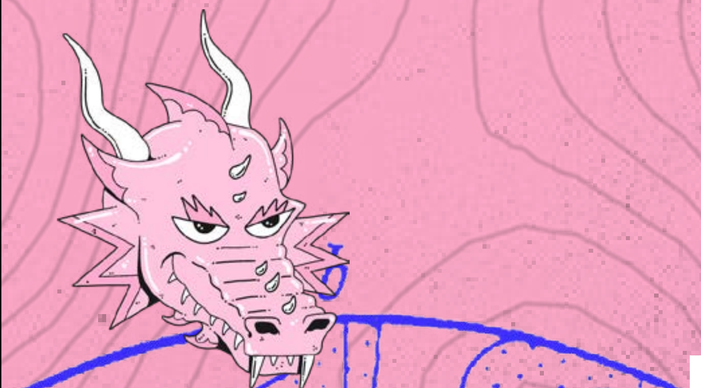
HERE BE DRAGONS



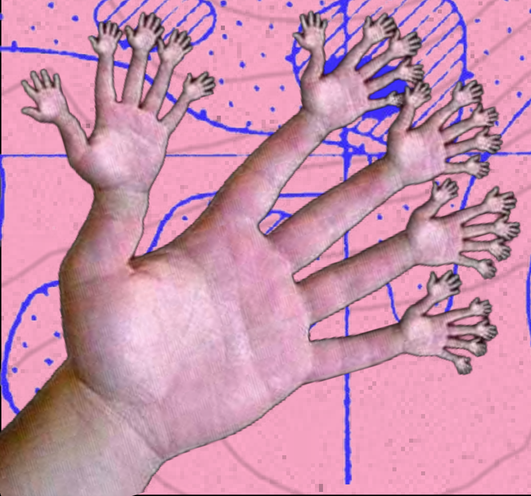


2027 PRIMER

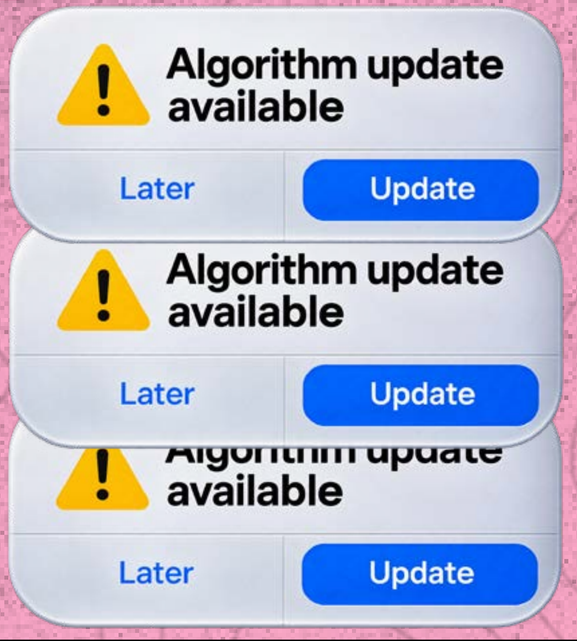
SOCIAL-FIRST PR

TAILWINDS

REPORT

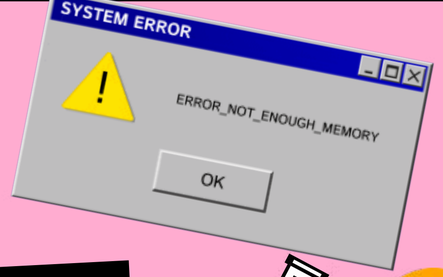






INTRO

THE ALGORITHM HAS CHANGED. AGAIN. AGAIN. AGAIN.



Another day, another algorithm update. Another platform to master. Another trend your brand is already three days too late to jump on.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

Welcome to communications in 2027. Where culture moves at the speed of a scroll, everyone's a creator, and the next big brand moment could start in a Reddit thread, a TikTok comment or a niche community you've never heard of.

The old PR playbook? It's giving outdated.

For years, brands and agencies created campaigns, pitched them to the press and then brought in the community manager a few days later to see how it all landed on social.

