June 2021

Harnessing the power of Digital Consumer Intelligence to understand the future of work

Brandwatch | **A new kind of intelligence**

Introductions

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What we do

We bring **structure** and **meaning** to the voices of billions.

Digital Consumer Intelligence (DCI) is our integrated approach for synthesizing online data for **richer consumer insights** and **data-based decision making**.

How we do it

Content collection

We have **the largest repository of social data available** with 10 years of historical content

Data enrichment

In addition to rich metadata collected, **we use artificial intelligence, machine learning, NLP and text analytics** to identify sentiment, emotions, image insights and more

Visualization tools and techniques

We leverage **segmentation techniques to categorize data** in meaningful ways. **Strong visualization** tools are used to build real-time dashboards for data storytelling

Insights generation and socialization

The Brandwatch suite enables the synthesis and interpretation of big data to **develop insights at scale** faster and more cost-effectively than other research modalities

The future of work

What have we learned?

✅ Project framework

Questions addressed:

- What are people saying about the future of work?

- What topics are contributing to positive and negative discussion about returning to work? (e.g. remote work, social distancing, requisite vaccination)

- Are there certain sites people are posting about future of work/returning to work most often?

- Are there topics emerging in the data specific/unique to the tech industry?

- How does third party research align with Brandwatch findings? (Can we weave a broader story with outside data?)

We looked at two years of US social data in the US and excluded news and retweets to isolate consumer opinion.

Thought leadership stories were often shared on Twitter

People shared thought leadership stories on Twitter from McKinsey, Harvard Business Review and MIT Sloan.

Frequent **topics included hybrid work, remote work, and managing an evolving workforce**.

Online engagement was high for Future of Work stories from top business outlets like Forbes, Business Insider and Bloomberg.

2020 events had an irrefutable impact on work discussion, particularly COVID and the BLM movement

March 2020

At the onset of the pandemic, non-essential employees began working from home, **introducing a dramatic rise in discussion about work flexibility**

May 2020

The murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter activism **drove an online focus on diversity in the workplace**

Fall 2020

WFH for now, turns to WFH indefinitely. As people continued working from home, **discussion about work/life balance** resurfaced as people juggled responsibilities

Early 2021

As vaccines rolled out, employees were **concerned about return to work and office safety**

Spring 2021

As the economy reopens, employees say **they're looking for a hybrid work schedule**. Discussion reflects **a need for personal flexibility and a right to choose where to work.**

Three key themes emerged in discussion

Flexibility

Employees want a say in where and how they work, indicating **a need for flexible work environments, schedules, working conditions and technology.**

Employees say they need help managing expectations around work/life balance, physical presence and mental load.

Diversity

Given the social and political climate, diversity and inclusion initiatives are expected and appreciated in all aspects of business, including hiring, selecting from a broad candidate pool, diversity in leadership and DEI specific programs.
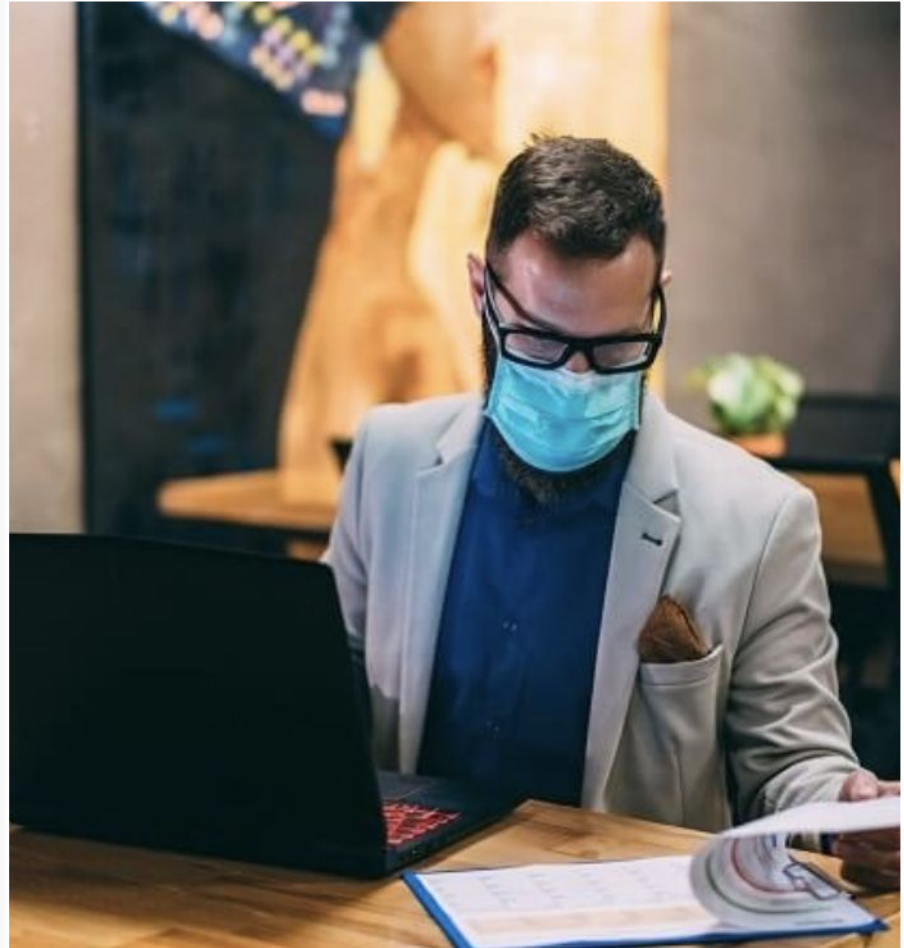
Safety

