



INSTAGRAM ENGAGEMENT REPORT

2021 on Instagram: What do the numbers say?



HubSpot × mention

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Introduction

Instagram has been around for over a decade, racking up one billion monthly active users, [25+ million business accounts](#), and a projected [\\$18 billion USD in ad revenue this year](#).

What was once a simple photo-sharing app is now a key business platform, supporting multinational brands and innovative entrepreneurs alike in achieving their brand engagement and growth goals.

The Covid-19 pandemic turned 2020 into a year like no other, as lockdowns around the globe and social distancing helped to spur [a massive surge in Instagram usage](#).

Alongside a completely changed definition of “normal”, 2020 also brought with it the launch of Instagram and Facebook shops, a hot feature for e-commerce brands, as well as Instagram Guides, IGTV advertising, and many other new features.



Instagram has never been afraid of change, and has been constantly evolving over the years to respond to its users' changing expectations and business' changing needs.

But, just as the platform and its users evolve, your Instagram marketing strategy needs to evolve with it. We joined forces to create this report to give businesses like yours the most up-to-date Instagram data and insights to support your strategy in 2021.

From how many hashtags to include, to how long your caption should be, to which influencers get the highest engagement, we'll help you to cut through the competition to get your brand heard and seen.



📍 LOCATION

@MENTION

#HASHTAG



🎵 MUSIC



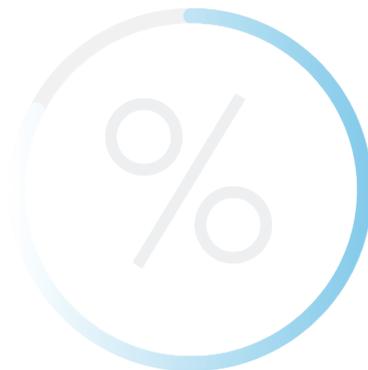
Methodology

The data outlined in the following pages is based on analysis of 100 million Instagram posts shared across 1 million users. To dive into differences in global communities and their Instagram habits, we also looked specifically at 2 million posts tagged with specific geolocations. You can find this data in the report Appendix.

This analysis was done to uncover trends about engagement, influencers, locations, caption length, and other insights that would be interesting and valuable to businesses, as well as marketers, around the world.

Report Highlights

- The most engaging tagged Instagram accounts are beauty and cosmetic related.
- The sweet spot for caption lengths to get the most engagement are in the 500-1,000 and 1,000-2,000 characters range.
- Carousel posts overtook both single image and video posts as the most engaging type of post this year, with 62 likes and 5 comments as the norm.
- 53.6% of Instagram followers have less than 1,000 followers
- The most geo-tagged city in the world is Los Angeles, California for the second year in a row, but the most engaged city is Beverly Hills, California.



WHO

What Does the Instagram Community Look Like?

If you run an Instagram account for a business or for your side-hustle, you know that comments, likes, and shares of your content cannot happen without first having an audience.

In 2021, building a community of engaged followers is one of the most important - and the most difficult - things you can do for your brand.

According to digital strategist Jeff Bullas:

// It's no secret that having more real followers on Instagram leads to higher engagement, website clicks, and sales for your business. But growing a following on Instagram is harder and more time-consuming than ever. //

Whether it's due to their sophisticated algorithm, or the fact that brands are getting more creative every day, Instagram accounts are competing harder for the same eyeballs.

On such a competitive channel, how do you compete?

To effectively capture the attention of their desired audience, brands need to **maintain a balance between implementing new strategies that will help increase their follower count, and optimizing engagement and community-building efforts within their current follower base.**



NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS

When thinking about follower counts on Instagram, there are accounts whose audiences range from under 1,000 to tens of millions of followers.

From global brands and influencers with tens of millions of followers, to micro-influencers and casual consumers, Instagram's user base varies across a wide spectrum of follower count groups.

