YouTube.

Survey Respondents

Another year's data concerning the social media habits of business professionals are in, and the need for a robust online presence is more important now than ever.

This year's global survey garnered 1,063 responses from leaders in the business community, 96% of whom are managers or above. 31% of respondents are founders or owners of their company, 38% are in the C-suite, and roughly 10% each are Vice Presidents/Executive Vice Presidents/Senior Vice Presidents, Directors, or Managers. Therefore, our survey sample strongly represents the opinions of the decision-makers of companies.

In what industry do you currently work?



- Real Estate
- Government
- Finance & Insurance
- Health & Social Care
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Arts/Entertainment
- Education
- Technology
- Marketing & Communications
- Construction
- Corporate Management
- Consulting
- Other

These business professionals work across a wide distribution of twelve of the most important business verticals. Out of the highest represented industries, almost a fifth work in Technology, and about a tenth in Finance & Insurance, Health & Social Care, Manufacturing, and Consulting. About 3% of respondents each work in Government, Real Estate, Retail, Arts/Entertainment, Education, Construction, and Corporate Management. The wide distribution represented means that our results are indicative of the trends in a number of industries, and therefore likely in business organizations as a whole.

In addition to representing full-time employees – 72.5% of respondents describe themselves as such, – this year's research also represents people who are self-employed (19.3% of respondents). There is a variety of company sizes among those who partook in the survey as well. Almost a quarter (24.71%) of those surveyed work at a company with more than 1,000 employees, or at one with 50-250 employees (22.5%). Companies with less than 10 employees, 10-50 employees, and 250-1,000 employees each represent about a little less than a fifth of respondents.

Participants hail from a number of countries around the globe. The United States is most heavily represented by about 35% of those surveyed. Germany, France, the United Kingdom, India, Singapore, and Australia each represent about a tenth of respondents. Age is well distributed too: 18-29 year-olds comprise 27.5% of respondents, 30-44 year-olds are 39%, 45-60 year-olds make up 20%, and 13.4% of respondents are older than 60.

The wide distribution in age, industry, and location among these professionals, 70% of whom are in the C-suite or founders of their companies, means that this year's results offer unique insights into the current state and future trends of professional social media use across the business landscape.

Professional Social Media Activity and Significance Have Been Greatly Accelerated In 2020

Covid-19 and Remote Work Have Increased Professional Social Media Activity and Heightened the Importance of Digital Reputation

Early in 2020, with Covid-19 many professionals suddenly found themselves working at home. In the U.S. alone, 42% of the entire working force is currently working from home.¹ We have therefore seen digital media consumption dramatically increase, and social media activity follow suit. Social media offers professionals multiple ways to connect, especially in this unprecedented time where more and more business activity is taking place through the internet. As companies and their leaders look for ways to keep their employees engaged without in-person activities or events, and no water-cooler for casual conversation, they can and do look towards social media.

The most common result when we asked respondents if their social media use has changed as a result of Covid-19 is that nearly half (50%) of all respondents are on social media more. Further, 38% of respondents believe that social media is more important to building their reputation during today's Covid-19 pandemic. 42.7% have seen no change in the amount of time they are spending on social media, but fewer than 9% are using it less.

The only category in which the majority of people have not changed in how they use social media during this time is to post their own content: 53.8% have not changed their habits. This means that social media is being used to gather information and see what others are doing more than post one's own content. In fact, this reflects an opportunity for professionals to post more, as there is a higher demand for content, and they can establish their leadership in this uncertain time.

Since COVID-19, people are spending more time on social media platforms to:



- 35.63%: Post content
- 47.74%: Read news
- 44.16%: Connect with people

¹ Stanford University

38%

believe that social media is more important to building their reputation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondents ages 18-44 are almost

4x more

likely to post multiple times a day than those ages 45-71

Important differences are found among regional responses of the changing perceptions of social media during Covid-19. Whereas two-thirds of Americans' views of social media and personal reputation have not changed during this time, results from both the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) cohort and the Asia cohort diverged from this American result. In EMEA, 39.9% of professionals think social media has become more important to building a professional reputation since the pandemic, and 56.7% of professionals in Asia feel the same. Taken together, this aggregate number cannot be ignored.

Some demographic differences are worth noting related to the pandemic. Women are slightly more likely (43%) than men (34.8%) to believe that social media is of increasing importance for their professional reputation at this time. There is a stark difference in the perceptions of age groups concerning social media use and Covid-19. Whereas 61.3% of those ages 18-44 believe reputation building on social media is more important right now, only 22.3% of 45-71 year-olds agree. This points towards the trend that social media is only increasing in use and significance, especially in times of uncertainty or strife.