Now, the most culturally relevant ideas are born on social, fuelled by communities and propelled into the mainstream by the obsessed.



And in a world drowning in AI-generated content, attention is harder to earn, showing up for real matters more, and **being interesting beats being everywhere.**

When brands stop treating social as an echo chamber and start using it as their primary engine for creative ideation and earned media, mainstream impact naturally follows – that's social-first PR.

Across 4 bite-sized chapters, this report explores how brands can spot the signals, join the right conversations and create ideas that travel from the feed to fame.

PART 1

Find the signal before it becomes the trend

PART 2

There's no such thing as 'social culture'

PART 3

How ideas travel

PART 4

The human advantage in the age of AI clutter

PART 5

2027 Brand Playbook

PART 01

NICHE IS THE NEW MAINSTREAM



Forget trying to appeal to everyone. Some of the biggest cultural moments of 2025–26 started with audiences that most brands weren't even paying attention to.

1

Forest Bikes

The London e-bike operator revived a 2012 viral figure, '£1 Fish Man', and recast him as its 'Chief Bargain Officer' to launch £1 rides – which soon went viral.



2

@BigManny

The biochemical science graduate started making TikTok videos to see what would burn with a Bunsen burner. He went on to write kids' science books and was commissioned by the government for an anti-knife campaign.



THAT'S NICHE TO MAINSTREAM.

That's the opportunity for social-first PR. Find the communities shaping tomorrow's culture, understand what makes them tick, and create something worth talking about.

CASE STUDY

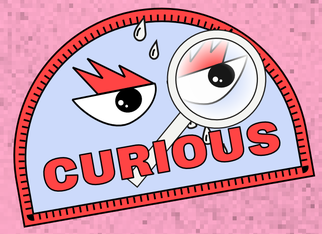
THE PICKLE PUFFER



A JACKET. FILLED WITH ACTUAL PICKLES.

Pickle lovers and haters spent months arguing in comment threads across Reddit and TikTok. Rather than talking to "everyone", KFC zeroed in on that obsession and created a wearable jacket filled with actual pickles.

By turning an online joke into a real-world object, they validated the communities in the most absurd way.



THE LESSON

"Niching down" doesn't mean shrinking your audience. It's more about sharpening your signal and messaging.



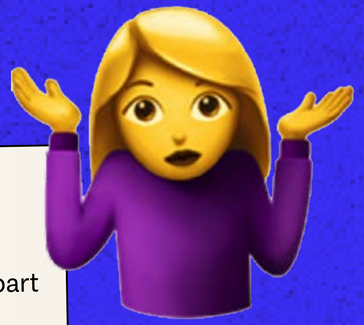
FOOTNOTE *

Otaku is the Japanese word for someone with an intense, devoted interest in a specific subculture. They want to be first to know anything that goes on in their area of interest. And you want to be known as their first port of call for that news or update.

PART 02

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS 'SOCIAL CULTURE'

It's become one of those industry buzzwords that's used so much it's lost all meaning.



The internet isn't one big conversation. It's millions of smaller ones. And they all play by different rules.

What gets people talking on Reddit or Discord is worlds apart from what blows up on TikTok. Yet we lump it all together.

Every platform has its own culture, codes and communities. Understanding those differences is where the opportunity lies.

Short-form gets you noticed.

Long-form gives people a reason to care.

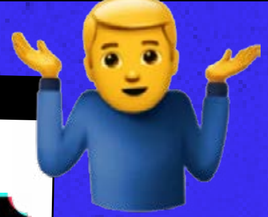
In 2027, smart brands aren't asking, "What's our social strategy?"

They'll ask:
"Who's already having the conversation we want to be part of?"

Then work backwards. sdrawkcab krow nehT

TIKTOK.EXE

Fast entertainment. Trends, sounds, humour and participation drive discovery.



INSTAGRAM.EXE

Aesthetics, aspiration and identity. Where people curate who they are (and yes, Reels is having a moment).

REDDIT & DISCORD.EXE

Deep lore, niche obsessions and unfiltered conversations. Authenticity is everything.

LINKEDIN.EXE

Credibility is currency. Expertise and opinions beat empty thought leadership.

