



# #RealTalk

The state of brand behavior on Twitter and what's coming next.





# What do **people** think of brands today

For over a decade, marketers have turned to Twitter as “the world’s largest focus group,” where people are sharing their raw, unfiltered opinions on brands each and every day.

Now more than ever, it’s important for brands to understand how and when people want them to show up in the public conversation. That’s why we’ve conducted first-of-its-kind research analyzing people’s attitudes on Twitter and what that means for the evolution of brand behavior.

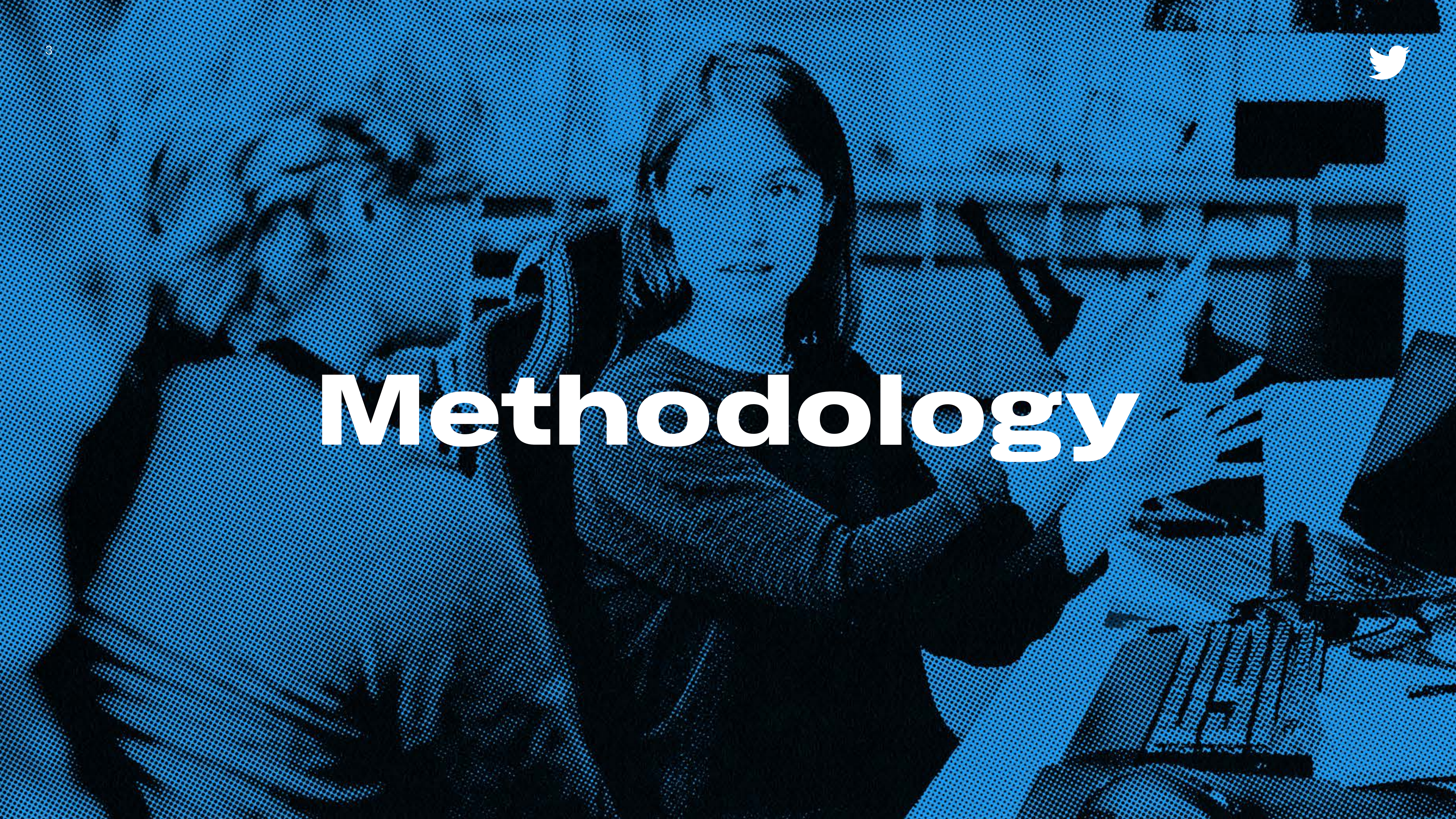
This is #RealTalk.







# Methodology







**Analyzed**

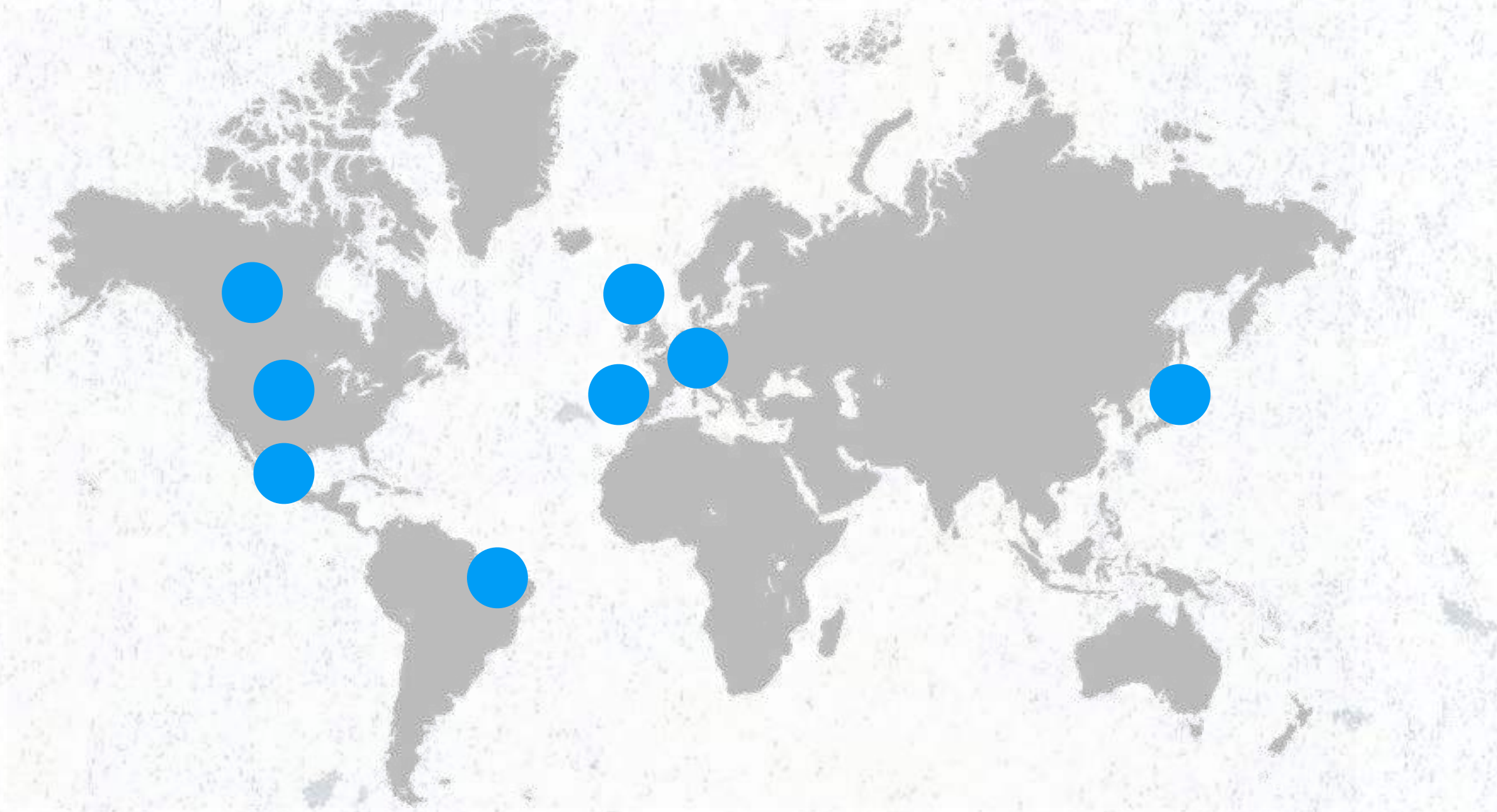
**5K**

**unprompted Tweets  
about brands**

Through an analysis of over 5K Tweets, we identified distinct shifts and trends in attitudes about how brands behave.