Today, the Bulk of the Workforce Is Posting Professional Content Every Week

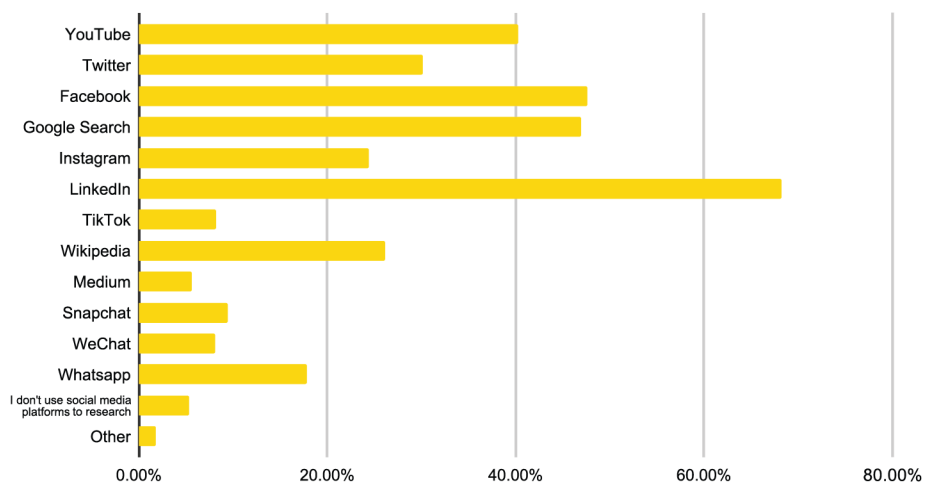
Social media use is very common among professionals, with 92% of those we surveyed using social media to post professional news and content regularly. 23% of business executives are logging into social media channels to engage with content more than once a day, and 18.7% are using social media once a day. 25% use it once a week, and only 10.8% rarely use social media. The smallest representative group, 7.9%, do not use social media to share professional news and content.

The age discrepancy in post frequency is striking. Younger professionals—really the bulk of the working force—are posting much more often on social media compared with their older counterparts. Respondents ages 18-44 are almost 4x more likely to post multiple times a day than those ages 45-71. 45.6% of the younger cohort posts more than once a day, whereas only 11.6% of the older cohort matches this frequency. Women (28%) are slightly more likely to post once a day than men (24%). As the younger generation of professionals increasingly makes up the business landscape, engaging with their professional posts online will be paramount to success. This is how the next group of executives, C-suite professionals, and managers will be communicating.

Social Media, Not Search Engines, Is How Professionals Find One Another

One of the most striking findings from our 2019 survey was that LinkedIn is used more frequently than Google when professionals look each other up. This year, this trend holds, as LinkedIn continues to be the most common platform through which business executives review each other's backgrounds. Notable again here is YouTube, which is now being used by 40.3% of professionals to research each other.

Which digital tools or social media platforms do you use to research or review the background of other professional colleagues, executives or industry thought leaders?



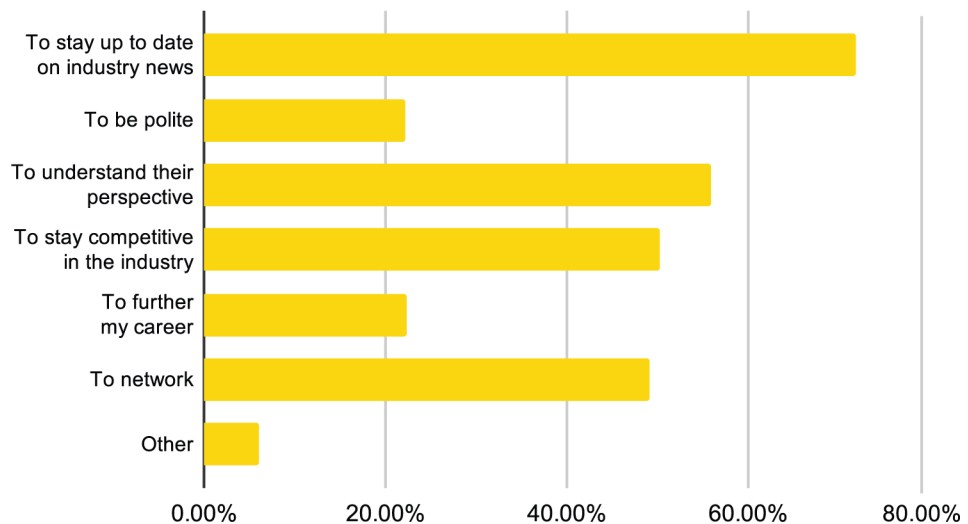
Facebook's importance has more than doubled from prior years: whereas only 22% used it in F2019, this year 47.7% of professionals researched one another through this platform. Google's importance for this research is dropping slightly—in 2019 it was used by 51% of respondents, but this year only 46.9% are using it as this kind of professional research service. It seems that people are more familiar with exactly what they want to find out about a potential business connection, and finding them through a social media channel is a more efficient way to go about their search.