Number of Accounts

100k-500k

0.9%

10k-50k

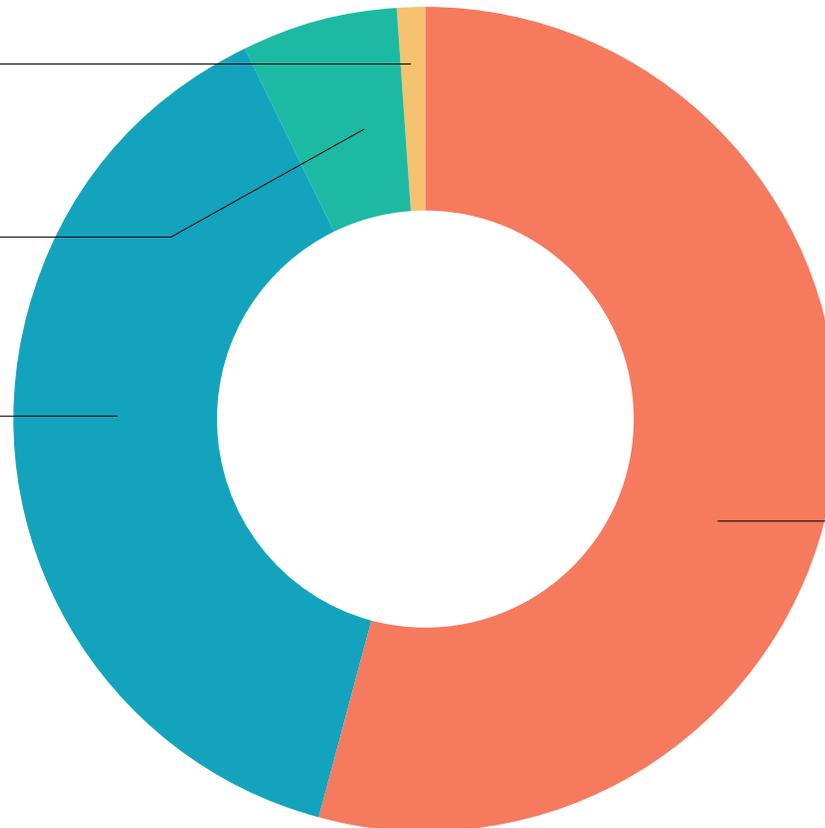
6.2%

1k-10k

38.0%

<1k

53.6%



According to our data this year, just under half (46.4%) of all Instagram accounts analyzed had more than 1,000 followers, putting 53.6% of Instagram users under the 1,000 follower threshold. This is a slight change from our findings from last year, where we uncovered that 52.35% of Instagram followers have less than 1,000 followers.

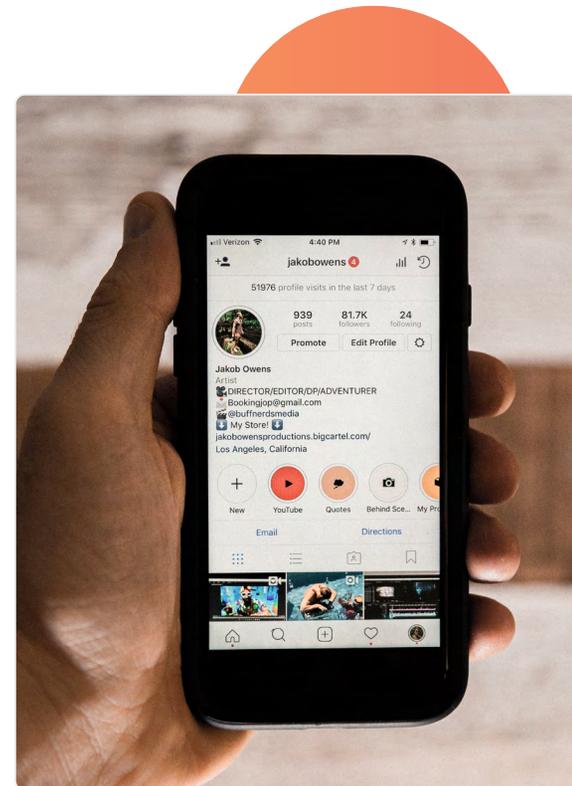
This increase in accounts breaking the 1,000 follower threshold year-over-year tells us that smaller accounts are seeing steady growth, and finding new ways to reach their intended audiences across the platform.

The next largest segment is users that have between 1,001-10,000 followers (38%), and together these two segments make up the majority of Instagram users.

Looking at accounts with larger bases, a further 6.2% have 10,001 - 50,000 followers and only a mere 0.9% have 50,001 - 100,000 followers.

The two smallest segments are users that have 100,001-1M+ followers. 1,539 accounts have more than 1M followers (0.14% of all users), while only 81 accounts have more than 10M followers (0.01% of all users).

