

CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES:

How brands can show what they stand for



A person with dark hair, seen from the back, wearing a white button-down shirt, is pointing their right index finger towards a large digital screen. The screen displays a financial candlestick chart with green and red bars and a blue trend line. The background is dark, and the overall scene is dimly lit, focusing attention on the person and the screen.

Content

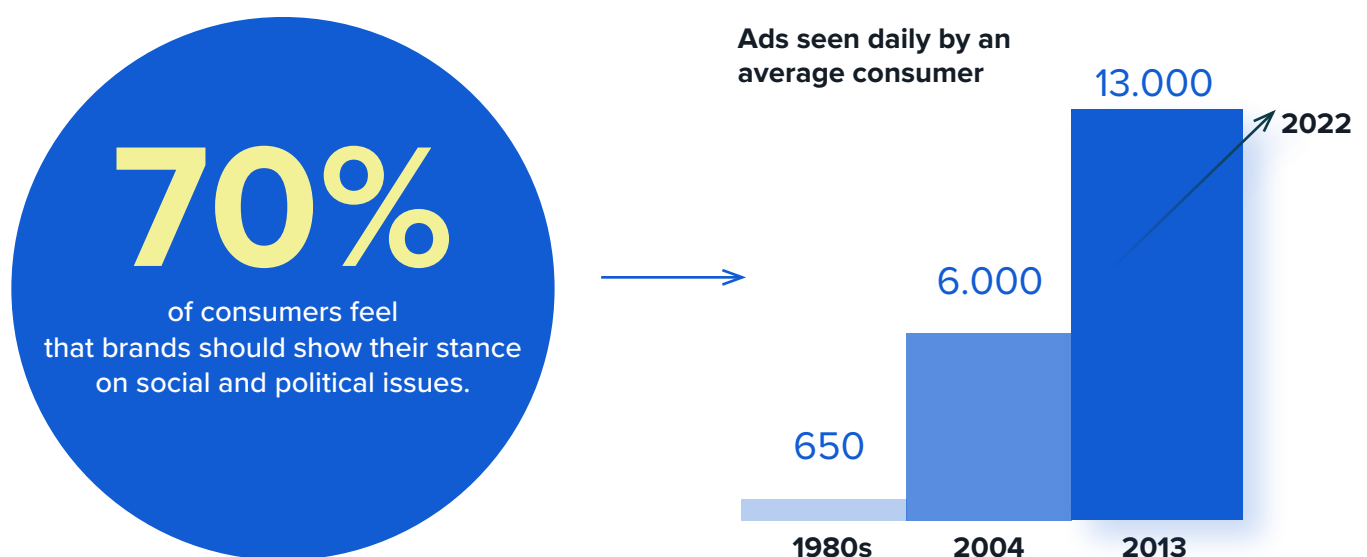
**CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES:
How brands can show
what they stand for**

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Introduction

Discussions on social media are shaping the narrative in today's society. To protect your brand's value, it's more important than ever to join in conversation and show what your brand stands for.

Research shows that around 70% of consumers now find it important for brands to be clear about their stance on socio-political issues. At the same time, the number of ads a consumer sees each day has been rising sharply for decades. This makes it difficult for brands to be visible at all, even if they do want to show their position through purpose marketing activities. Meanwhile, brands are often accused of greenwashing, pinkwashing and wokewashing on social media if they communicate a position that does not align with the way consumers already perceive them.



Source: Sprout Social, <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/data/brands-creating-change/>; Wirtschaftswoche, <https://www.wiwo.de/unternehmen/dienstleister/werbesprech-nie-war-die-botschaft-so-wertlos-wie-heute/23163046.html>

For brand managers, it's not a question of whether your brand should show its stance, but how to gain visibility for your purpose marketing in the first place.

In our experience, the scientifically sound answer to that question lies in combining innovative social and expert listening combined with classical marketing theory. In this white paper, we show you a universal game plan to help you bring visibility to your brand's authentic stance on the issues that matter.