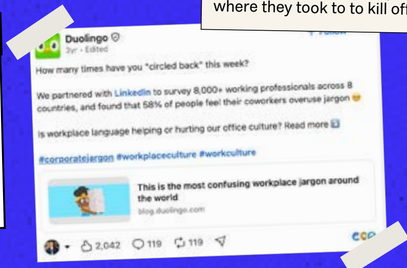
YOUTUBE.EXE

Depth beats distraction. Shorts drive discovery; longer-form content builds trust and authority.

DUOLINGO

Duo Lingo reside best in class for mastering different platforms.

Linkedin is used to discuss workplace topics (eg office jargon) with its usual dose of wit baked in (attached - remove the 3yrs ago), while TikTok is where they took to to kill off their mascot.



THE LESSON

1. **Find your niche.**
   Identify communities that matter to your brand.
2. **Know the conversation.**
   Understand what they care about, debate and obsess over.
3. **Find where it lives.**
   Go where those conversations are happening.
4. **Earn your place.**
   Contribute something worthwhile. Don't interrupt the feed.

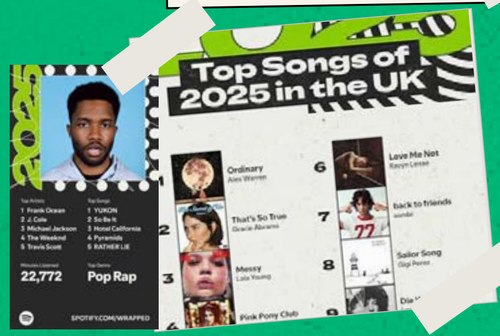
PART 03

HOW IDEAS TRAVEL

Why do some campaigns generate millions of organic views while others disappear into the feed?

It comes down to **shareability.** People share content to entertain mates, show off knowledge, express opinions or join conversations.

Brands can buy reach, but getting people to share requires a different approach.

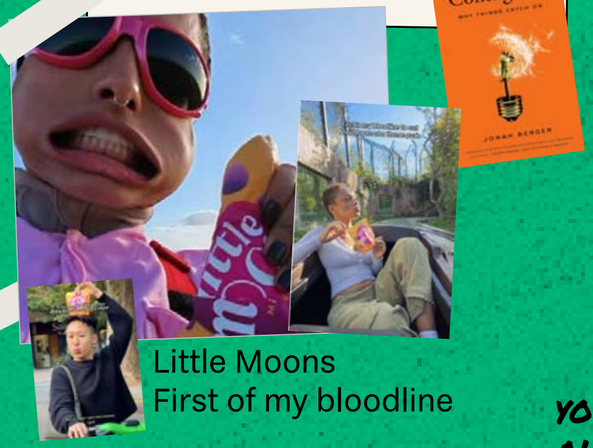


Spotify Wrapped



Death of Duolingo

In his bestselling book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, behavioural scientist Jonah Berger identified six psychological drivers behind why people share, offering marketers a useful framework for creating ideas that travel.



Little Moons
First of my bloodline



GREGGS X MADAME TUSSAUDS

When Here Be Dragons made the Greggs sausage roll act like an A-list celebrity and turned it into a waxwork in Madame Tussauds for National Sausage Roll Day, we weren't just playing.

We understood the UK's response to having a baked good next to national icon David Attenborough. Horror, delight, disgust, lols – we tapped into people's sense of cultural self to get them to respond – and **they screamed on social first.**

Campaigns don't need all six ingredients, but they do need reasons to share.

For social-first PR, that means creating ideas that travel from brand channels into group chats, communities, creator content and mainstream media.

THE SIX RULES

OF SHAREABILITY

01 SOCIAL CURRENCY

MAKE ME LOOK GOOD.

People share things that make them look clever or in the know. Spotify Wrapped nailed this, turning listening data into an annual social flex.

02 RELATABLE MOMENTS

LIVE RENT-FREE.

Great brands own everyday moments. Pringles owns indulgence, making its product synonymous with couch-based activities.

03 EMOTION AND 'WTF'

MAKE ME FEEL SOMETHING.