# Surveyed and tested



sparkler | Part of  
PA Consulting

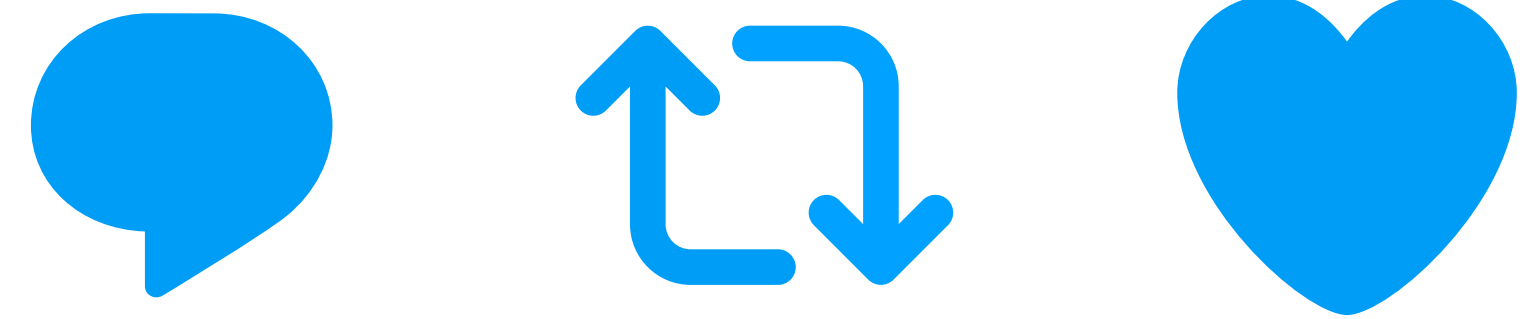


Partnering with industry-leading researchers at Sparkler, trends surfaced in the Tweet analysis were then surveyed and tested in eight countries to identify how people's attitudes toward brands are influenced by local cultures.



Partnering with the data scientists at Pulsar, #RealTalk investigates shifts in behavior not only in Tweets about brands, but the Tweets brands are sending themselves — analyzing every Tweet published from 20 iconic global brands over a three-year period.

## Dissected Tweet behavior



Three years | 20 brands

**PULSAR** 





# The findings



# Real people ≠ marketing people

Throughout the research, we were humbly reminded of an important and obvious thing we tend to forget — most everyday people do not work in the advertising industry.

Beyond that, however, three key themes emerged.



**dakota**  
@bydakotalowe



**Important to remember that just because Marketing Twitter loves or hates something, doesn't mean the everyday consumer will feel the same**

6:57PM · Feb 4, 2021





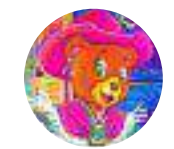


1

# They're onto us

When it comes to a brand's intentions, people are savvier than ever.





sarah's femme phobic era  
@dykeparton



**Brands be like “join the revolution” and then it’s just a millennial pink vacuum cleaner or some shit**

9:38PM · Jul 17, 2021



**Which means  
they **GET** it**

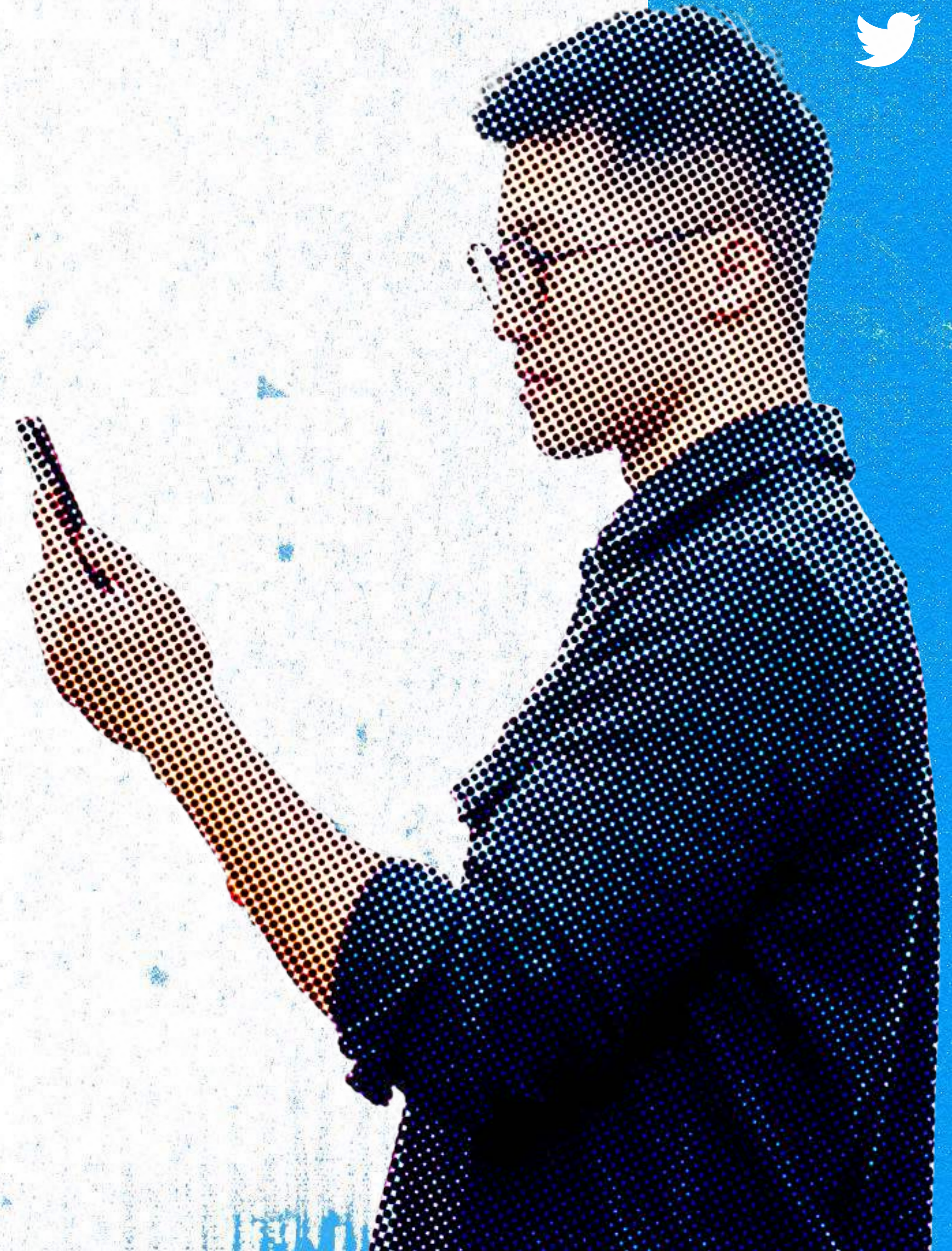
People have a sense of authenticity and aren't shy about speaking up when it's lacking.





# People are **paying** attention

Because they're interested in what  
brands are Tweeting.