Our game plan is based on a research project that we conducted in partnership with the Marketing Department at the Luigi Bocconi University of Economics in Milan, Italy. The findings we present in this white paper are based on data that was collected largely by a group of Brand Management students at Bocconi under the supervision of two TD Reply experts.

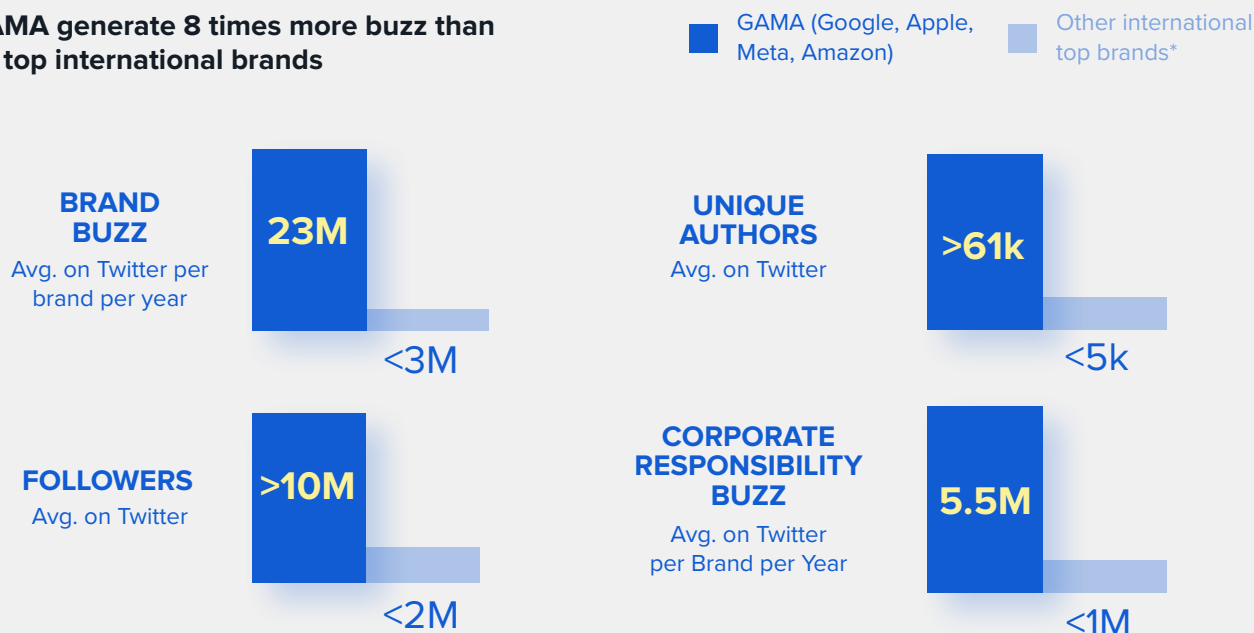
The visibility problem

Social listening platforms like Brandwatch show that a few super brands (especially Google, Apple, Meta, Amazon, known collectively as GAMA) attract many times more social media attention than similar leading international brands.