The biggest roadblock for using social media professionally continues to be privacy concerns. This number has remained fairly consistent over our four years of data collection. This year, 55% of respondents said they are concerned about personal privacy, up from 48% in 2017 who claimed to be worried about cybersecurity. Even though the interest in and acceptance of social media have increased, no doubt the past year's widespread political hacking and bot activity have spooked some users.

Social Media Use Equates to Professional Relevance

Being on social media is how professionals stay relevant. 71.9% of respondents use social channels to stay current on industry news. Furthermore, it's not just the headlines that are important, but social media use also allows business executives to understand other perspectives (55.9%), stay competitive in their industry (50.2%), and network (49%). Other reasons business executives follow each other include aspects of furthering their career (22.3%). The least common reason professionals follow each other is to be polite (22.2%), which shows that the connections being established through social media are meaningful, and not just for show. The dominance of networking online shows that social media is likely just as important as traditional in-person occasions, especially in the wake of the pandemic, as more events move online.

Why do you follow business executives on social media?



Less than 2% of people hold a negative view towards colleagues or industry leaders who share professional news and content on social media. The importance of this number cannot be overstated; social media is a vital tool for professional success. 61.5% of professional leaders think professional presence on social media is positive, and 36.9% feel either indifferent or that it depends. The vast majority see the benefit in the professional use of social media to share career updates, industry-related news and content, or corporate communications. Slightly more women (69.3%) than men (60.9%) view their colleagues who share professional content more positively.

A Professional Social Media Presence Is Critical For Many Aspects of a Business Strategy, Including Sales Growth

Executive Activity on Social Media Is Driving Consumer Purchases

Executive's use of social media has the power to drive a company's bottom line. Over 40% of business executives are more likely to purchase from the organizations of those business leaders that they follow on social media. This number has steadily increased year over year: in Qnary's 2018 study, only 33% of respondents were more likely to purchase from those they follow online. How social media influences potential purchasing decisions is a trend that we are only seeing continue to grow.

With younger people, the likelihood to purchase in fact increases even further. 65% of 18-44 year-old professionals surveyed are more likely to buy from the brands or companies represented by professionals they follow. For 45-71 year-old professionals, only 27.3% state that this is the case.

The importance of an executive's digital presence on social media is well understood by survey participants. Over three quarters (76.9%) believe that an executive's social media presence can help their organization's sales growth, and 82.9% believe that it will enhance the organization's communication strategy. Furthermore, almost 40% of business professionals are more likely to trust statements from an executive's social media account than from the brand or organization's account.

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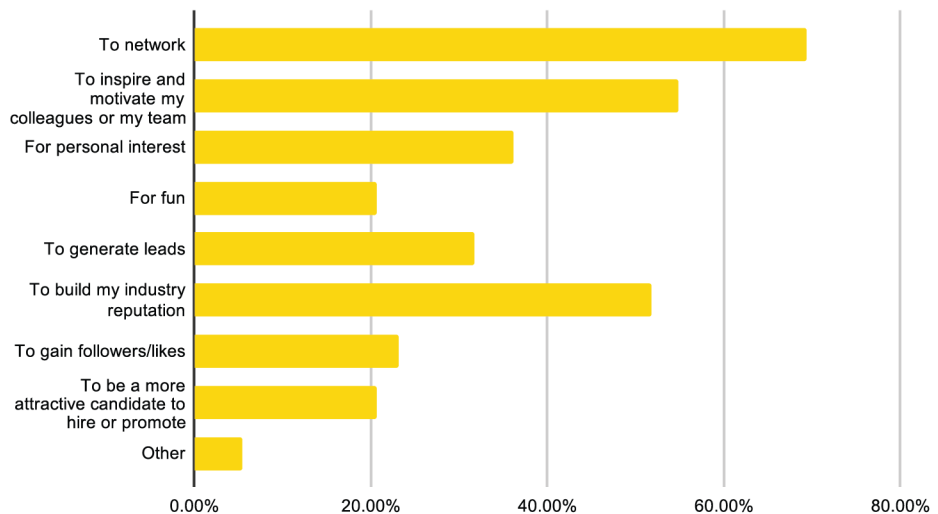
Professional Social Media Use Bridges Internal Company Communication with External Network Reach