Joy, surprise and controversy get people talking. Duolingo's 'Duo is Dead' campaign sparked memes, speculation and debate. Killing your mascot was a brave move that gave its community plenty to talk about.

04 PUBLIC

MAKE IT A MOVEMENT.

The easier something is to copy, the faster it spreads. TikTok's 'First of My Bloodline' trend turned everyday milestones into shareable moments, inviting millions to join in.

05 PRACTICAL VALUE

MAKE ME USEFUL.

People share things that help others. Shopify's free calculators, name generators and templates build familiarity with aspiring entrepreneurs before they've even launched a business.

06 STORIES

GIVE ME SOMETHING TO TELL.

People remember stories, not product messages. Great campaigns create narratives worth retelling, with the brand naturally woven in.

YOU DON'T NEED ALL SIX. BUT YOU NEED A REASON TO SHARE.

THE LESSON

Mainstream media now goes to social to find the stories – use the six rules of shareability to make sure they find you.

PART 04

The human advantage in the age of AI clutter

Generative AI has lowered the barrier to entry to almost nothing. You can create images (and soon, videos) in seconds and for almost no money.

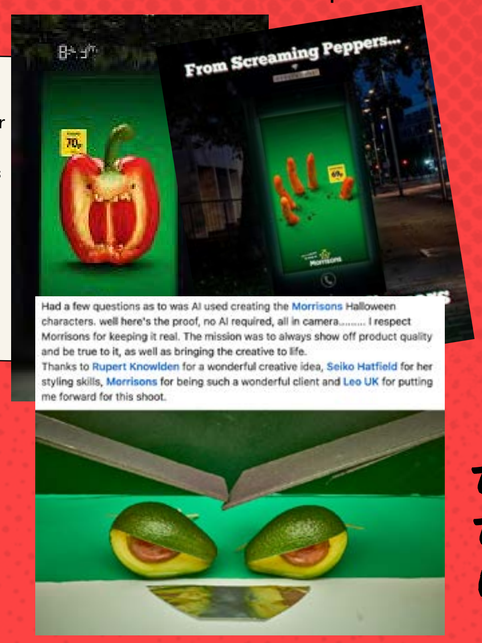
But when content is infinite, people become more discerning with where they spend their time. With only 24 hours in a day – 8 of them spent sleeping, 8 of them spent working – you want quality, not quantity.

This doesn't mean you need to direct a feature film for every post, but it does mean you need to be real – and show the receipts.

EXAMPLE

MORRISONS

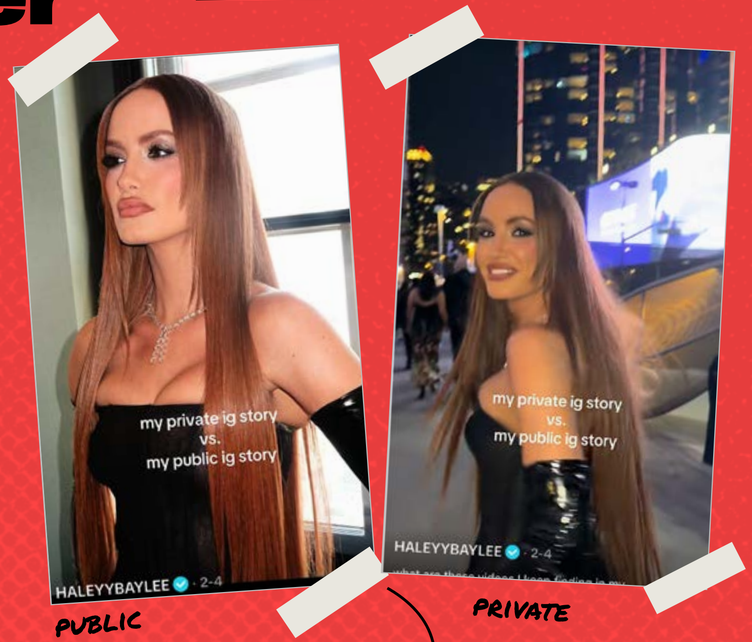
Morrisons knows this and ran an out-of-home campaign over Halloween. They made it look like their fruit and veg was screaming at you. The seeing-eye effect of these images was striking but clean.
But beyond that, and due to comments that speculated on the campaign's use of AI, the lead designer jumped on LinkedIn to share BTS proof of how he meticulously created the assets by hand. This way there's no doubt this was not AI slop.