Employee well-being has **significantly grown in importance and has become a cornerstone of the employee experience/expectations.** Safety includes mental health, physical health, wellness and security | privacy.

Flexibility

The future of work is about choice, options, and freedom. 🌍 the ability to work from anywhere in the world ⏳ async comms 👨‍👦 never missing out on life due to a miserable daily commute Done well, remote work offers the closest thing to work-life balance we've seen in years.
- Twitter / May 2021

Working from home is an evergreen hot topic

As offices begin to reopen, discussion is focused on whether or not working from home will continue post-COVID.

In April 2021, posts that mention working from home appeared 821% more frequently than in April 2019.

Many have grown to love the WFH life, while others crave a return to the office. These opinions vary based on life stages and circumstances.

Conversation about hybrid work plans reflect a lack of clarity and a surge in anxiety among employees who are unclear about their company's plans.
What is clear is that employees want the ability to make choices that work for them.

Employees have mixed emotions about WFH

While **employees are looking for flexibility,** emerging themes include **feeling unsafe** about going into an office, **struggles with a transition to remote work** and **gratitude about the option to work from home**.

There are concerns as well from those who want to continue to work from home about the impact on career growth (particularly among women and minorities).

Analysis of April 2021 discussion surfaced these emotions emerging:

- 43% were joyful
- 33% were angry
- 14% were sad
- 5% were fearful
- 5% were disgusted

Hybrid work is inevitable

A return to office life is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

As employers ask employees to return to the office, most employees are voicing a desire for a hybrid model that includes both working at home and on site.

The ability to have control over where one works is a dominant theme.

- Clear policies and supportive reasoning to rationalize those policies will help to alleviate confusion
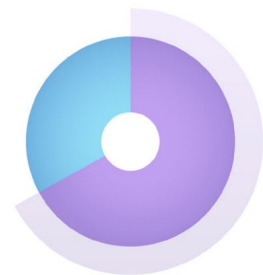- Technology and tools that best enable employees to be successful (at home and in the office)are paramount
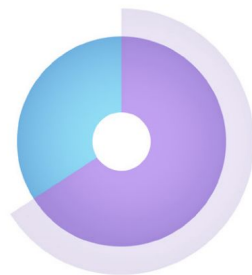
66%
of leaders say their company is considering redesigning office space for hybrid work
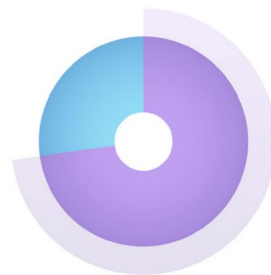
73%
of employees want flexible remote work options to stay

67%
of employees want more in-person work or collaboration post-pandemic

Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index
The Work Trend Index survey was conducted by an independent research firm, Edelman Data x Intelligence, among 31,092 full-time employed or self-employed workers across 31 markets between January 12, 2021 to January 25, 2021.

