



August 2022



The Tiktokification of Meta

In a blog post this July, Instagram quietly announced an expansion of its app's 'remix' feature, allowing users to remix public photos and welcoming a series of new templates, all designed to make video content, including popular reaction videos, easier for newbie creators.

The rollout included a controversial caveat, however: all new videos uploaded to Instagram would now automatically become Reels. For many users who had previously chosen to shun or ignore the Reels feature, this announcement created a mixture of confusion and frustration.

Yet, Meta's motives in shifting its focus towards video content are clear. Since its launch in 2016, TikTok's popularity has boomed. Capitalising on our collective desire to feel togetherness, TikTok's features – such as duet and react – made it the perfect antidote to lockdown living. While the overall usership of Meta's products dwarf that of TikTok, TikTok's popularity among Gen Z has fuelled its rapid growth. According to IPA Touchpoints data, the platform has a weekly reach among 15-24s of 47%, behind Instagram (73%) but ahead of longer-standing channels like Twitter (35%) and commercial radio (34%).

When Meta launched Instagram Reels in 2020 – with the feature debuting on Facebook the following year – analysts widely described it as a 'TikTok copycat' – a charge Mark Zuckerberg did not explicitly deny. Indeed, Meta is not the only social media company looking to adapt in the face of its Chinese competitor, with Twitter recently trialling a 'For You' page which eagle-eyed users were quick to point out looked suspiciously like a typical TikTok feed.

So, is Instagram foolish in shaking up its central premise and, if so, will this prompt a user backlash? In shifting its focus even further towards video content, Meta clearly has its reasons. In April, Zuckerberg revealed that 20% of the time its 2 billion plus monthly users were on the platform, they were engaging with Reels content.

Of course, such a dramatic shift will not be universally popular. the7stars' Lightbox Lowdown found that while 16-24s narrowly supported the changes by a 41-37% margin, those aged 25-34 were opposed, by 40-30%. Perhaps more troublingly for Meta, just short of one-in-ten of those surveyed said they had recently considered deleting their Instagram account as a result of the changes.

However, it's worth remembering that comparable product changes in the past have provoked similar ill feelings. The launch of Instagram Stories in 2016 was maligned initially as a Snapchat clone. While its introduction prompted much noise from the community, users soon grew to accept and even enjoy the feature, with Stories now as familiar a part of Instagram as food pics or beach selfies.

For brands for whom influencer marketing is pivotal, the Instagram changes could provide an opportunity as much as a challenge. Advertiser content originally created for TikTok can be seamlessly transitioned to Reels, potentially allowing brands to tap into Instagram's larger monthly audience without the need to produce bespoke content. Should Reels eventually come to be accepted by Instagram's broad user group – as Stories were half a decade earlier – this would open the door for a more age-diverse audience to become attuned to brand-led video content.

Such an acceptance is far from certain but, if past platform changes are anything to go by, much of the initial noise will soon quieten down. And however long Instagram's lead over TikTok lasts, one thing is clear: video content is here to stay.





Streams Like Teen Spirit

Over the past few years, we've seen a shift in the music industry where music consumption is less clearly defined by the boundaries of genre tribes and generational eras. Rather, musical taste has become more liquid and flows with the current of culture. For instance, the resurgence of 'Running up that Hill' by Kate Bush, which was originally released in 1985, perfectly encapsulates this new wave of music listeners in today's modern society.

The7stars' latest whitepaper 'Streams like Teen Spirit' explores how listening habits are evolving, with Generation Alphas (born 2010 onwards and predicted to reach a population of 2.2B by 2025 globally) acting as society's trailblazers in creating a more fractured and mosaic music scene. Not only do they mature into fully fledged active consumers at an earlier stage, but they are also one of the most culturally complex generations the world has ever seen.