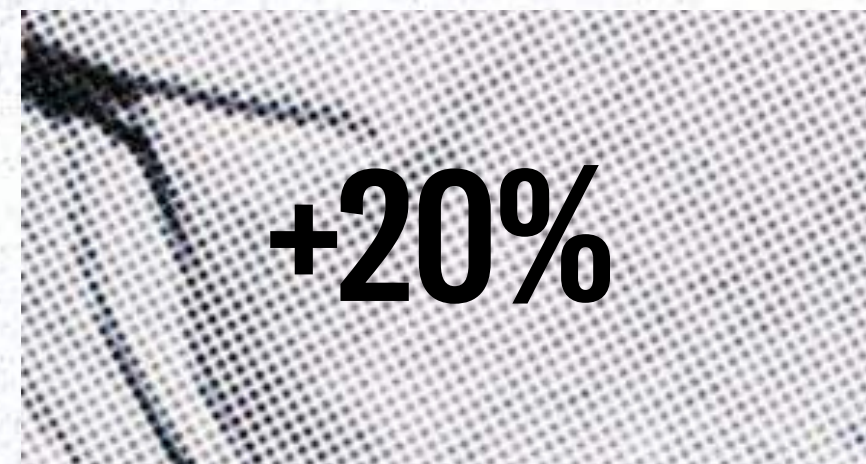




# Active

In the past year alone, conversations and engagements with brands were up double digits.

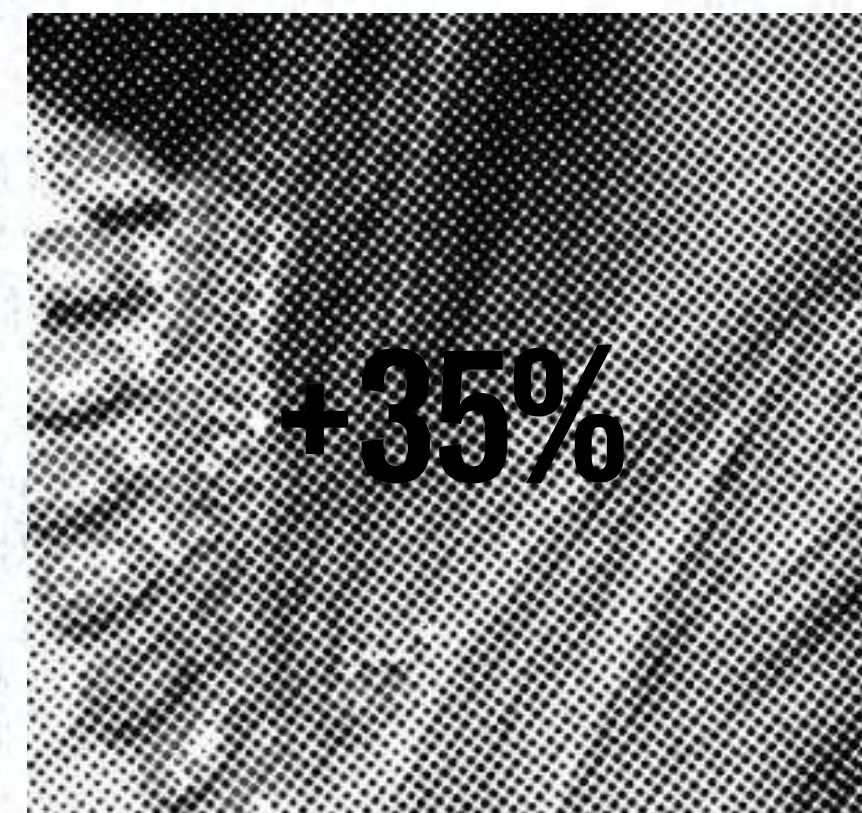
(2020 vs. 2019, US)



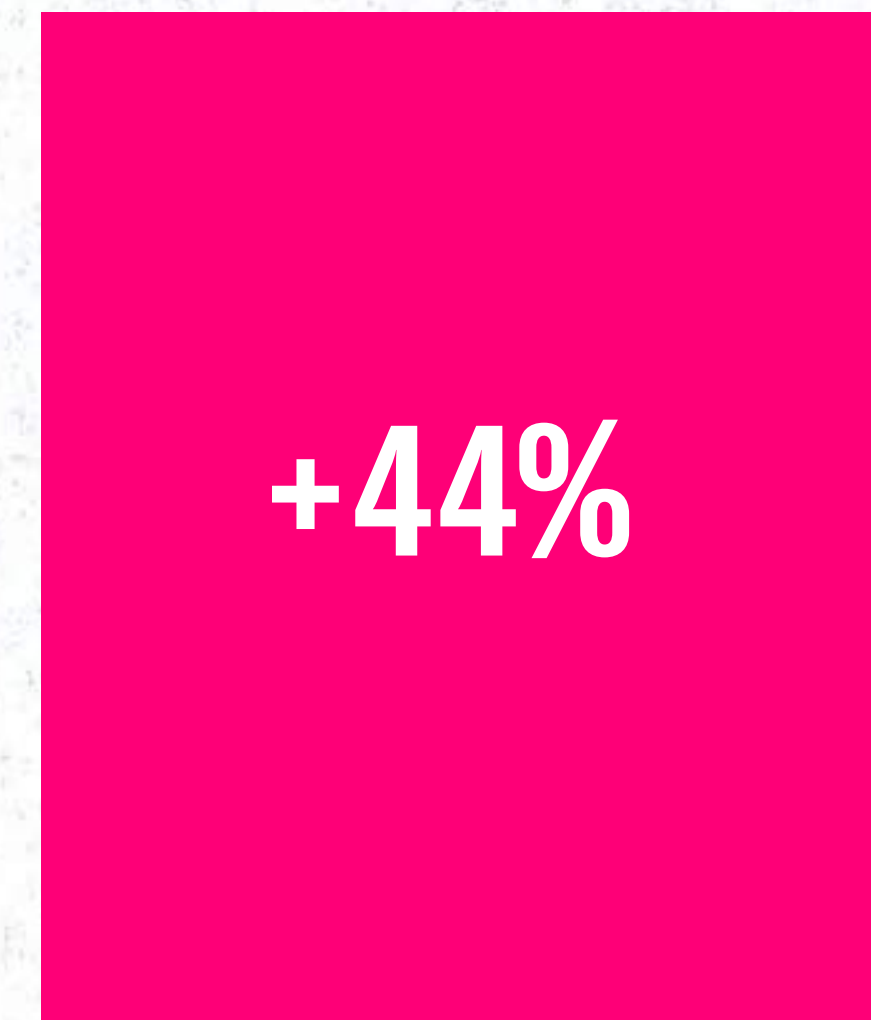
Retweets



Tweets



Quote Tweets



Replies





# Active

People are actively participating in the conversation with brands because brands add to the enjoyment of using Twitter.