These accounts with massive followings include celebrities, global brands, and mega-influencers.



Let's dive into what being an influencer actually means, and why understanding the influencer market on Instagram is critical for businesses in 2021.

INFLUENCERS AND INSTAGRAM

Did you know what an 'influencer' was before Instagram? Most of us didn't.

In fact, influencer marketing wasn't recognized as a legit business strategy until Instagram helped to launch it into a true game-changer. It has become so successful that in a few short years, almost everyone and their pet chihuahua has become an 'influencer.'

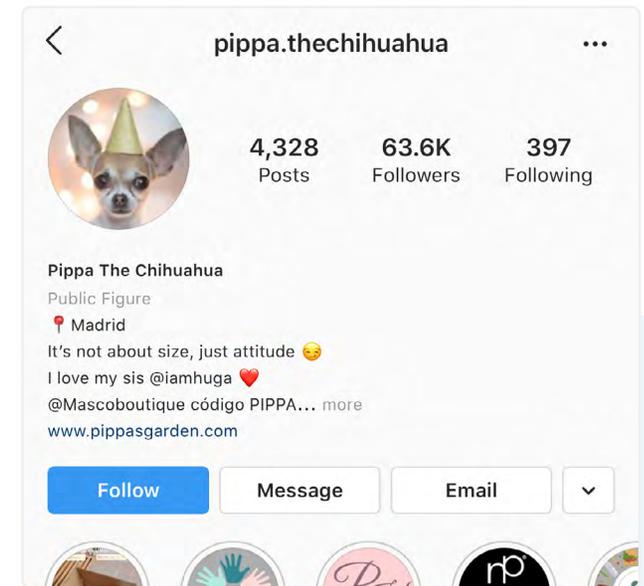
But how did it become so effective? Simply put, influencers are able to penetrate the barriers of traditional advertising and allow brands to communicate with their intended audiences in a more authentic, less invasive way.

Influencers create real connections by engaging their audiences with relevant content, which establishes a level of trust that businesses weren't able to gain by themselves.

However, this quick success also led skeptics to believe that influencer marketing was just one of those short-lived social media marketing trends that will eventually die out, as a result of the market becoming too competitive and expensive.

With this projected growth - up by almost \$6 billion since 2020 – where exactly is influencer marketing headed? What do brands need to keep in mind to make sure that they're staying ahead of the curve?

Let's look at the largest accounts on Instagram to uncover which influencers have been expanding their audience reach.



But despite the naysayers, influencers are proving that they're here to stay. In fact, they're projected to be bigger than ever in 2021, becoming a \$13.8 billion dollar industry by the end of this year.

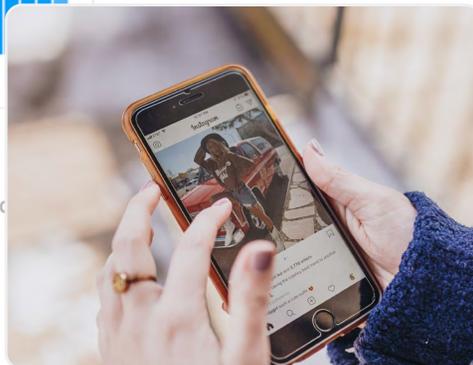
[Influencer Marketing Hub](#)

WHICH ACCOUNTS HAVE THE MOST FOLLOWERS? INSTAGRAM'S TOP 50 ACCOUNTS

As our research has shown, only 81 accounts on Instagram have amassed a following of over 10M, making up the top 0.1% of accounts followed.

Knowing this, we wanted to dive into the top 50 accounts to uncover which celebrities, brands, and influencers have won the hearts of Instagram users.