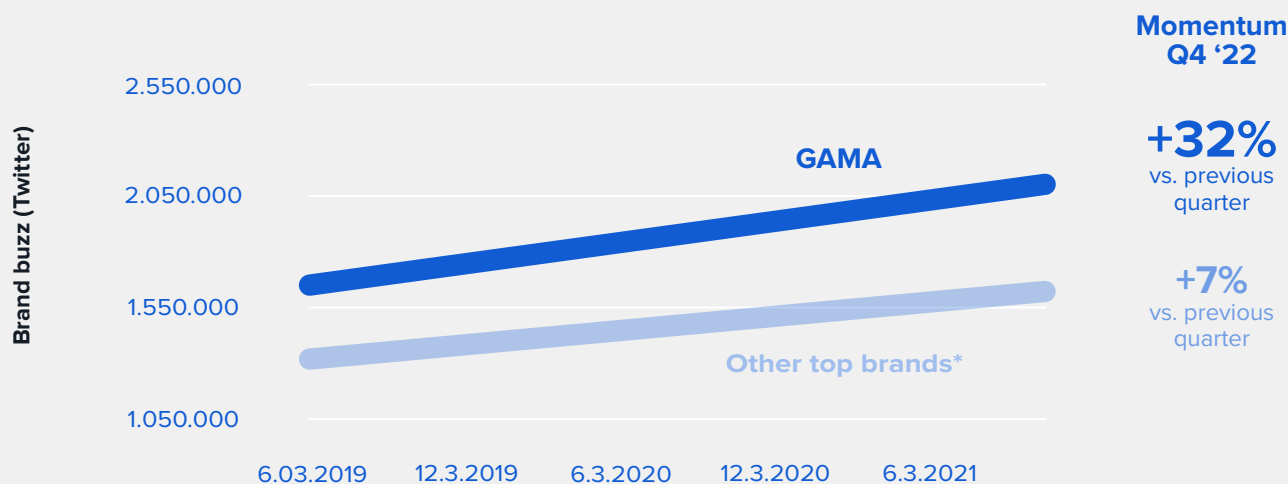
This is clear if you look at the metric known as 'buzz'. The more often consumers mention a brand on social media, the greater its buzz becomes, compared to other brands. Our research shows that GAMA alone generate eight times more buzz on Twitter than around twenty other major international brands used for comparison, including American Airlines, Ben & Jerry's, Budweiser, Burger King, Coca-Cola, Gucci, H&M, Ikea, McDonalds, Nestle, New Balance, Nike, Pepsi, Prada, Qantas, Starbucks, Tesla and Walmart.

GAMA overshadow brands outside the big tech bubble on social media, making it difficult for those brands to generate enough visibility for their purpose marketing.

#1 GAMA generate 8 times more buzz than other top international brands



#2 The gap is widening



Research period: Jan. 2019 – Nov. 2021; Twitter buzz in English. Obtained via Brandwatch. *Comparison brands: American Airlines, Ben & Jerry's, Budweiser, Burger King, Coca-Cola, Gucci, H&M, Ikea, McDonalds, Nestle, New Balance, Nike, Pepsi, Prada, Qantas, Starbucks, Tesla, Walmart.



Measuring 'buzz'

The more often consumers mention a brand in discussions on social media, the higher the brand's buzz metric is, in comparison with other brands.