**7 in 10**  
surveyed people agree

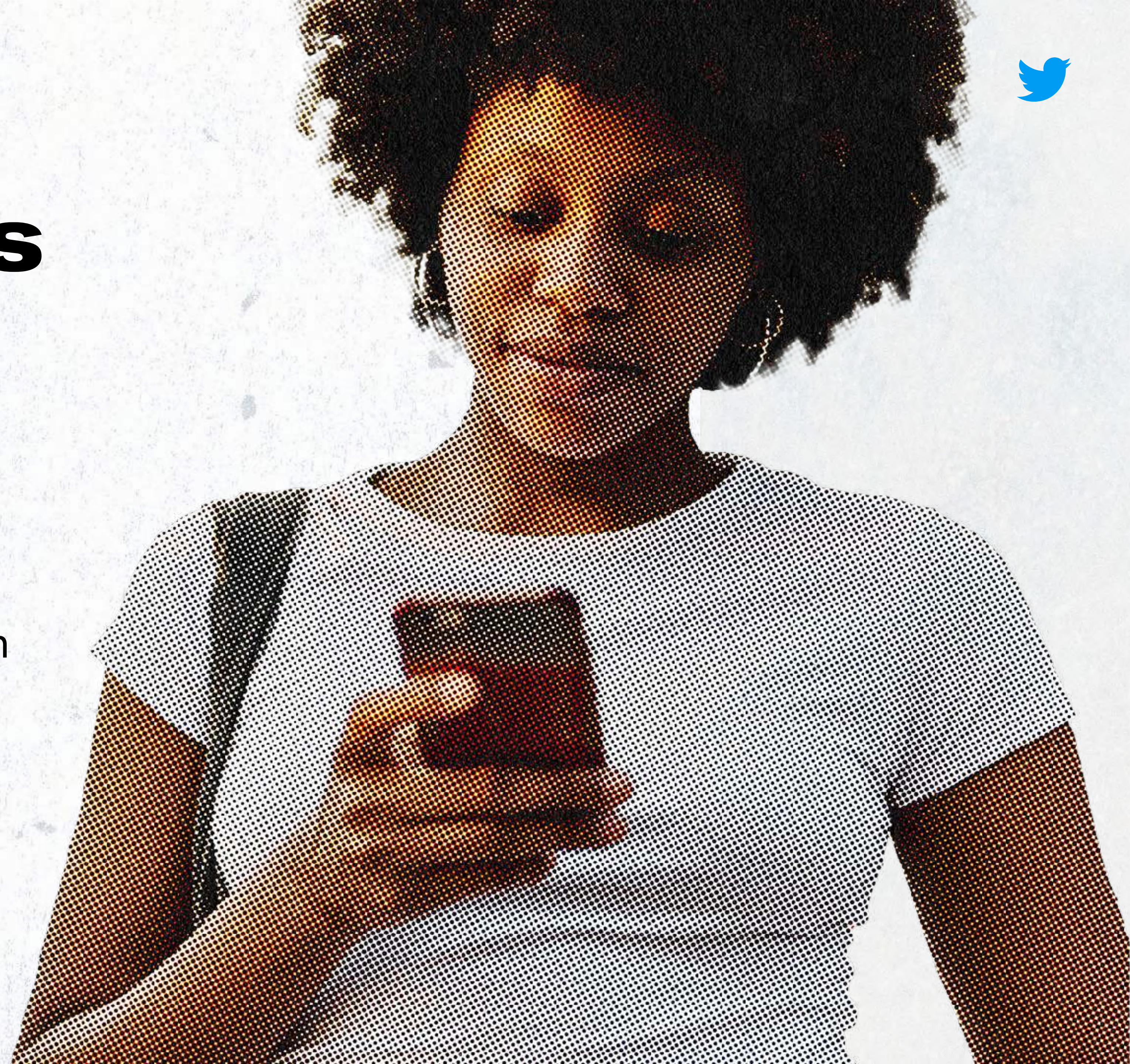
“Brand Twitter” is one of the best parts about Twitter.





# Expectations are high

When the increased attention on brands meets the reality of the world we're living in — navigating a pandemic, political instability, and an awakening around privacy and data use — **it raises the expectations people on Twitter have of brands and how they communicate.**





# Savvy

# 80%

## surveyed agree

“I don’t mind being sold to on social media, as long as it’s fun, useful, entertaining, informative, or moves me in some way.”



 **jon drake**  
@DrakeGatsby



**Brands be like “We know this is a difficult time. We are all in this together. Please enjoy 20% off our WACKY, BENDY KRAZYSTRAWS™. Use code “Pandemic” at checkout.”**

5:17PM · Apr 4, 2020



We increasingly found that people are savvy when brands are or aren’t meeting those expectations. They call out when brands are exploiting a situation in an insincere way. But that doesn’t mean they mind being sold to, just so long as the brand makes it interesting.





# Paying attention

They notice when you're talking.

Now, this savviness means that people are paying attention. They notice when brands are talking, especially in moments of crisis.

**61%**  
of people surveyed say

“Brands **should acknowledge moments of crisis in their advertising and communications** when they are occurring.”





# Paying attention

They notice when you're not.

A key observation uncovered in the research is that a heightened level of savviness about brand communication means people also notice when brands remain silent. It implies that brands today must have a firm grasp of the conversations consumers expect them to join.

# 48%

of people surveyed say

“It’s more important now for brands to support economic, social, political, or cultural issues, **even when the issue doesn’t directly impact them vs. a year ago.**”





# 2

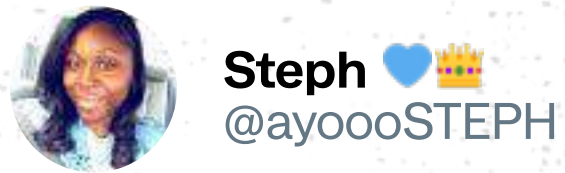
**People are tired of  
the sea of same**

**“Brand Twitter” is at a tipping point.**





# Same tones



Steph 🇺🇸👑  
@ayoooSTEPH



All these brand statements are all starting to sound the same



# Same topics



Emotional butterfly  
@gotohellisabel



Brands be like “aw it’s mental health day :( cheer up with 15% off using this coupon code! :)”



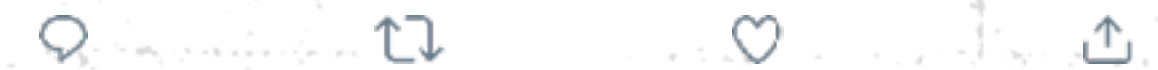
# Same communities



LOGAN DUBIL  
@logandubil



Tomorrow is the last day of #Pride  
Can’t wait to see every single company logo change back to normal at 12:01AM the next morning



“Social media behavior” upstages brand distinctiveness, and **people are taking notice.**



## Tone

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**Our research sought to understand these emerging attitudes more specifically and with more evidence than an anecdote**