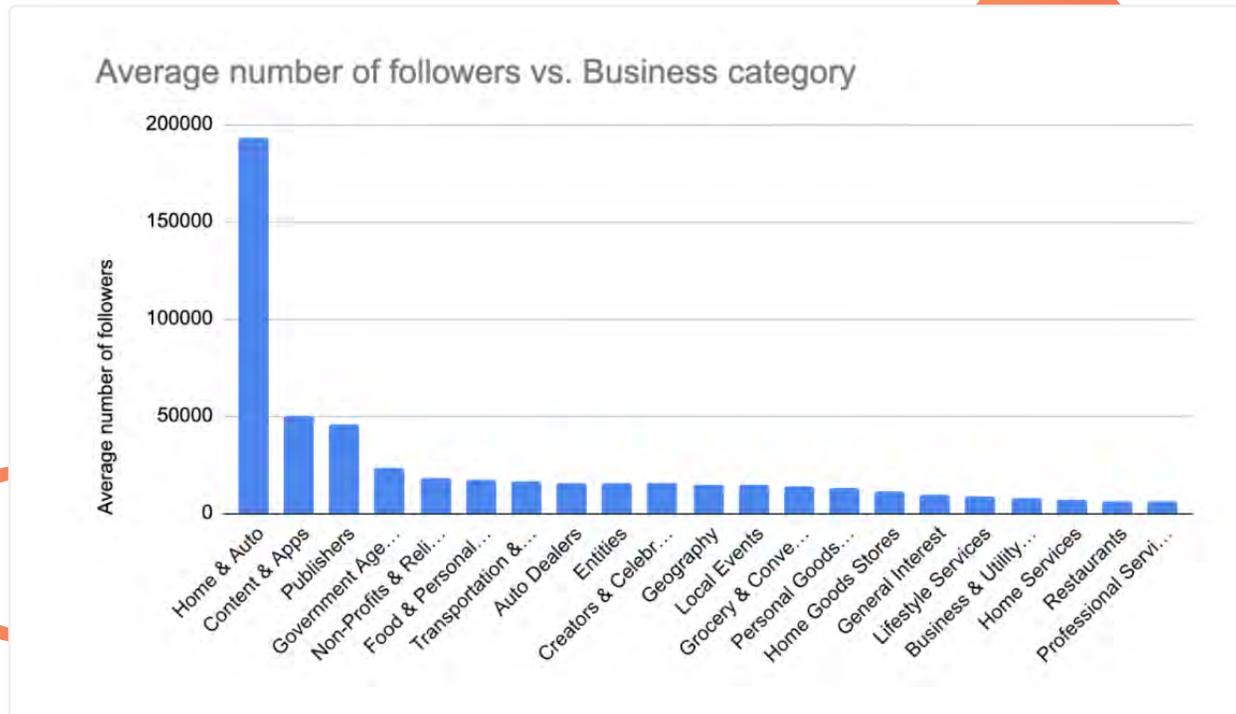
The top Instagram account is actually the official brand account of @instagram itself, boasting a robust 387.9M followers. Apart from Instagram, four other brands also make up the Top 50 largest accounts:



- 15 @lamborghini (28.5M followers, #15)
- 20 @netflixbrasil (22M followers, #20)
- 30 @anastasiabeverlyhills (20M followers, #30)
- 46 @givenchyofficial (14.2M followers, #46)

While most of the Top 50 is made up of non-brand accounts, global brands like the ones outlined above have cemented themselves as focal points of their industries.

Speaking of industries, it's worth noting the differences between these top brands. From social media, to automotive, to entertainment, to beauty and fashion, they run the gamut of audience interests across the platform.