Two in five of 7–14-year-olds agree that they have a wide taste in music and a third agree they like to listen to new bands (the7stars Kantar TGI Youth, April 2022). This is largely thanks to the evolution of music technology, which has broken down barriers in all areas of music discovery, curation and sharing. For instance, Spotify continues to release social features on its platform – such as blended playlists, follower activities and algorithms that recommend music based on your current tastes – all making the music platform another form of social media in its own right. With the dawn of the TikTok era bolstering music discovery even more, the landscape is a free-for-all where genres, eras and tribes diverge to reflect youth's expressions of multifaceted, modern self-identities.

What emanates is a plethora of opportunities for brands and artists alike – from virtual reality concerts within gaming, to new possibilities in sponsorships and partnerships. With trends and culture continuing to evolve at a rapid pace and the future of music becoming even more unpredictable, not only does the significance of brands' awareness of current behaviours become amplified, but their understanding of Gen A's unique core values that will capture this generation for years to come.





ASA Names & Shames Influencers who Repeatedly Flout Disclosure Rules

Food supplement brand Huel and podcast host Steven Bartlett have been reprimanded by the ASA for failing to disclose commercial intent following an ad that featured in an episode of *The Diary of a CEO*. The response was the result of a single complaint, demonstrating the regulator's commitment to cleaning up the industry.

Non-disclosure Erodes Consumer Trust

Earlier this year, the DCMS Report on Influencer Culture was critical of the ASA's ability to regulate influencer advertising effectively, with influencers repeatedly flouting the rules around disclosure. The rules state that brands and influencers should declare any material connection when collaborating on sponsored content.

Lack of effective disclosure erodes trust with an audience, calling into question the integrity of a channel that depends heavily on authenticity.

ASA Fights Fire with Fire!

While social platforms can take action against individuals for non-disclosure through account suspension, the ASA themselves cannot impose financial penalties or haul influencers and brands through the courts. That said, they may be getting tougher.

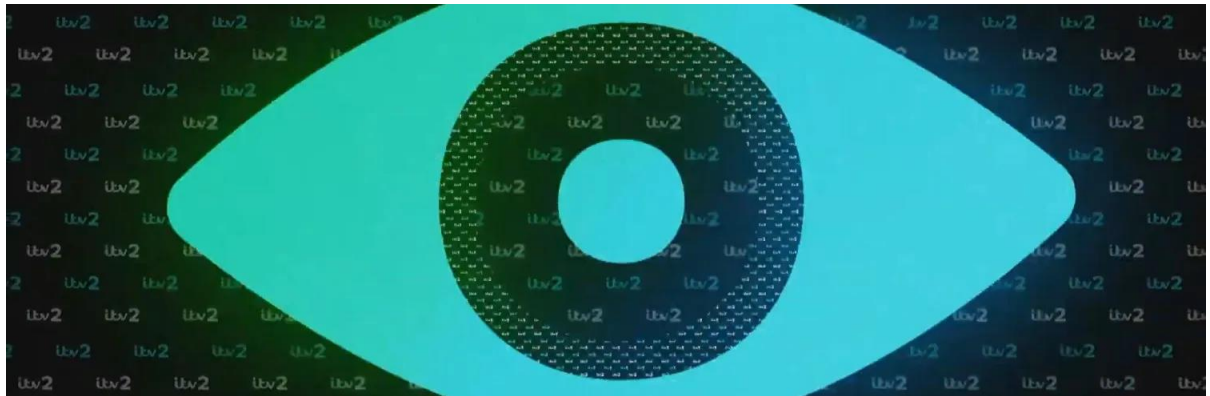
Last year, a dedicated webpage was set up to name and shame influencers who failed repeatedly to disclose ads masquerading as posts. These influencers were subject to enhanced monitoring. Yet placement on a naughty list provided small deterrent for many who continued to break the rules. The ASA is now escalating action by taking out their own branded ads against these influencers on Instagram - targeting the very same audiences that the influencers have profited from misleading.

Brands Beware while Regulators Play Catch-up

In a channel where trust is currency, this approach may be effective. No-one likes to be lied to. With that being said, negative publicity is not always a bad thing in the influencer sphere and arguably, for those whose reputation is built upon courting controversy, integrity may not outweigh the commercial benefits. That is why it's crucial for brands to ensure that their influencer partners have a genuine affinity to the brand or product they are asking them to promote. Recruiting talent that do not need to deceive their followers in order to reap rewards - because the brief is properly aligned to their interests, values and previous content - will help clean up the industry and the root.