# Are brands really starting to sound the same?



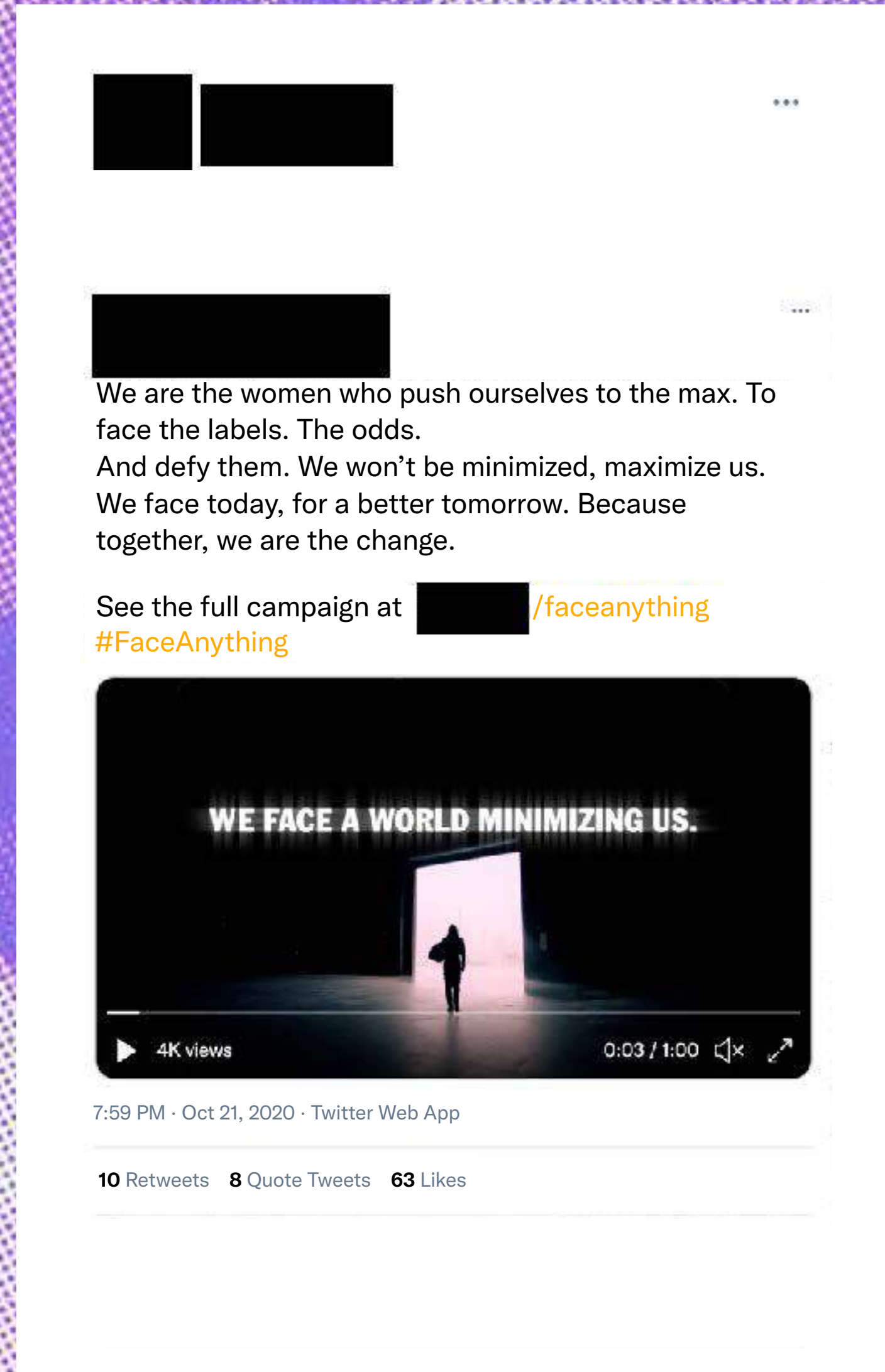


# We created a test

We created a blind brand test selecting a variety of Tweets from prominent brands from around the world across similar industries.

We removed any identifiable branding such as names, logos, keywords, and hashtags. We then asked people to attempt to guess which brand authored the Tweet they were viewing.

The results confirmed our suspicions.



[Redacted]

[Redacted]

We are the women who push ourselves to the max. To face the labels. The odds. And defy them. We won't be minimized, maximize us. We face today, for a better tomorrow. Because together, we are the change.

See the full campaign at [Redacted] [/faceanything](#) [#FaceAnything](#)

**WE FACE A WORLD MINIMIZING US.**

4K views 0:03 / 1:00

7:59 PM · Oct 21, 2020 · Twitter Web App

10 Retweets 8 Quote Tweets 63 Likes





# Only 1 in 3

**people surveyed could  
guess the correct brand  
from a list of five options**







# The sea of same

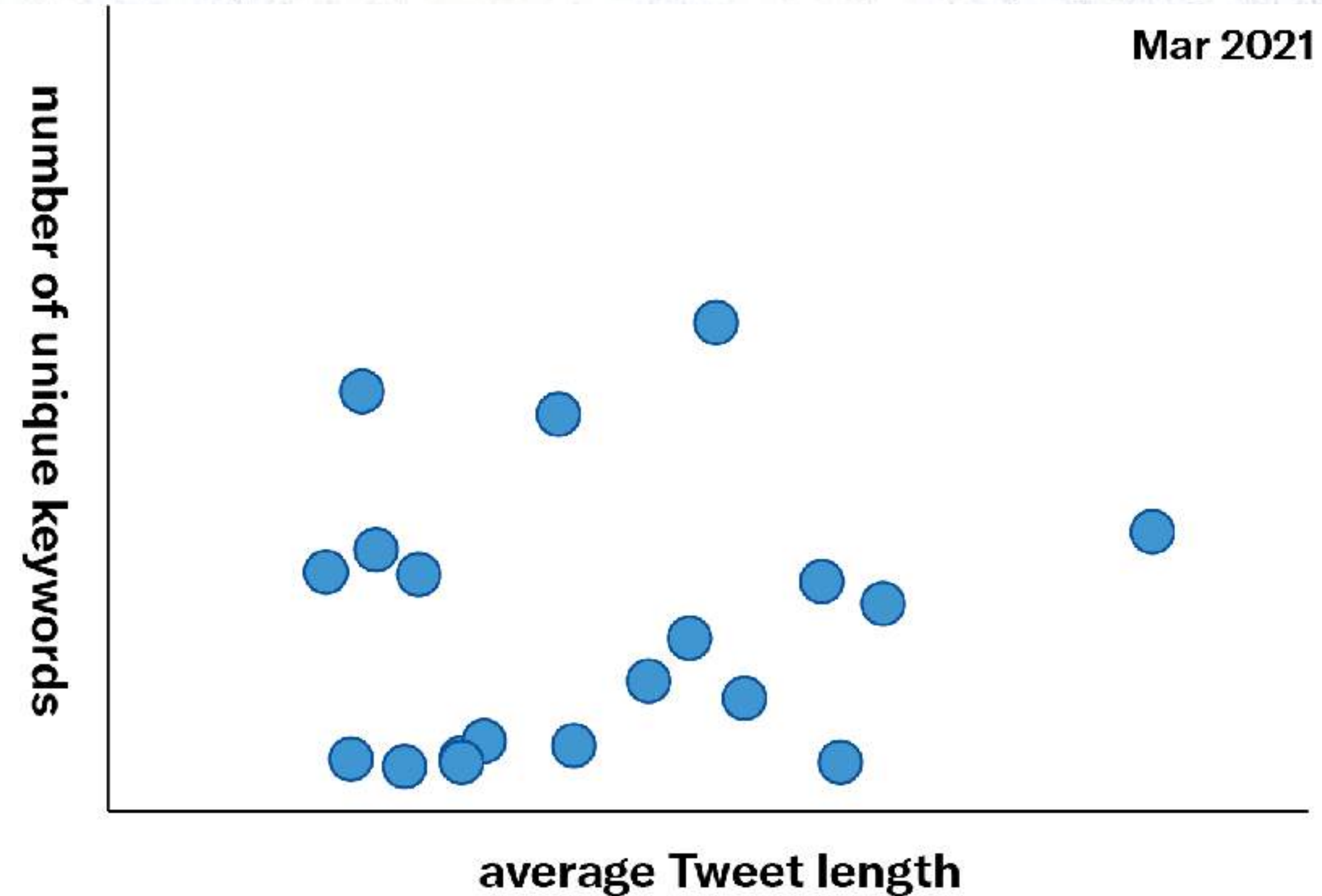
**Same** unique keywords.

**Same** length of Tweets.

**Same** brand archetypes.

**We went deeper in our investigation of brand Tweets**, examining the Tweet structure of every Tweet, from 20 brands, in eight countries, during a three-year period.

We found that brands began converging around the same social media archetypes, even using the same number of unique keywords and characters.







# People are even describing brands on Twitter the same way around the world

Put more bluntly, when we asked people in these eight countries to use one word to describe brands on Twitter, in every single country, people said brands are “playful” and “funny.”

“Funny!”

“Playful!”



# Brands who rely **only** on humor and jokes can feel outdated in today's world

With “funny” and “playful” being such strong tone-types on Twitter — and often what the most famous brands from “Brand Twitter” are known for — it was important to ask if this still feels right in today's world.

So we did.

We found one out of two people surveyed agreed that **brands that rely on humor and jokes can feel outdated today**. And when we focused on ages 18 to 34, this was even more true.







Francisco // djstarion  
@djstarion



**Man, some brands just need to read the room.**

5:04PM · Apr 20, 2021



# 8 in 10

people expect “brands to **evolve their tone with the times**”

**Read the room.** People today don't want brands that rely solely on being funny and playful — they want a brand's tone to evolve with the times.

Because sometimes the moment just doesn't call for an LOL.