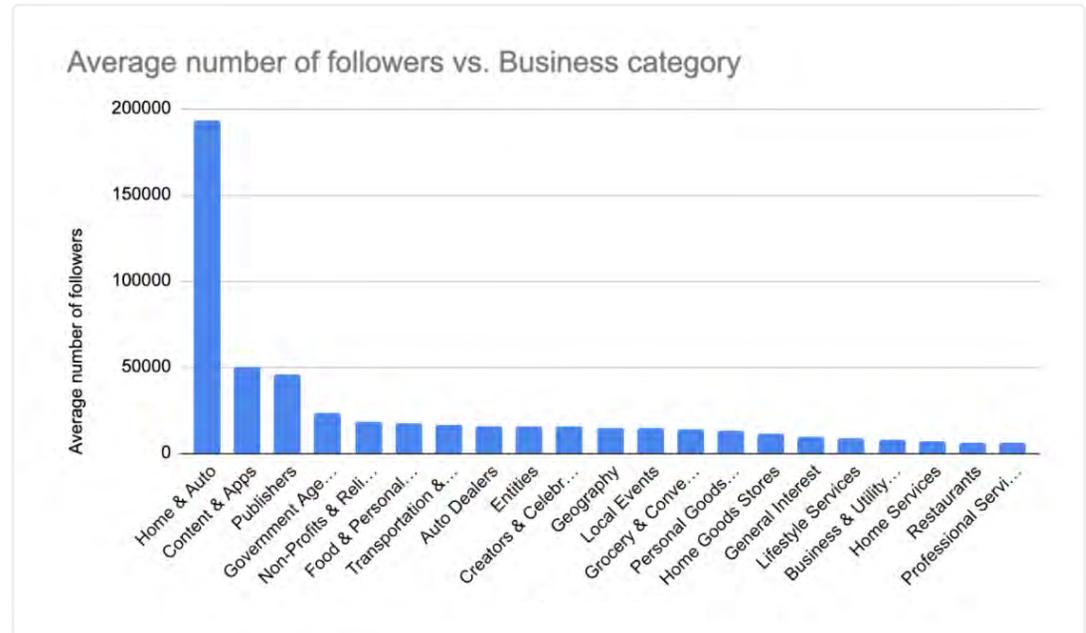


In 2020, the business category with the highest number of followers on average was Home & Auto (192K followers). This was followed by Content & Apps (50K followers), Publishers (45K followers), Government Agencies (23K followers), and Non-Profit / Religious Organizations (17K followers).

On the flip side, the business category with the least average number of followers was Professional Services (6,375 followers), closely followed by Restaurants (6,430) and Home Services (6,683).

Whether your brand is in the most competitive category or the least, it's crucial to differentiate yourself from competitors, invest in your Instagram strategy, and showcase your unique value propositions to reach your intended audience.

Making up the rest of the Top 50 list, excluding brands, there were 45 personalities and one travel inspiration page – @earthpix, with an impressive 17.3M followers. Of the 45 personalities featured, **40% (18) are female** and **60% (26) are male**.



Following behind Instagram itself, the most followed account on the platform is pop singer **Ariana Grande** (@arianagrande), with 207.4M followers.

From her start on Broadway to her television features on Nickelodeon, Grande has risen to fame through her music with hits like "thank u, next," "7 rings," and "God is a woman."

Rounding out the remaining top spots are:

- 3 **Jennifer Lopez**
(@jlo, 133.6M followers)

- 4 **Rihanna**
(@badgalriri, 87.4M followers)

- 5 **LeBron James**
(@kingjames, 74.6M followers)

- 6 **Shradda Kapoor**
(@shraddakapoor, 56.9M followers)

To break this down even further, 31% (14) of the Top 50 Instagram accounts are actors or actresses. The actor with the most followers is Shradda Kapoor (@shraddakapoor, 56.9M followers), and the actress with the most followers is Bruna Marquezine (@brunamarquezine, 39.9M followers).

Musicians make up 26% (12) of the top-followed celebrities today, with Ariana Grande naturally holding the top spot, while sportsmen make up 20% (9) of the most-followed celebrities. Of these sports, basketball and soccer were equally tied with 4 **sportsmen** in each category. The basketball player with the most followers is LeBron James (@kingjames, 74.6M followers), while the soccer player with the most followers is Andres Iniesta (@andresiniesta8, 35.4M followers).

9% (4) of the Top 50 are **Internet personalities**, with James Charles (@jamescharles, 24.4M followers) coming in as the most followed, while only 7% (3) are **TV personalities**, the most followed being Sabrina Sato (28.8M followers).

Two groups minimally represented in the Top 50 are **models** and **politicians**. Only one model, Georgina Rodriguez (@georginagio, 21.9M followers) breaks into the Top 50, as well as only one politician, former United States President Barack Obama (@barackobama, 33.9M followers). He is the top-followed politician overall on the platform.

From a geographic perspective, the Top 50 is made up of accounts from around the world.

Of the 45 personalities featured in the Top 50 biggest accounts, 35% (16) were from the USA (with one being Canadian-American). These 16, in order of most to least followers, were:



- @arianagrande, 207.4M followers
- @jlo, 133.6M followers
- @badgalriri, 87.4M followers
- @kingjames, 74.6M followers
- @barackobama, 33.9M followers
- @jamescharles, 24.4M followers
- @camerondallas, 21.5M followers
- @madisonbeer, 21.5M followers
- @tyga, 21.4M followers
- @kobebryant, 20.8M followers
- @kingbach, 20.2M followers
- @ncentineo, 18.3M followers
- @jimmyfallon, 18.2M followers
- @dwaynewade, 17.1M followers
- @channingtatum, 17M followers
- @michaelbjordan, 15.4M followers.