Since its inception, social media has blurred the line between private and public communication. Although often used to communicate with family and friends, one's public social media posts reflect the organization one is affiliated with. Striking the right tone through one's social media presence is very important, and requires finesse as the prevalence of online communication only grows.

Executives think of social media platforms with a dual value of both building an internal audience with one's employees and coworkers, and also networking with external audiences and leaders in one's field. 67% of respondents follow their current or former colleagues on social media, and 62% also follow industry thought leaders. 42.5% follow influencers in their industry, with whom they have no direct relation. 39% also follow their business organization's leader. Furthermore, roughly 30% of respondents follow their managers or their direct reports, showing how social media can offer a way to build rapport along many levels of an organization.

The specific reasons why business professionals share professional news and content on social media vary, although they are all tied to strengthening one's career. Networking is of supreme importance, with almost 70% of people surveyed using social media for this purpose. There is also a strong team aspect of using social media, as the next most frequent reason (54.9%) is to bolster one's colleagues or team. Respondents also care about building their industry reputations (51.8%) and generating leads (31.7%). Executives recognize how an active social media presence allows one to connect to both personal and wide audiences.

Why do you share professional news and content on social media?



91%

of those surveyed believe that an active professional presence on social media can help their professional reputations.

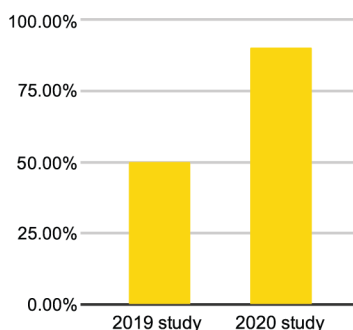
Professionals strongly agree with the fact that an active, professional presence on social media can help their professional reputations. 90.7% of those surveyed articulated this fact, meaning that less than 10% disagree with this statement. 88.3% of business executives affirm that an active, professional social media presence can also help them become stronger candidates for future positions or promotions. Similarly, 89.4% believe that this same social media presence can also inspire one's colleagues or team.

Video Content Has Made Leaps In Terms of Professional Importance, with YouTube Emerging as an Up and Coming Professional Platform

LinkedIn and Twitter Continue to Dominate; YouTube Emerges as a Contender

Since the beginning of Qnary's research, the data has shown that LinkedIn and Twitter are social media sites most important to professionals. This year, only 10% of people claimed that they do not log in and use LinkedIn at least once a week. That means that a staggering 90% of business professionals are perusing and/or posting on LinkedIn every week. This number has even increased from last year, when only slightly over half of the respondents said they use LinkedIn at least once a week.

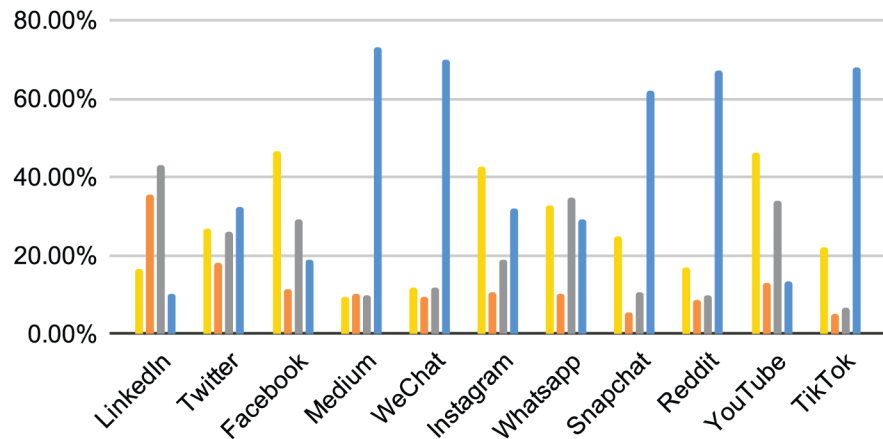
Do you post on LinkedIn at least once a week?