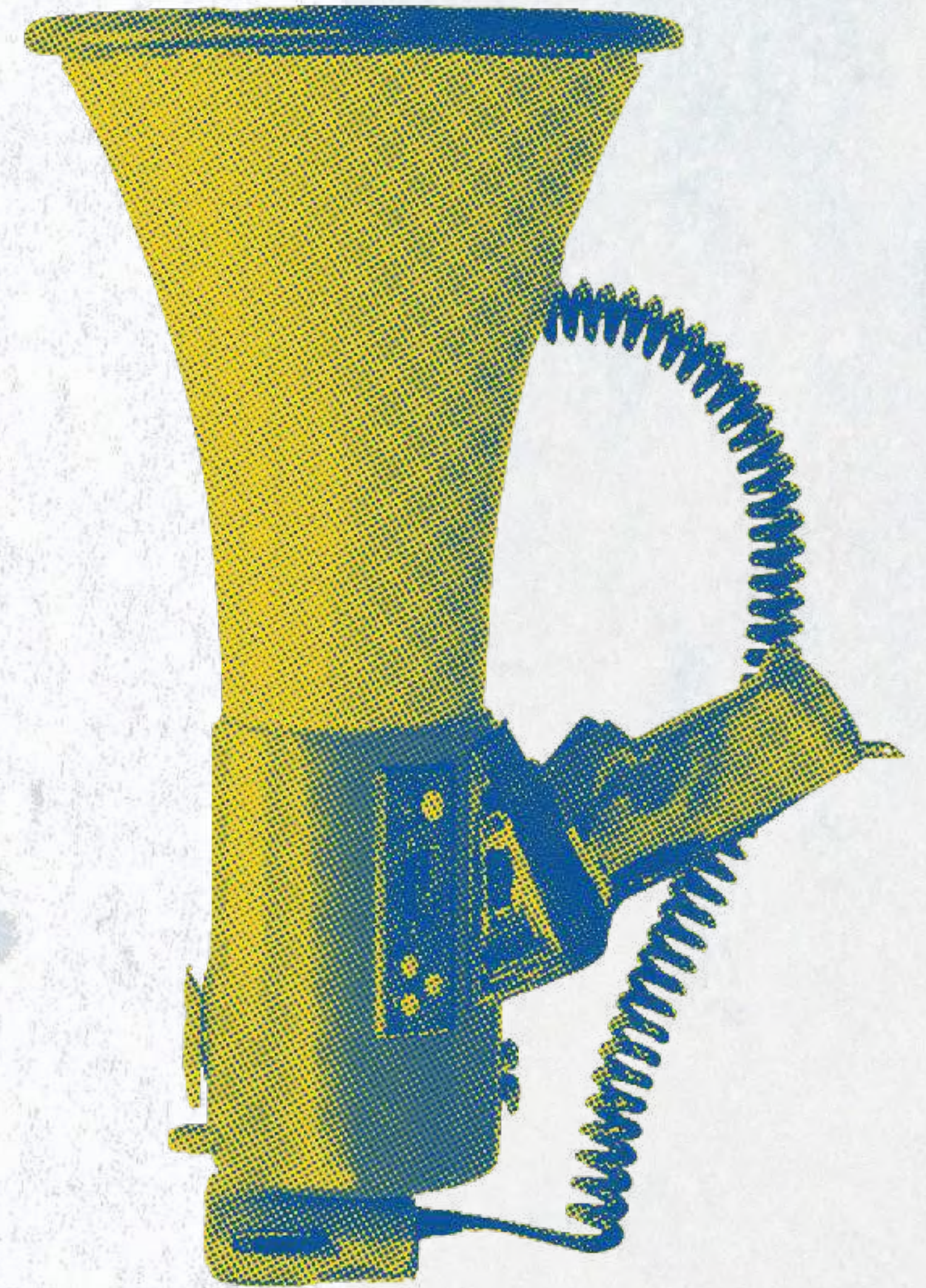


## Topics

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# What conversations should brands join?

When it comes to staying fresh and relevant with the times, this is the question we most often get from marketers.







**Now, you may not think that a topic like political insurrection would be one that people want or expect brands to join.**





shoe  
@shoeOnHead



**I do not want to hear from  
The Brands**

11:15PM · Jan 7, 2021



One day after events unfolded, some people expressed how they felt about brands and politics with Tweets like, “I do not want to hear from The Brands.”

So, we tested this Tweet and the scenario in surveys. Did people want to hear from brands in such moments or not?





 **shoe**  
@shoeOnHead



**I do not want to hear from  
The Brands**

11:15PM · Jan 7, 2021



# 60%

**of people surveyed actually  
disagreed with this Tweet**

They want to hear from the brands in these moments — so that tells us people want you to join in, but you have to know when and how.





**Hat Cat Summer** 🍷🌞🍕  
@NorthCaroliNats



**Brands be like “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards two medium pizzas and a free order of cheesy bread for only 17.99”**



**When brands join sensitive cultural or political topics, they must **do it meaningfully**.**

Remember, people are savvy and paying attention — they’ll call out when they see brands not keeping it real.

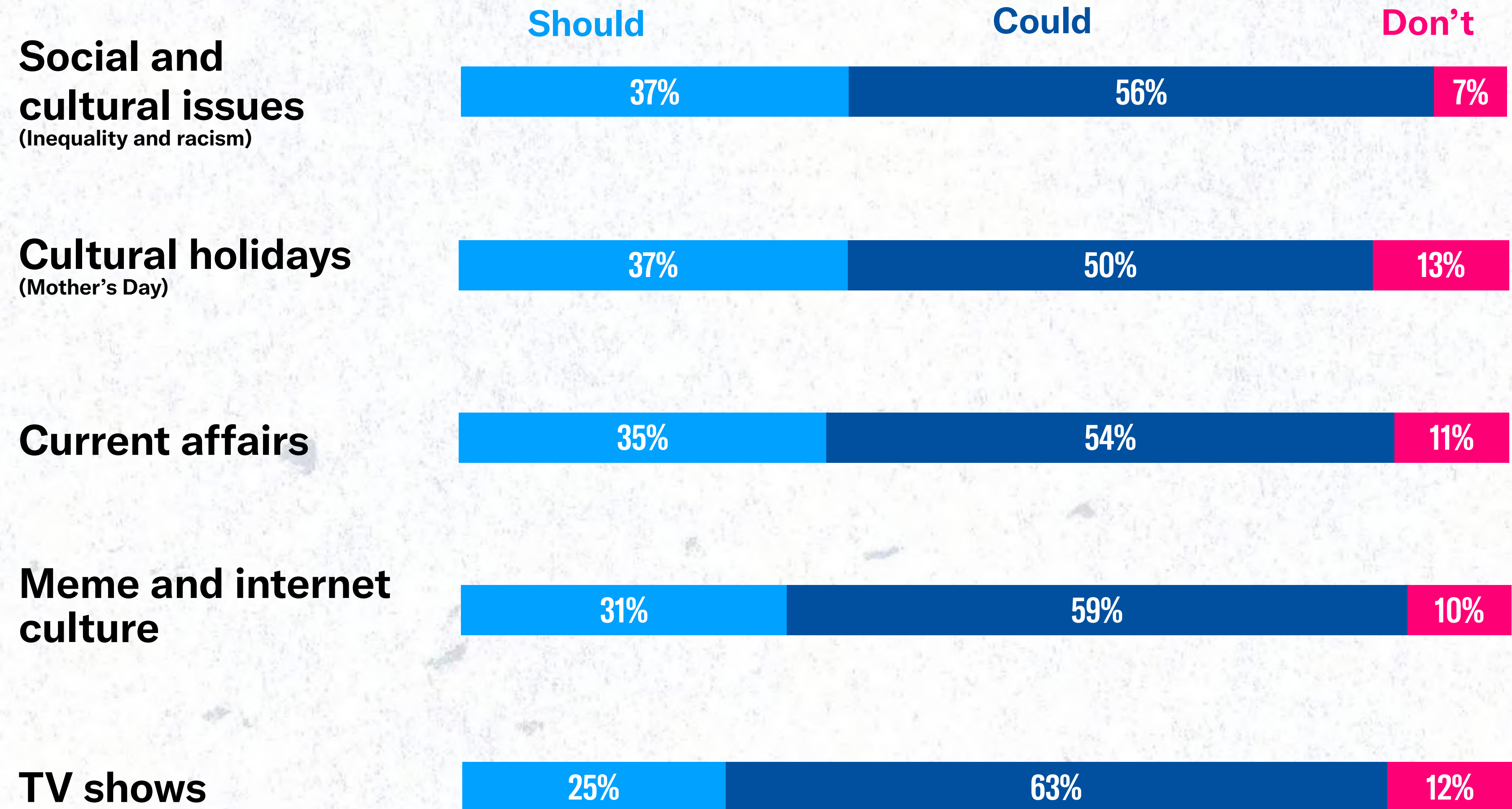


We then got even more specific on what people do and don't expect brands to Tweet about. (Or should we say, "shoulda, coulda ... don't?")