24%, or 11, of the Top 50 were from Brazil, featuring:



- @brunamarquezine, 39.9M followers
- @maisa, 36.1M followers
- @mariliamendoncacantora, 33.9M followers
- @danielalves, 31.6M followers
- @sabrinasato, 28.8M followers
- @fenandasouzaoficial, 22.4M followers
- @simoneesimaria, 18.1M followers
- @lexa, 15.7M followers
- @camilaqueiroz, 15.3M followers
- @leosantana, 15.2M followers
- @cocielo, 15M followers.

India had 11% (5) of the Top 50 with the accounts for:



- @shraddhakappor, 56.9M followers
- @prineetichopra, 31.3M followers
- @tigerjackieshroff, 27.2M followers
- @gururandhawa, 21.7M followers
- @kajalaggarwaloff, 16.6M followers

In Spain and the UK, each country had 4% (2) accounts who broke the Top 50. In Spain, these were @andresiniesta, 35.4M followers and @enriqueiglesias, 15.4M followers, and in the UK, they were @lewishamilton, 21.2M followers, and @henrycavill, 14.4M followers.

There were also eight different countries with one account each who broke the Top 50. For Argentina, @georginagio made the cut with 21.9M followers. In Australia, the top account was @katherinelangford with 18.1M followers, while Belgium's @hazardeden_10 has a 27.2M follower count, also putting him in the Top 50.

In Indonesia, the top followed account is @showimah, with 14.2M followers, while Mexico's top account is @iamyanetgarcia at 13.5M followers. Russia's @egorkreed also made the Top 50 with 13.9M followers. For South Korea and Sweden, the top followed accounts who break into the global Top 50 are @skawngur and @pewdiepie, with 13.7M and 21.5M followers each respectively.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

Instagram is constantly changing, but one thing is for certain: growing your followers base will only get harder. But this doesn't mean that you should forgo all hope of getting followers organically and rely on buying new ones. Here are 5 things you can do to boost your follower growth:

- 1 Ensure that your Instagram profile is complete.** This means filling out the bio thoroughly with relevant keywords to your business, as well as creating IG Stories highlights and curating your posts into easy-to-scroll Guides.
- 2 Post high-quality content consistently.** Don't post content just for the sake of posting; be intentional and thoughtful in the content you create. Always be sure to include a thorough caption - the more detailed, the better - and use relevant hashtags. We'll dive into how to curate your captions to get the most engagement later on.
- 3 Be responsive and interact with your community.** Make sure you're replying to your followers' comments, direct messages, and follows. Give your followers regular engagement opportunities outside of the feed, like asking questions in your Stories. If you're being tagged in posts, respond to them in the comments.
- 4 Collaborate with influencers and partner brands.** Working with the right influencers and partners that align to your brand, goals, and values will boost your engagement much more effectively than trying to do it on your own.
- 5 Post a good balance of different types of content.** This will include image posts, video posts, Stories, IGTV, and even Reels. The more diverse content you create, the more avenues you give your brand to reach your ideal audience.

HOW

Engagement

WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT (AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT)?