For now, the ASA's crack down seems to be targeting influencers rather than brands. But there's a sense that regulators are still playing catch-up with an industry that's moved from emergence to growth phase. The rules for disclosure apply to all types of posts across all social platforms, so it's important to ensure all branded content is labelled correctly. Brands can further protect consumer trust by ensuring they have a compliance strategy in place, so they can respond quickly if they or their influencer partners do make a mistake.





Big Brother's Big Return

After five years absence from our screens, Big Brother will return in 2023 to its new home on ITV2 and ITVX. Along with sister show Love Island, it crowns ITV with two of the biggest reality shows in the UK. With its re-branded format, ITV will be hoping to awaken this sleeping giant.

The Doors are Back Open

Launched back in 2000 on Channel 4, before moving over to Channel 5 in 2011, Big Brother dominated for 18 years. Over the decades, Big Brother became one of the biggest programmes on these channels after consistently performing well, attracting an average 9.7m viewers a year. However, in its final series, only 2.4m people watched, 62% lower than Love Island's following this year.

ITV's Big Move

Clearly, fans have been hankering for Big Brother's return. After the announcement during the Love Island Final on ITV2, Twitter blew up with Big Brother trending No.1 in the UK, stealing the limelight from the final... But could all this excitement wear off?

It's hard to say where ITV will take Big Brother. A re-brand was crucial but how much will the format change? The joys of Big Brother's greatest moments will certainly survive the show's evolution, while many of us are still hungry for the drama that we loved.

The monumental factor for ITV is the introduction of ITVX, a new platform launching in November. Considerable content for Big Brother, aside from the daily shows, is rumoured to be scheduled for ITVX. This is where ITV are going to evaluate the early success or failure for their new projects. ITVX is aiming to provide content that would 'especially engage with younger viewers' - the brainchild of Director of Reality Commissioning, Paul Mortimer. Such engagement would be essential for ITV to put this show back on the top block alongside Love Island.

A Vital Force

Along with ITV's other huge entertainment shows and Dramas, their acquisition of Big Brother is good news for everyone in advertising. The demand for advertisers to access Love Island is too vast to accommodate every brand. Big Brother's return will provide clients with another chance to align with a mammoth reality show.

ITVX x Big Brother

It's an exciting time for TV with BB returning. The hype around the announcement is likely to ensure that Big Brother succeeds and can look forward to a prosperous future. For ITV and the ITVX product, this show will be the catalyst for its launch and will provide endless opportunities to show the public what their new product can offer.



This month's mini stories

UK Black Pride, co-founded by Dr. Lady Phyll, was this year held at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford, on August 14th. This year's theme was POWER – dedicated to the loving power of Black Queer women who founded UK Black Pride. UK Black Pride is Europe's largest celebration, with 25,000 people in attendance.

With major sponsors, such as TikTok, IHG, NYX & Tesco, there were some key activations and partnerships, highlighting the history and foundations of the event. This included the series #TikTokUnpacks to learn about the experience & history of Black+ LGBTQIA+ people, and NYX partnering with 5 rising creatives to share their stories and elevate their profiles, with yearlong support from the brand.



E-sports could be set to make its full Commonwealth Games debut in 2026, following a successful pilot event which ran alongside this year's games in Birmingham. And while there are currently no plans to introduce the sport to the Olympics, Commonwealth Games President Dame Louise Martin has hinted that gaming has a role to play in the next games. With the global e-sports market valued at over \$1bn and growing, the time for brands to cement themselves within the industry is now.

The shortlists for this year's prestigious Media Week Awards were announced and the7stars scored a total of 13 entries, including Media Agency of the Year. With the number of entries for the awards increasing by 50 (reaching 480 entries), this large number of nominations speaks to the dedication of the team at the7stars as well as the people-first culture that continues to create a healthy working environment. Winners for the Media Week Awards will be announced on Thursday 20th October at Grosvenor House in London.