On TikTok, **the value of the post is more important than the production value of the post.** And Instagram is starting to lean the same way, moving from highly curated aesthetic feeds to more authentic ways of sharing yourself.

Earlier this year Instagram creators decided to expose themselves by sharing their public vs private Stories – showing the massive difference between how they want to be seen and how they would be seen if you saw them on the street.



PUBLIC PRIVATE

Via TikTok: @haleyybaylee

This had a massive impact on their relationship with the community – not only was it humanising, but it also showed the person behind the content.
When creators pulled back the curtain to show, side by side, the difference between their hyper-curated public grids and their raw, chaotic private photo dumps, they gave their fans more reasons to relate to them.

The transparent act showed how human we all are. Alone this would not have seemed like a big deal. But it is one of a hundred tiny steps that creators took to build their relationship with their audience.

THE THING YOU DON'T WANT TO SHARE MAKES YOU THE MOST INTERESTING + AUTHENTIC

THE LESSON

Too often brands think that because sharing something on social media is "free", there's no downside to posting slop. But you're wasting your followers' time – they might unfollow, or worse, make a habit of scrolling past.

By avoiding the AI slop and showing your working, you show that you value their time. And in turn they'll value your effort.

2027 BRAND PLAYBOOK

Five things brands need to get right

Culture moves fast, communities call the shots and audiences can spot brands trying too hard.

Here are five ways to make social-first PR work harder in 2027.

01

BUILD FOR SPEED. NOT SIGN-OFF.

By the time your campaign clears six rounds of approval, the internet has moved on.

Get PR, social and creative teams working together, with faster sign-off and the freedom to turn emerging trends into earned opportunities. Being three days late to a joke rarely ends well.

02

DON'T JUST LISTEN TO SOCIAL, LIVE IT.

You can't understand a community from a dashboard.

Every corner of the internet has its own language, in-jokes and obsessions. Spend time there, follow the creators shaping conversations and understand what makes people tick. The best PR ideas come from being part of culture, not monitoring it.

03

MATCH THE PLATFORM'S ENERGY.

Your TikTok audience doesn't want your LinkedIn content with a trending sound slapped over it.

Create ideas native to the platform, designed to spark shares and conversations that can travel into earned media.

04

GIVE YOUR COMMUNITY SOMETHING TO DO.

The comments section is part of the creative, not just customer service.

Give people something to debate, decode, remix or share. Reward superfans with Easter eggs and niche references. And when people engage, join in. **The more they make an idea their own, the further it travels.**

05

GET PHYSICAL. MAKE IT REAL.

The internet loves a good IRL moment.

Unexpected collaborations, ridiculous product drops, bizarre meet-ups (Lime-bike joust, anyone?) that have no business existing can make brilliant social-first PR. Create something people want to film, share and talk about.

Sometimes the best way to get the internet talking is to give it something worth leaving the house for.



LIME-BIKE JOUST, ANYONE?

HERE BE DRAGONS

POSTCARD FROM THE FUTURE

READING IT IS ONE THING... USING IT IS ANOTHER. BOOK A TAILWINDS SESSION WITH THE HBD TEAM.

WE'LL TAKE YOUR BRAND, FIND THE COMMUNITIES ALREADY TALKING ABOUT YOUR WORLD AND SHOW YOU WHERE THE TAILWINDS ARE, ALONG WITH A FEW IDEAS TO RIDE THEM.

AHOY@HEREBEDRAGONS.CO

Posted 2026

Dear 2027,

Weather's great. The algorithm changed again (obviously).

The brands that won this year weren't everywhere. They were somewhere. The right Reddit thread. The right group chat. The right comment section.

They signed things off in hours, not weeks. They made stuff worth leaving the house for. And they showed their working.

Are they still jousting on Lime bikes?. It did numbers.

Wish you were here... you still can be. Start in the comments.

Love,
2028 x

P.S. DON'T SEND US ANY AI SLOP X