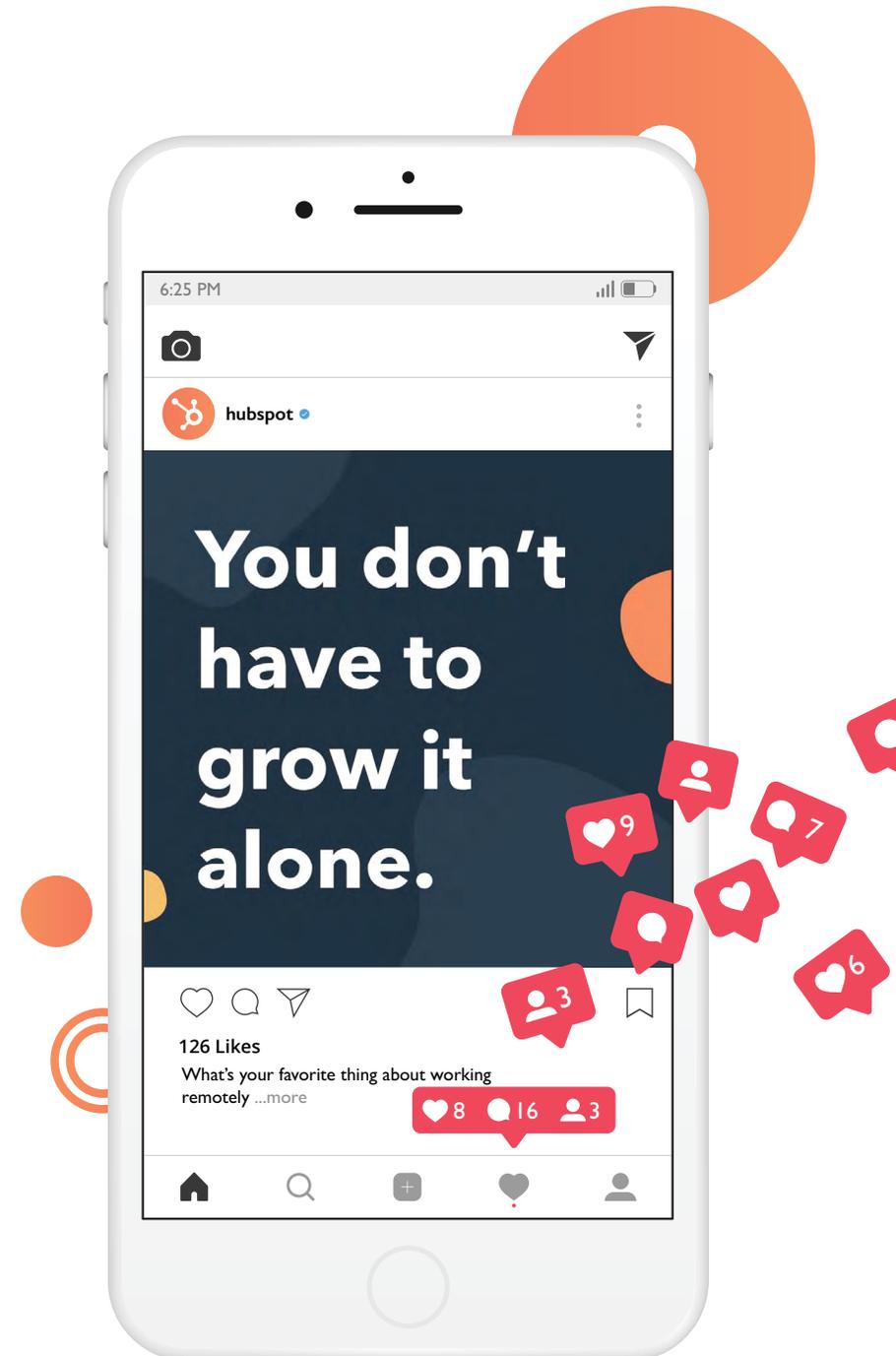
For marketers, [Instagram engagement](#) is considered to be the holy grail KPI of brand awareness on the platform.

Indeed, engagement is the tell-tale sign from their audience that their content is accomplishing two key goals - reaching the right people, and resonating with them.

And for good reason.

Of Instagram's 1 billion users, 68% and 66% have viewed photo and video content from brands on the platform, respectively ([BusinessofApps](#)). But are those views translating into engagement with the brand?

First, let's take a step back. What is engagement, anyway?



As Instagram has continued to reinvent itself over the years, it has introduced many new features such as Stories, IGTV, Reels, and more. This means that engagement is no longer limited to likes and comments on a photo post, but also views or shares of video, as well as direct messages from a user to a brand.

// Engagement rates are healthy metrics to monitor because they underline how frequently your following interacts with your content, and force you to focus on important data, rather than vanity metrics (like the number of followers you have). //

Oberlo



You can calculate your engagement rate by adding up the average likes and comments that you receive per post, divided by your total number of followers. However, it's important to keep in mind two caveats when measuring engagement:

- 1 A lot of different things can be considered as 'engagement' today.
- 2 There is no universal way to measure engagement.