People were asked to assess a set of topics and whether a brand: 1) SHOULD Tweet about a particular topic; 2) COULD Tweet (if appropriate, but not expected); or 3) outright SHOULD NOT Tweet, at all.

Across every range of topics, a pattern becomes clear — 90% of topics are on the table for a brand, if correctly addressed.

# Shoulda, coulda ... don't







## Communities

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# Are brands overly generalizing distinct communities?

It was clear in our research — people want brands to talk about a range of culturally relevant topics when they make sense.

But we also found that a big factor in deciding which topics to talk about is understanding the distinct communities you're speaking to.







royalty 👑  
@SirSmythe\_



**It's too easy for brands to  
generalize black people into  
one box ...  
We're not monolithic 😡**

6:51PM · Oct 18, 2020



Communities on Twitter today are more diverse and nuanced than ever, and they expect brands to be mindful of that when they're being addressed directly.





**8 in 10**  
**people surveyed agree**

“The voice of a brand’s Twitter account should **reflect the full diversity** of their customers — not just one customer type.”

Our research found that across the world, people now expect a brand’s voice to reflect the **full diversity** of both its company and its customers.



**83%**  
**surveyed agree**

“I don’t mind when a brand addresses me as part of a specific community on social media, as long as they do so with respect.”

Almost everyone in our research agreed; they welcome brands addressing them as part of a specific community, as long as it’s done respectfully. It places even more importance on the need for marketers to prioritize diverse teams reflective of their customer base.





# More people are wearing their on their feeds

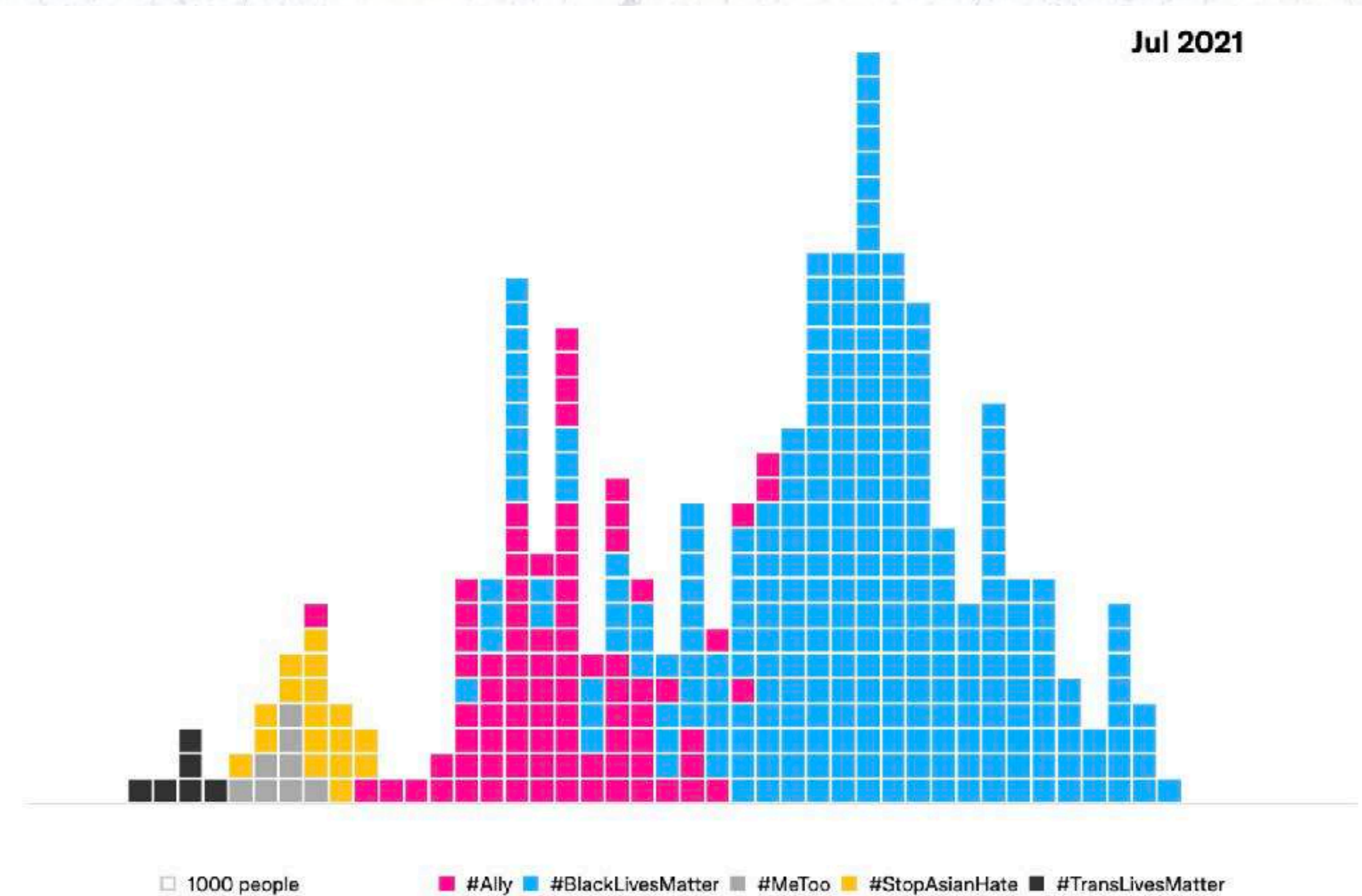
On Twitter, we see that people are identifying more strongly with specific communities than ever before.

This proud expression of identity and growth of communities is a beautiful thing, with audiences getting more specific and fragmented — which creates both opportunities and unique challenges for communicating at scale.

# 10x



allyship keywords in Twitter account bios this year.



Source: Twitter Internal Data, Total number of Twitter profiles with specified Hashtag in their Bio from March 2020 to March 2021.





**Tanya Compas FRSA**  
@TanyaCompas



**I need brands and companies to show support and work with queer people all year around and not just pride month**

9:38PM · Jul 17, 2021



If you're going to communicate to (or with) specific communities, it must be bigger than a single Tweet.

Remember that people are active and paying attention. They want you to show up year-round, not just during specific moments (as this Tweet calls out).





# 3

## How we evolve

The evolution is here — to stand out, brand behavior must evolve.





# Distinction = Everything

The writing is on the wall ... or the timeline.  
Sameness simply won't survive.

Distinction is everything a brand needs to  
succeed on Twitter.





