The Voice of Society Seen Through the Lens of Social Media

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Initiatives: Executive Leadership: Enterprise Strategic Planning and Execution; CIO Leadership of Innovation, Disruptive Trends and Emerging Practices

This research analyzes social media data on the voice of society’s influence on social justice and social fracture. Executive leaders can use this directional research to see how employees and other stakeholders relate to these issues, and the potential impact on products, brand and reputation.

Strategic Planning Assumption

By 2024, 30% of major organizations will use a new “voice of society” metric to act on societal issues and assess the impacts to their business performance.
Data Snapshot

Figure 1. Trend Analysis of Social Media Data Showing Percentage of Commentary in Four Areas: Political, Economic, Societal and Technological

![Trend Analysis of Social Media Data](image)

Data Insights

The voice of society is being evidenced by discussions about social justice and social fracture (see Why the Voice of Society Is Getting Louder). Executive leaders responsible for enterprise strategic planning and execution must understand how employees, customers and other stakeholders relate to these issues, and recognize their potential impact on products, brand and reputation. They can start by gaining visibility into discussions on social media about these issues. This research examines two questions:

- What are the biggest social issue concerns expressed via social media?
- How are those concerns expressed using the lens of politics, economics, society and technology (PEST)?
For executive leaders, social media is an important new part of the voice of society for two reasons. First, because it is amplifying the voice of society to levels not seen before, and second, because it can serve as an important, low-latency signal to leaders about what customers, employees and citizens want. The findings presented here are, therefore, designed to educate executive leaders and offer short- and long-term actions that can help them create and communicate the right strategies by keeping the broader view on societal issues in mind. Please note clients should consider this research in combination with the other insight we have published as part of the Gartner Global Scenarios research about social fractures.

Overall Findings at a Glance

Societal factors were the most discussed topics with respect to employees and co-workers on social media from the first half of 2018 through the first half of 2020. Its share of conversations grew from 29% in 2H18 to 46% in 1H20 (see Figure 1). Discussions about economics remained pretty consistent over the same period, as did those around technology. Interestingly, discussions about politics dropped dramatically, from 25% in 2H18 to a mere 7% in 1H20.

All Four PEST Factors — Concerns About Racism

Racism was the most discussed issue on social media in terms of all four PEST factors. Concerns about racial incidents and COVID-19-induced distress about unemployment drove discussions about society and economics in 2020. For example, in 1H19, discussions increased about incidents of racism toward people from ethnic groups at workplaces, and about concerns on the ignorance of racist actions from certain people. In 2020, the “Black Lives Matter” movement inspired further increases in discussions about racial incidents from fellow employees and during the hiring process, as well as about negative treatment of employees who spoke out about racism in the workplace.

Political Factors — Less Discussion, but Persistent Concerns

Political factors mentioning employees decreased, as concerns about racism, climate change, immigration and the economic impacts of COVID-19 took precedence. However, issues around governance, eroding democracy and rising government corruption were the primary focus of political discussions that did take place on social media.

Economic Factors — Dominated by COVID-19
Unemployment due to COVID-19 was the most widely mentioned economic driver on social media. Discussions focused on the negative impact on a nation's resources, leading to dependency on employment benefits. This was especially pronounced where employees highlighted concerns about returning to workplaces with unhealthy environments. Discussions about capitalism highlighted frustration due to lack of proactiveness and financial support from wealthy capitalist owners during the crisis.

**Societal Factors — A Mixed Bag**

While racism and noninclusivity were major discussion topics, social media commentators were also concerned about immigration, climate change and more rights for those in the LGBTQ+ communities.

**Technological Factors — Automation, Innovation and Privacy**

While social media commentators see technology as a unifying force, they also expressed concerns about how things like automation and innovation would result in job loss. They were also anxious about cybersecurity and privacy.

**Individual PEST-Factor Findings**

Social media commentators indicated that racism, along with COVID-19-induced unemployment and perceptions of poor governance, have driven social fractures. However, those same commentators affirmed that innovation in technology and more aligned climate change policies could provide pathways to greater unity among people.

Figure 2 reveals interesting details about the separation between polarizing (red) and unifying (green) drivers and their impact on social cohesion and the power of societal voices.
The following sections provide more specific information on each driver within the PEST framework.