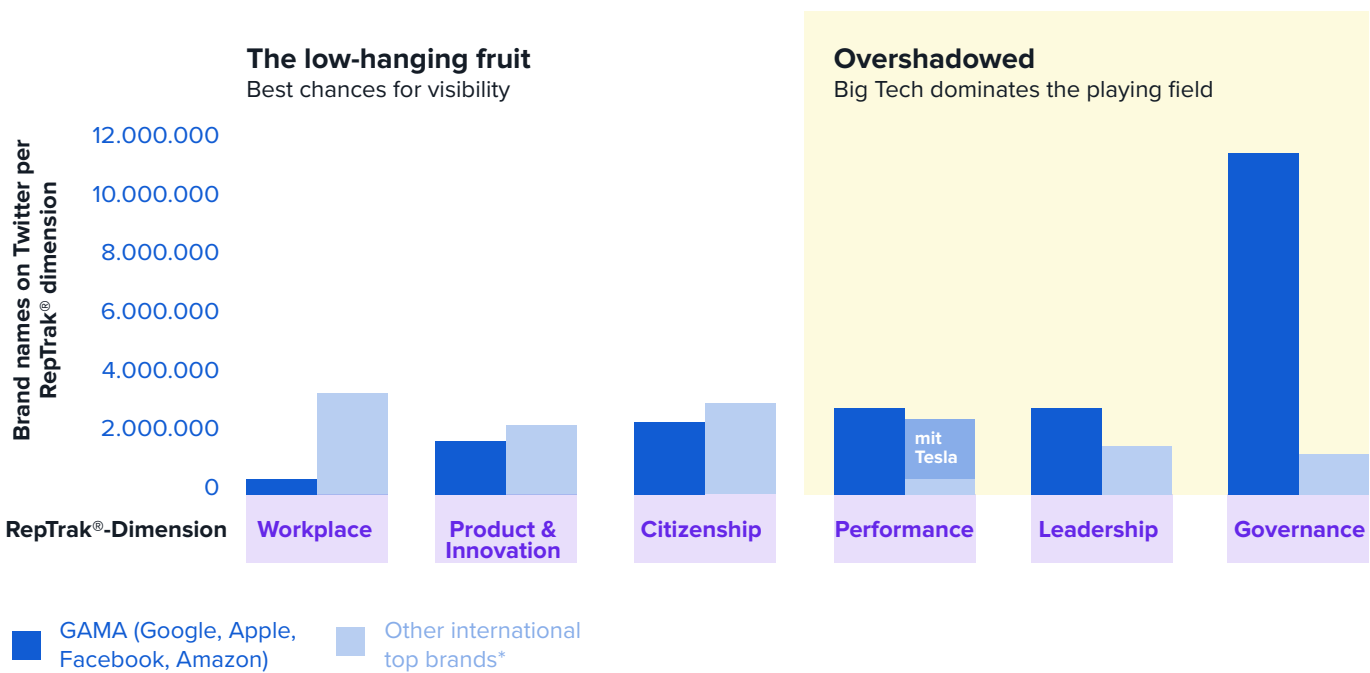
Focusing on the right topics

If we break buzz down into topics, we find some topics in which GAMA generates far less buzz than other companies. This gives other brands the potential for high visibility on those topics, despite GAMA's dominance elsewhere.

In our analysis, we broke buzz down into the dimensions used by the renowned research firm RepTrak® to track corporate reputation. Those dimensions are:

- **Workplace** (treatment of employees, equal opportunities, quality of workplace)
- **Product & Innovation** (product quality and perception, ability to innovate)
- **Citizenship** (environmental awareness, support for good causes, positive impact on society)
- **Performance** (profitability, growth, future potential)
- **Leadership** (quality and charisma of management, vision for the future)
- **Governance** (transparency, business ethics)

For each of these dimensions, we created sets of keywords in the Brandwatch platform, which we used to analyse the amount of buzz for each brand. We did this by comparing how much buzz the GAMA companies generated in each dimension, compared to the other companies.



Investigation period: Jan. 2019 – Nov. 2021, Data: Twitter Buzz in English language. All data retrieved using Brandwatch.
*Comparison brands: American Airlines, Ben & Jerry's, Budweiser, Burger King, Coca-Cola, Gucci, H&M, Ikea, McDonalds, Nestle, New Balance, Nike, Pepsi, Prada, Qantas, Starbucks, Tesla, Walmart.

The analysis showed that GAMA generate significantly less buzz than other companies in the corporate reputation dimensions Workplace, Product & Innovation and Citizenship. GAMA are particularly weak in Workplace. This means that companies have the greatest potential for

achieving visibility in these three dimensions. In contrast, Governance and Leadership are clearly overshadowed by GAMA. When it comes to Performance, Tesla stands out as a company capable of generating a lot of buzz and stepping out of the GAMA shadow.

The right strategy and timing

In addition to focusing on advantageous reputation dimensions like Workplace, companies can achieve better visibility by choosing the right topic at the right time.

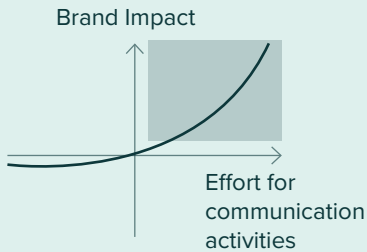
To see how well your brand is picking its topics and timing, **brand impact** is an important metric to watch. This refers to an uplift in **positive buzz (in other words, buzz shaped by positive sentiment)** as a direct result of the brand’s communication strategy. An uplift in positive buzz is almost always the desired outcome of any brand’s communications. The opposite is **negative buzz**, better known as media fallout or a firestorm, which is driven by negative consumer sentiment towards a brand. When that happens, the brand’s buzz increases, but the primary sentiment driving the discussion is negative. This is sometimes used as an intentional viral marketing technique, following the logic of ‘there’s no such thing as bad publicity.’