Diversity
& inclusion

Clear D&I policies are table stakes for hiring and retaining talent

Employees and potential recruits continue to **discuss initiatives or the lack of programs around diversity and inclusion.**

Tech employees in particular were vocal in their appreciation for corporate D&I initiatives such as:

- More inclusive hiring practices

- Increased focus on mental health

- Trainings or educational offerings

My entire timeline is is about how companies like Mailchimp and Google are constantly gaslighting, demoting and firing brilliant women and POC. How can someone even argue it is a pipeline problem? - Twitter, February

While my work has skirted #disabilityDongle territory, I do believe that as technologists building the future of work, we need to deeply understand these dynamics, so we don't prioritize communication methods that exclude people.

- Twitter, May

Inclusion includes increased employment access for those with disabilities

Discussion reflects that the increase in work from home and remote work fosters a more supportive environment for employees with disabilities.

Online discussion about the future of work and disabilities is up 58% to date in 2021.

Cultivate a culture of belonging

Holistic diversity and inclusion efforts are appreciated and expected.

New roles and departments specific to DEI initiatives have been created to highlight companies' commitments to DEI.

The focus on diversity is mutually beneficial - companies with greater cultural diversity will also see a diversity of opinions, ideas and innovations.
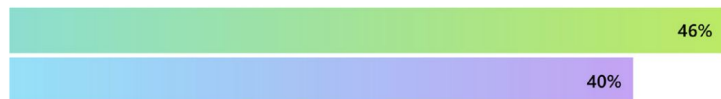
Companies considered disingenuous in their calls for increased diversity or perceptions that companies did not support employees of color drove negative discussion among tech employees.
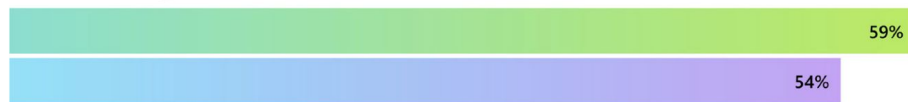
A workforce that is culturally diverse and inclusive will also enhance productivity and innovation with a variety of viewpoints and expertise

- Twitter, March

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Women
46%
40%

No Graduate Degree
59%
54%

Gen Z
21%
18%

Certain groups are more likely to seek out remote work

Remote applicants   On-site applicants

Insights were generated from data points created by hundreds of millions of members in over 200 countries on LinkedIn.

Remote opportunities are more attractive to diverse applicants

Women, Gen Z, and those without a graduate degree are more likely to apply for remote versus on-site positions, according to LinkedIn data.

Companies with remote-first/remote-friendly or flexible work policies will yield a broader talent pool to choose from within these audiences.

A wider talent pool offers immense opportunity, especially as the pandemic subsides and childcare options are more readily available. Organizations will be able to hire the best and brightest from around the world, and employees will be able to broaden their career and economic possibilities without compromising wellbeing and family priorities.

Safety in the workplace

"Emphasis has shifted to flexibility, mental health, parents in the workforce and enhanced initiatives around diversity, equity and inclusion."
- Twitter / April 2021

The idea of commuting elicits concerns

As people begin returning to work and offices, **concerns from employees about their personal safety have increased,** particularly among those who are immunocompromised or who have young children.

The potential impact on productivity was also a dominant concern, given the time it takes to commute into an office and the stress of balancing care for kids and pets at home.

Many who previously had long commutes were shocked to look back at the percentage of their day spent on the road or on public transit. A shift in priorities is evident in discussion.

I would work fewer hours if I returned to the office bc of the commute, although as it is now I work longer hours than I probably should so maybe it would be better. But that commute stress is no joke!
- Twitter / May

Let's face it, you can't trust others to be as careful as you are. My coworkers are slobs!
- Twitter / May

Office policies need to evolve as restrictions lessen

How to safely return to offices with social distancing policies in place was a focus area for employees concerned about office safety. **Physical office space must be compelling enough to entice workers to commute to**, and include a mix of collaboration and focus areas.

Employees specifically cite the following concerns:
- "Hot desking"
- Open floor office plans
- Office cleaning policies
- Meeting rooms

Required Vaccines

Questions about whether offices will require vaccinations for returning employees has increased month-over-month since the beginning of 2021.

Some employees are hopeful that companies will require evidence of vaccinations before allowing employees to return to offices, **often citing health as the a top concern for returning to work.**

Others expressed concern about employers requiring vaccines and **questioned whether it was ethical or legal for companies to require a vaccine** prior to re-opening an office.