In addition to being the most popular, LinkedIn is also the most dynamic platform used by executives. This site is the most common platform on which to follow other professionals, post professional content, advocate for employees, and find sales leads. As for posting professional content, 51% of respondents do this on LinkedIn. The next most common site is Twitter (40%), followed by Facebook (36%), then YouTube (29%). This means that the most sharing among executives is occurring on LinkedIn, and LinkedIn is where a professional's content has the greatest opportunity for exposure. 68% of respondents follow other business professionals on LinkedIn, followed by a distant 42% on Twitter, 36% on Facebook, and 33% on YouTube.

Thinking now about which social media platforms you use professionally, how do you typically use the platform?

- Personal use only
- Professional use only
- I use it personally and professionally
- I don't use this social media platform



24% of respondents use LinkedIn for sales leads; the next three most popular sites for this kind of activity are all used by about 12% of respondents: Facebook, Whatsapp, and Instagram. Whatsapp likely makes an appearance in this category because of its international popularity; not all domestic cellular providers and programs integrate with each other, so many global businesses and professionals conduct international communication through Whatsapp. The main platform used by professionals for employee advocacy is also LinkedIn (27%), then Facebook (19%), Whatsapp (15.53%), and Twitter (15.52%).

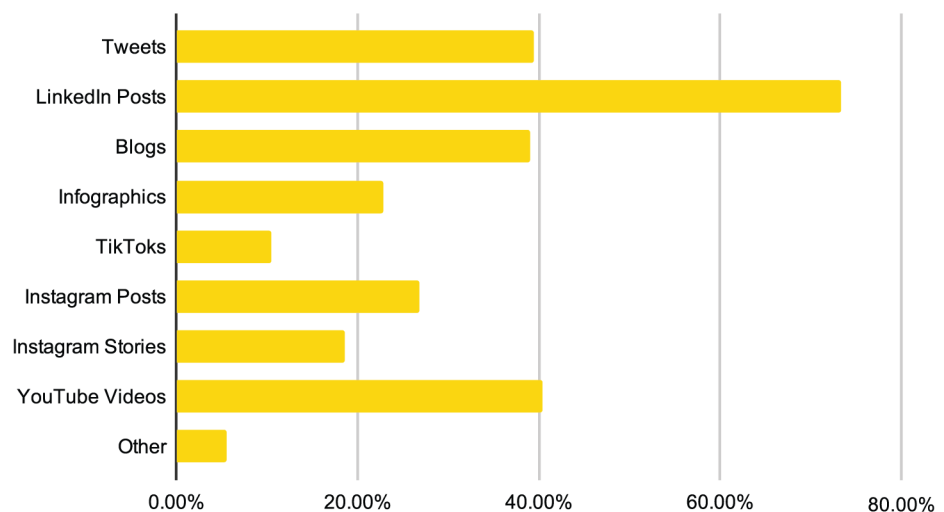
YouTube is greatly increasing in importance as a professional platform. Nearly 34% of people surveyed say that they use YouTube for professional and personal reasons, and almost 13% use YouTube strictly for professional reasons. This finding points to the increasing importance of video content and encourages practices like recording conferences or panels so that they can have a greater impact with the added bonus of online distribution.

As for other video platforms, TikTok has not made a dent in the professional realm. It is beginning to infiltrate personal use and home lives, with 22% using the app for personal enjoyment. However, less than 5% use the app for something professional, and almost 68% do not even use the app at all. Although TikTok's personal use at 22% is greater than LinkedIn's personal use (which falls at 16%), this number is not indicative of widespread professional use or a necessity for presence on this platform.

Multimedia Content Is Important for Executives On Social Media

The most frequently viewed type of content from business executives is LinkedIn posts (73%), which is to be expected given LinkedIn's popularity. However, the second most frequent type of content viewed points to YouTube's ascendancy: its videos are viewed by 40.4% of respondents. Although this is only slightly more than Tweets (39.5%), YouTube videos were not nearly this relevant in the data from 2019 or 2018, and were in fact less popular than Twitter and Facebook.

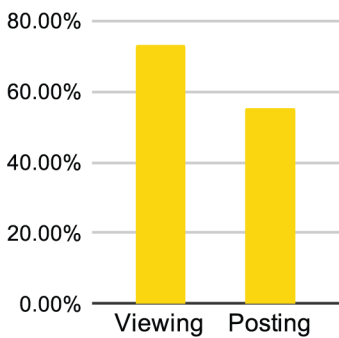
What kind of content do you view from business executives that you follow?