### Political Drivers

- **Governance:** Inadequate political governance is seen as a polarizing force in society due to:
  - The perception of preferential governmental financial support to bail out companies from the crisis, but the simultaneous lack of measures to address the unemployment situation adequately and sustainably.
Democracy: The erosion of democracy is considered polarizing due to:
- The recognition of regulation and laws, globally, that have been introduced or changed against prodemocratic institutions, processes and policies

Corruption: Addressing corruption has become more of a unifying force in society due to:
- The ongoing corruption in public and private institutions and increasing unity around the need to implement strong legal frameworks to tackle corruption — especially in the context of developing and deploying technological innovations in the government and society

Economic Drivers

Unemployment: Unemployment is leading to greater levels of polarization due to:
- COVID-19-related economic crises that have increased layoffs, coupled with unpopular government measures to mitigate economic challenges
- Concerns about returning to unhealthy working conditions and employee reluctance to return to physical workplace locations, as well as potential loss of unemployment benefits and paid sick leave

Capitalism: Capitalist policies and leader mindset are increasing polarization due to:
- Perception of captains of industry as exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic to grow their personal wealth
- Belief that industry leaders are not doing enough to cushion increasing unemployment burdens, are demanding pension cuts and are getting government bailouts to ease the economic crisis

Income tax: People are united about the impact of reduced taxation due to:
- Social media commentary highlighting that a reduction in personal taxes will ease the financial burden during the ongoing pandemic (Note: there was no significant commentary about corporate taxes)

Societal Drivers
Technological Drivers:

Racism: Racism is fostering societal division due to:
- The level of racial incidents in daily life
- General concerns about racism and noninclusivity in the workplace

Immigration: Discussions about immigration highlight social polarization due to:
- Perception of racism in immigration services

Climate change: The increase of societal drivers also drove interest from employees expressing their concerns about climate change and requests for enterprise carbon footprint reductions, especially due to:
- The nature and quality of executive decision making
- Bad external advice executives received due to corrupt climate change policies
- Social unity is expressed in discussions on climate change as:
  - Employee demands for organizational proactiveness in driving government climate change policies

Civil rights: Social media commentary highlights a shift in stance from divisive to more united due to:
- Abolishing employee discrimination about LGBTQ+ in the U.S. under the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Technological Drivers:

Automation: Automation has become a more unifying force in society due to:
- Recognition of and anxiety about the potential for reductions in job opportunities, which is causing employees to seek skill upgrades

An acceptance that automating repetitive tasks will save time and lessen the ambiguity in customer service
What You Need to Do

Near-Term Actions

Talk with a Gartner expert about your current strategy and where marketing data and analytics can be used to support your business goals for 2021/2022. For example, sentiment analysis, pulse surveys, social media listening and massive AI-facilitated online conversations can help enterprises monitor how beliefs are changing in near real time.

Longer-Term Actions

Talk with a Gartner expert about your strategies beyond 2022, in light of our research that shows that 30% of major corporations will use a new voice-of-society metric to act on societal issues and assess impacts to their business performance. Social media will become an even more critical barometer of societal issues, and CIOs must incorporate this data into their long-term planning.

Innovation: Innovation is seen as a unifying force due to:

- Social media commentators valuing digitization of cities and services as well as improving solutions to address cybersecurity issues
- Commentators believing that leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) enhances enterprise capabilities and processes

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): GDPR has been welcomed as a unifying force due to:

- Requirements to introduce/improve data protection laws
- The need to improve data protection, especially due to work-from-home situations
What You Need to Know

This report is intended to display directional trends based on an analysis of social media and inquiry data and may or may not be suitable for every organization's needs. In particular, note that the information is gleaned prior to, and during, the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis. Additional data will need to be collected to offer a dynamic understanding of attitudes as the crisis continues to evolve through 2H21 and into 2022. The information contained here, other than the Data Insights section, is produced by an algorithm and may use different terms or suggest different conclusions than a Gartner expert would offer.

Evidence

Client Inquiries:

This report analyzes over 1,500 client inquiries with Gartner experts that were completed from April 2019 through June 2020 that we classified against the Marketing Data and Analytics client initiative. See Marketing Data and Analytics Primer for 2020 to learn more about this initiative. These inquiries were from Gartner clients of varying sizes and maturity levels, and may not reflect all Gartner clients or all companies, generally.

2020 Gartner Social Media Analytics Study:

Gartner conducts social listening analysis leveraging third-party data tools to complement or supplement the other fact bases presented in this document. Due to its qualitative and organic nature, the results of this survey should not be used separately from the rest of this research. No conclusions should be drawn from this data alone as it may not be entirely market representative. The social media data referenced in this research is from 4 September 2018 to 2 September, 2020, in all geographies (except China) and recognized languages.

Social media analytics study results do not represent “global” findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the aggregate crowdsourced opinion of the respondents commenting about the topic on social media.

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