Employers are proceeding cautiously when it comes to #COVID19 #vaccine requirements. Less than 6% plan to enforce a mandate, @Littler found.

-Twitter, February

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2020 resulted in a greater emphasis on mental health

The focus on mental health and work life balance in online discussion increased 31% in 2021 from 2020. Prominent themes in conversation were requests for employer initiatives for continued support of employee mental health and wellness programs.

As offices start to reopen, employees are concerned about how to balance their work | life schedules. They are also stressed about the optics of choosing not to go back to the office fulltime and the impact on career growth.

What's ahead…

Employee attitudes and behaviors have changed in ways that are apt to be long lasting, so decisions about the return to the workplace should involve their input. Corporate cultures will hopefully shift to accommodate individual needs.

Questions to continue monitoring:

- Will there be a resurgence of fear about office safety and social distancing?

- Will people adopt a hybrid work schedule and wll companies support them?

- How will the focus on diversity and inclusion continue to evolve?

- How will virtual work / virtual connects shift as more return to in-person office spaces?

... how to prepare

The new work normal will continue to evolve and a one-size-fits-all, set-it-and-forget-it policy is apt to fall short of employee expectations and desires. If the past six months are an indication, companies must be proactive by:

Looking beyond branded social discussion to spot broader consumer trends.
- Unbranded conversation is critical for trendspotting

Prioritize employee key careabouts and pain points:
- Flexibility and productivity in the way that's most meaningful to them (home or in office)
- Genuine and consistent diversity and inclusion efforts
- Safety of commuting, in-office return, mental well-being

Segment social data by audience to identify opportunities for action and vulnerabilities.
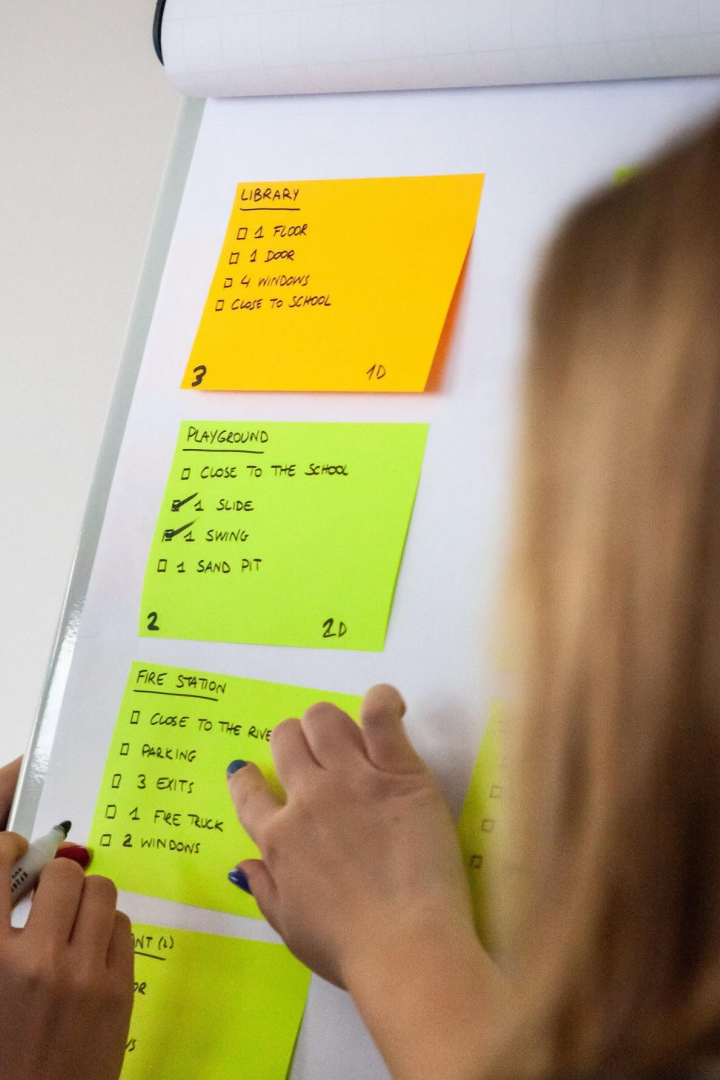
Now you know.

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