When it comes to timing, there are three main strategies your brand can take:



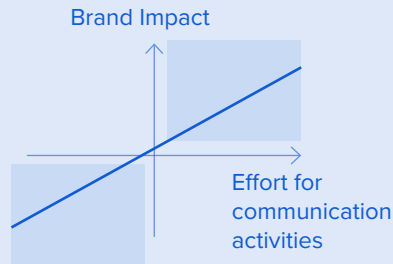
Hot topics

Emerging topics with high upside potential



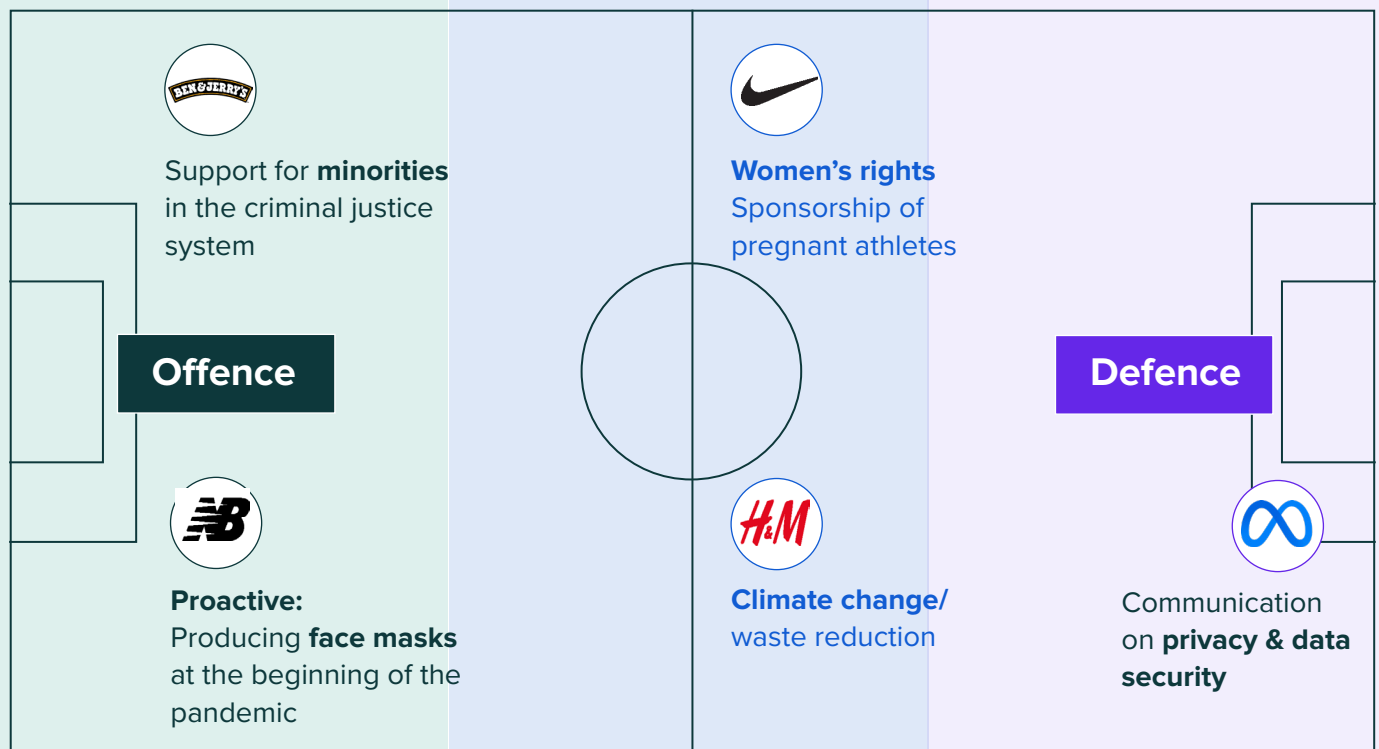
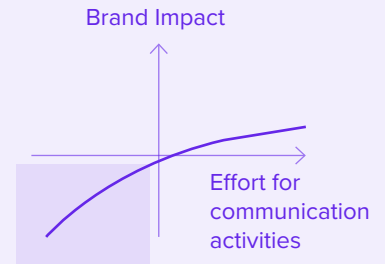
Core issues