# 9 in 10

**people surveyed value  
brands that have a strong  
sense of who they are**

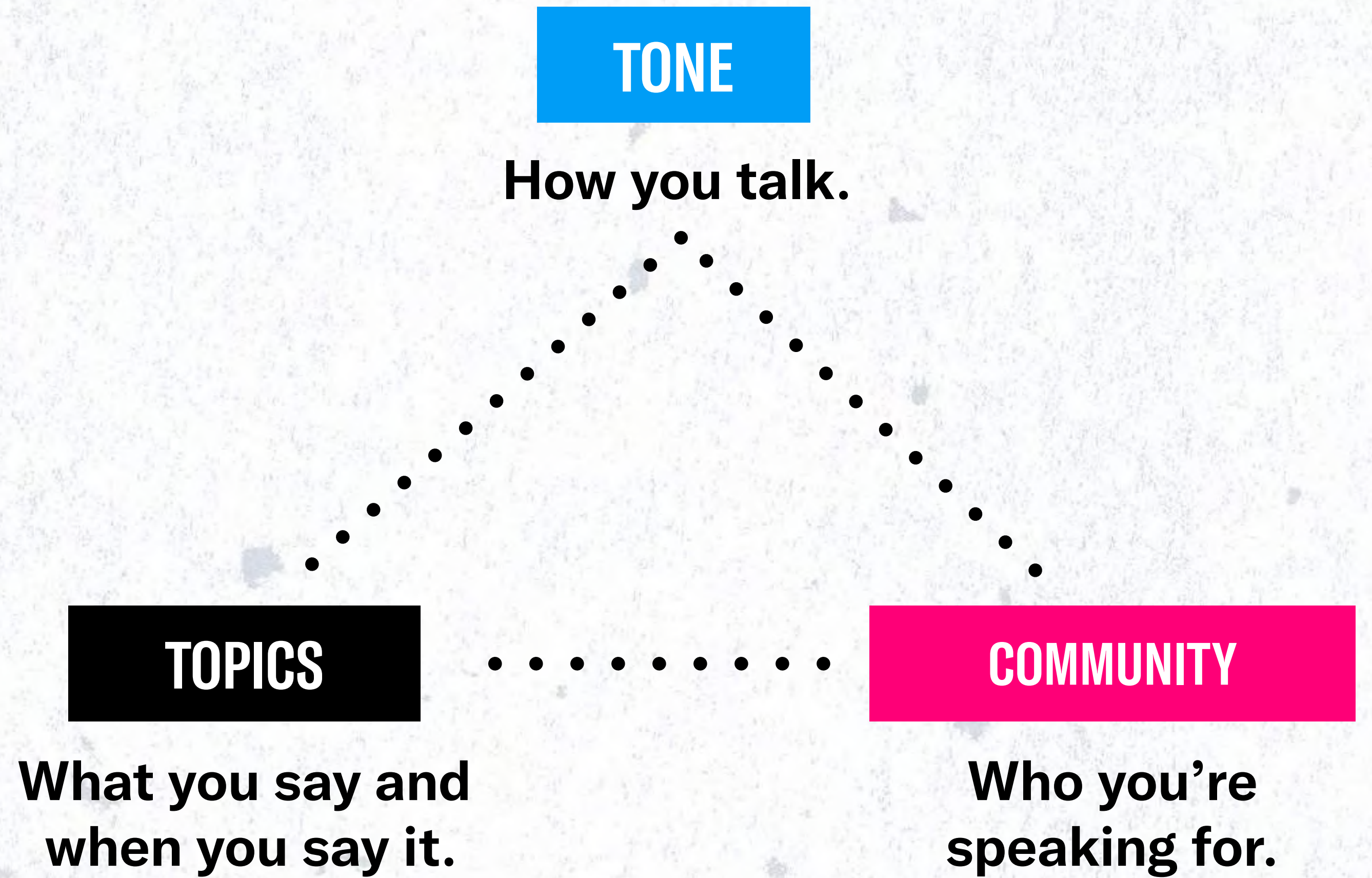
The most universal finding in this research was that almost every consumer valued brands that had a strong sense of who they are.

Or as Shakespeare wrote, “**to thine own self be true.**”





# Who you are on Twitter







# Reclaim your tone

It's time to break free from contrived media tones and embrace the tone that authentically represents your brand.

**Be real. Be straightforward.  
Be YOU.**

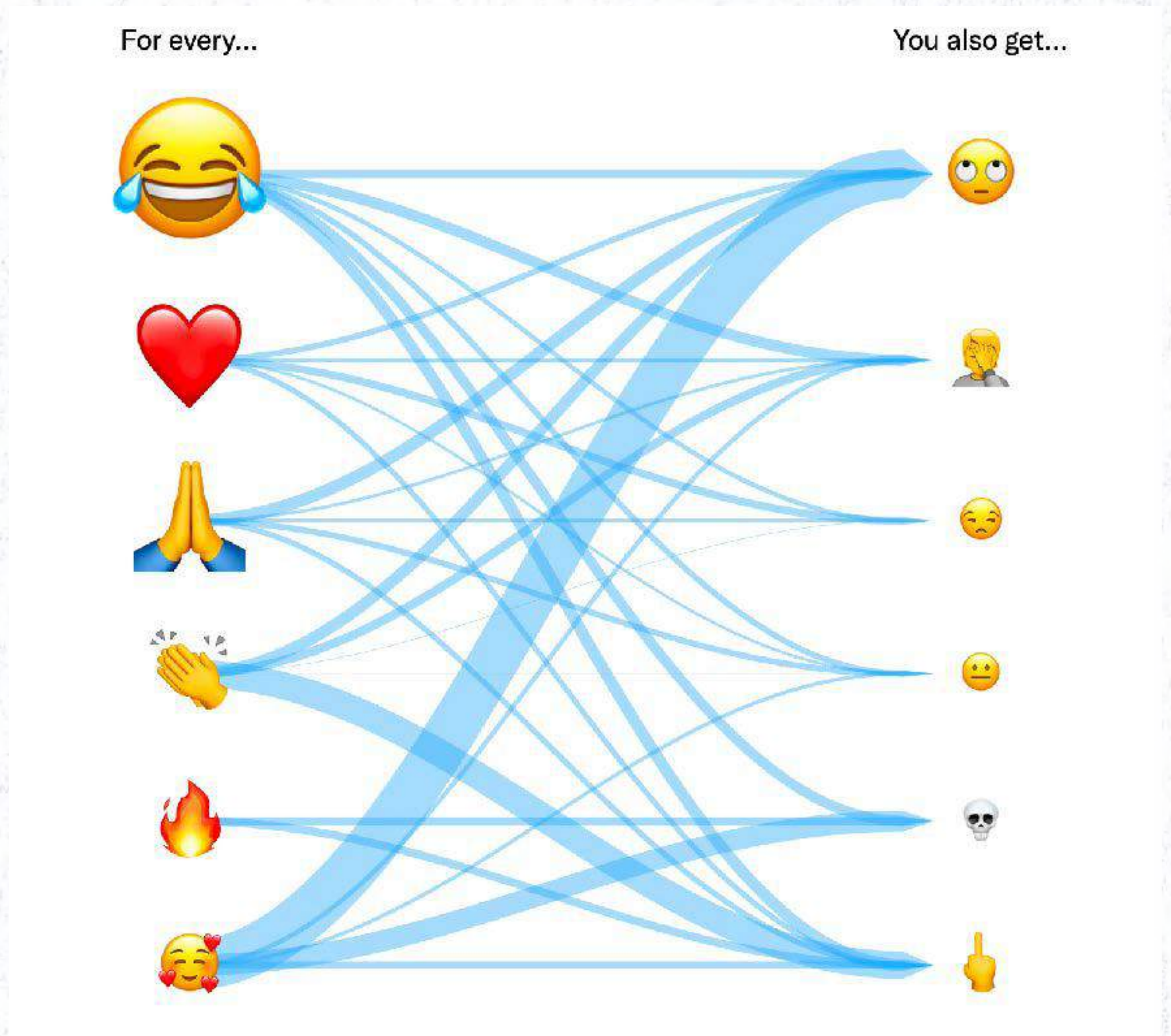






A bold tone should elicit a reaction from people, and you should be confident that those reactions won't always be equal.

Our analysis examining the use of emojis in replies to Tweets from brands found that being bold encouraged an emotional response, and the positive often outweighed the negative.







# Revisit your topics

It's time to revisit what seems right for your brand, not just what topics are trending, or what other people are jumping in on.







# Be (self) aware

The question today isn't IF your brand should be connecting with culturally relevant topics in unique ways — but WHEN, WHY, and HOW.

The Twitter conversation can be key to identifying those moments.







# Rewrite your community approach

Finally, when it comes to the communities you're engaging,  
there's lots to keep in mind.

Do your research.

Connect with the demographic.

Rewrite your approach.





# **Be for some, not for all**

**If you speak to everyone, you speak to no one.**

**And as we've seen, communities on Twitter have never been more vocal, passionate ... and of course, specific.**



# **It's time to reimagine your brand behavior on Twitter**

**We're here to help.**