The fact that blogs, videos, and personal writing are the most popular types of content for executives to view means that social media presents unparalleled opportunities to establish oneself as a thought leader. Last year's data found that rather than simply reflecting thought leadership, a strong social media presence is actually what helps create it. As YouTube's use increases, professionals who are creating video content related to their expertise will be positioned for success in this area. Furthermore, the use of YouTube instead of TikTok or Instagram shows how this platform is uniquely positioned for professional content instead of the more playful others.

Multimedia and video content is important for social media future success. The types of content shared by professionals include things like infographics and videos from industry figures. LinkedIn posts (55.2%) and industry-related news articles and links (52%) are the most common types of content shared, followed by Tweets (36.5%) and Retweets from other industry figures (32.5%). 25% of respondents share infographics, 23% share videos they create, and 23% share videos others create. The videos shared are likely hosted on professional sites themselves or YouTube, as TikTok posts are only shared 7.7% and Instagram posts 17.2%. The sustained popularity of Twitter over the other quick, sound-bite sharing apps like Instagram and TikTok shows that professionals still value the ability to add substantial amounts of language to their content, rather than as textual overlays on a photo or video.

Companies Aren't Providing Enough Training to Unleash Social Media's Potential



Opportunity Gap: Executives Should Post More on LinkedIn

Whereas 73.3% of professionals are viewing LinkedIn posts, only 55.2% are posting this same type of content. This 18% disparity means there is still room for business executives who want to become thought leaders to increase their presence on LinkedIn.

Only a minority of companies provide social media training to their employees, and this is true of both small and large organizations. 55.6% of professionals are not receiving any kind of social media training from their companies, which is only slightly fewer than in 2019. The results from 2019 found that roughly 60% had not received training, thus less than 5% more businesses are offering this kind of information. Of those who have received training, about half have each received crisis training, brand identity training, and best practices training related to social media. Many organizations likely have their own social media profiles and channels, but the individual employees—and especially the leaders—of companies need powerful, consistent messaging to further their company's goals.

The ironic thing about the majority of companies not providing any social media training is that most respondents (55.9%) are encouraged by their organizations to share company news on social media. This number is slightly down from last year, where more than 60% of respondents felt this type of encouragement from their companies. This percentage matches the number of business executives (59.5%) who themselves feel it is important to advocate for their company on social media. A similar number (45%) feel that posting about their company on social media makes them more engaged.

Although there is an expectation that employees will share company news socially, less than 10% feel that their company has provided instruction on how to do so. Furthermore, 13% feel their company's policies and procedures concerning social media are unclear.

Conclusion: **In 2020, the importance of an online presence for executive reputation has significantly accelerated**

This year's survey was undertaken within the context of a global pandemic. As digital media usage continues to increase during this pandemic, so does the importance of a strong professional online presence. For executives and managers, video and multimedia content is growing in importance, as is the need for clear, consistent communication through social media channels. There are more people looking for content than ever before, and professionals are uniquely positioned to deliver important insights and valuable services.

Research Methodology

The research was carried out online by Qnary. There were 1,063 total completed surveys. All surveys were conducted between July 7, 2020 to July 27, 2020. Respondents worked in 12 countries including the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, India, Singapore, and Japan. All survey respondents' inputs were in English. Respondents' professional titles included Owner/Founder (31.45%), C-Suite (38.38%), VP/EVP/SVP (9.49%), Director (8.42%), Manager (8.85%) and Other (3.41%). Survey respondents worked in over 13 different industries including Real Estate, Government, Finance and Insurance, Manufacturing, Retail, Arts/Entertainment, Education, Technology, Marketing and Communications, Construction, Corporate Management, Consulting, and others. Survey respondents' organization sizes ranged from more than 1,000 employees (24.7%), more than 250 employees (16.04%), 50-250 employees (22.46%), 10-50 employees (18.07%), less than 10 employees (18.72%).

Contributors

This has been an amazing year for this study, it would never have happened without the following involvement from these people:



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CEO & Founder Qnary APAC



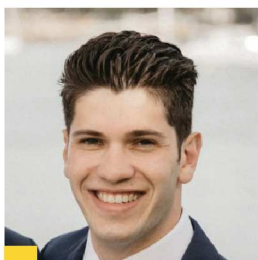
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