Battles to be chosen carefully with high polarisation potential



Unavoidables

Necessary 'housekeeping' topics with low upside potential



Score a hit

- **Respond quickly** to emerging issues
- **Lead the discussion** on niche topics

Shape and stabilise

- **Choose your battles** carefully
- **Fight through** battles with consistency and a long-term view

Secure your ground

- Raising **general awareness** of issues relevant to your sector
- **Continuous communication**

Strategy for Visibility

Mastering the proactive strategy by spotting trends early

Mastering the proactive strategy allows you to achieve a strong brand impact while gaining visibility for making a genuine contribution to society. **It all starts with spotting the right trends on time.**

To help you, we've developed our scientific, data-based 'Listening' approach, which combines Expert Listening, Social Listening and Search Listening:



Expert Listening

Having emerging trends on your radar

Special tools like Sonar (a data-driven trend radar by TD Reply) let you continually analyse discussions in scientific publications, expert blogs and other expert media. These media platforms are usually where trends originate. Sonar lets you spot emerging trends that are growing fast or gaining momentum in expert discussions.



Search Listening

Determining a trend's maturity level

Not every trend you spot in expert discussions is actually 'mature' enough in terms of consumer interest to become the focus of your communication strategy. To determine how mature a trend is, it's important to take consumer interest into account. Online searches are a reliable indicator of consumer interest. We apply a continuous and granular analysis of relevant search volume data. After that, we use statistical methods to compare the level of interest in a trend among experts versus consumers. A trend is usually considered mature when experts and consumers are equally interested in it.



Social Listening

Determining brand fit

In addition to checking the trend's maturity level, you want to be sure that it's a good fit for your brand. The more a trend fits with your brand's image, the higher the brand impact you can achieve by communicating about it. A trend is a good fit when it is associated in consumer discussions with values that you want your brand's image to be associated with. The same applies if the trend connects your brand in consumers' minds with other communication partners (such as influencers and other brands) that you want to be connected with. We also use a data-driven approach to determine the brand fit based on social listening and our brand research methodology.

Expert discussions
What are the experts
talking about?



**Expert
Listening**
Spotting trends
early

Consumer interest
What are consumers
looking for?



**Search
Listening**
Determining trend
maturity

Consumer discussions
What are consumers
talking about?



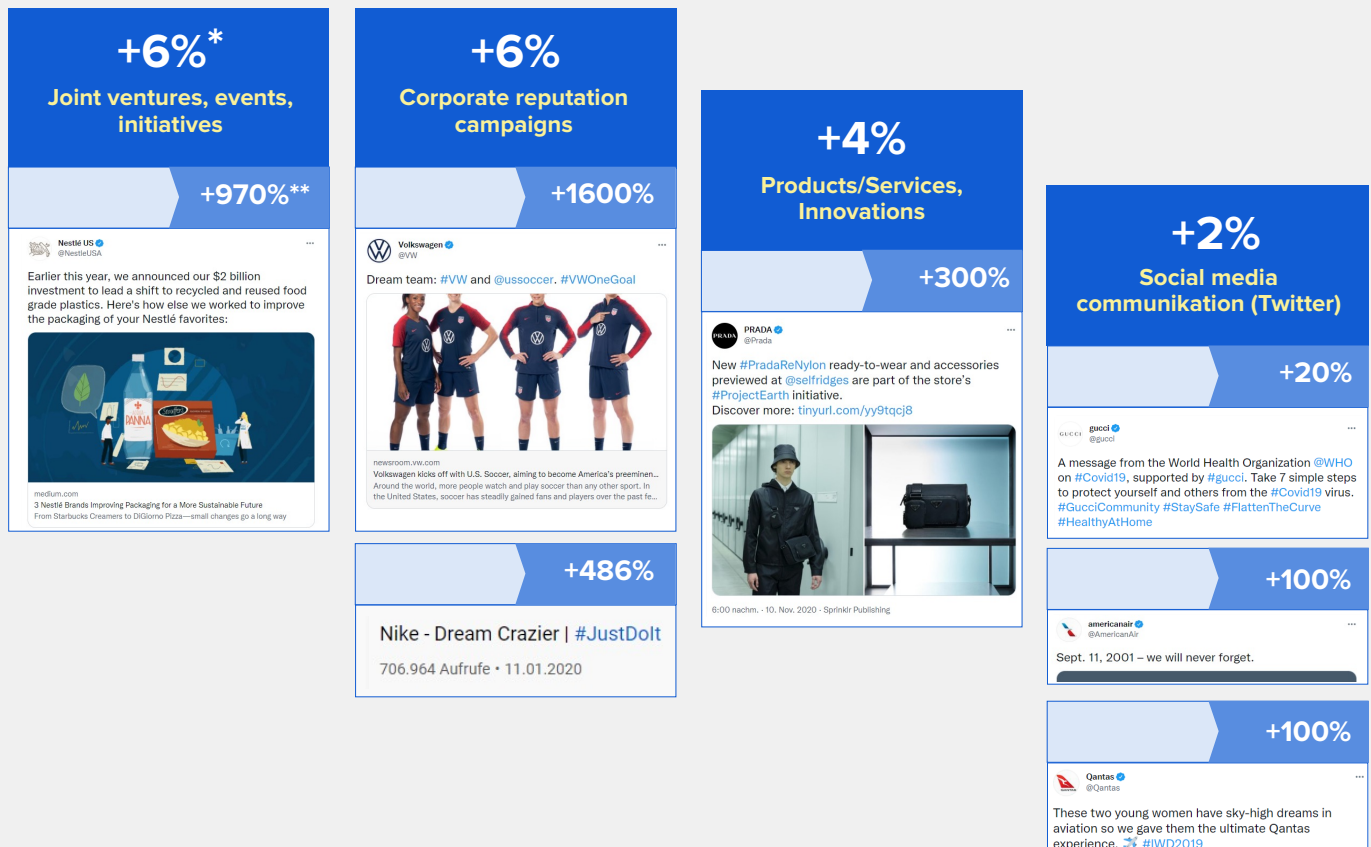
**Social
Listening**
Determining
brand fit

One initiative is not enough

Our joint research project conducted with students from the Luigi Bocconi University of Economics proves that it takes more than just a one-off initiative to authentically communicate your brand's stance on an issue. We analysed 30 leading international brands to see which of their communication activities achieved the **highest average brand impact (positive buzz uplift) over a two-year period.**

We found that leading international brands achieved a brand impact of +18% by combining different activities. A one-off initiative (like a joint venture, event or corporate reputation campaign) resulted in +2% to +6% increase in social media brand impact. Bottom line: it takes a series of activities to maximise your brand's impact.

Average Brand Impact



*Average uplift in positive buzz over a 2-year period (brand impact), including all activities in the category (successful and less successful).

** Short-term brand impact of individual activities listed here as an example
Study period: 2020-2022

Quick guide: Effectively communicating what your brand stands for

1

Step out of GAMA's shadow by focusing on topics where GAMA generate relatively little buzz.

4

To master a proactive communications strategy more easily, leverage data-driven trend research and look for niche topics to claim.

2

Master reactive strategies for visibility, like actively communicating on topics when necessary.

5

Don't expect too much brand impact from a single initiative. It takes a series of coordinated initiatives to achieve lasting success.

3

The top social issues of the day are constantly changing. Take a long-term view and stay true to your brand's authentic self.

6

Continuously track how your communication activities are performing, ideally using innovative data-driven methods.

Contact

Do you want to make your brand positioning as successful as possible?

We can help.

Contact us today to start benefiting from our data expertise and experience.



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**We drive change
through data**