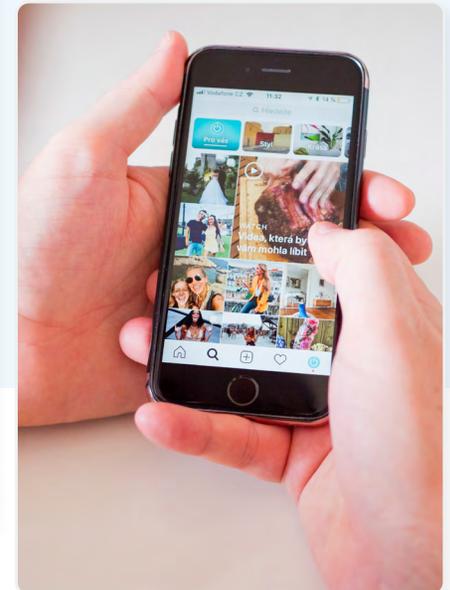
This is important to remember because **when it comes to engagement, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Every brand is unique, and as a result, so are their measures for success.**

For example, if you're a new electric bicycle brand, you may be more interested in the number of views you get on your daily Stories which show off the features of your product in action, rather than the number of likes you get on your photos.

With this in mind, it's clear that brands have a massive opportunity to capture the attention of their target consumers. But capturing that attention enough to earn a like or a comment is more crucial, and more challenging, than ever.

When it comes to measuring your success on Instagram, remember to focus on engagement metrics that work for you because at the end of the day, the most important thing is that your community is interacting with your content.

For the purposes of this report, we're defining engagement as the number of likes and the number of comments received on a post.

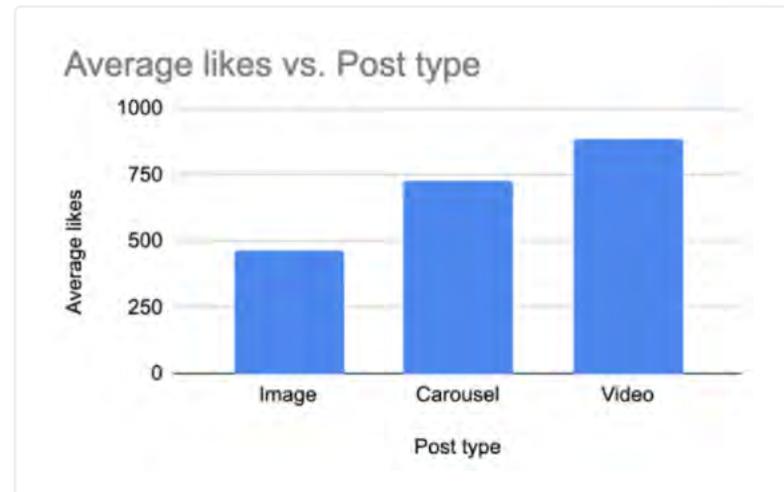
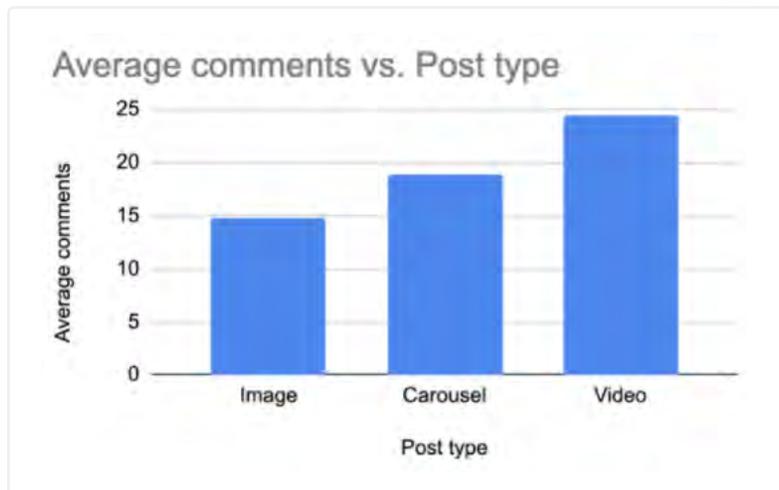


WHAT'S THE AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT RATE ON INSTAGRAM?

It's no surprise: as more brands entered Instagram, it became noisier and more competitive.

Companies were going toe-to-toe, competing for the same eyeballs and audience engagement.

For this reason, influencer marketing started to take off and brands started flocking to popular users to help them increase the likes and comments they receive on their branded content.



The average engagement rate of an Instagram post of any kind in 2020 was 2.26%. Keep in mind that this number takes into account the posts of super influential users and public figures, which skews the average heavily.

When we consider the median engagement rate, which allows us to adjust for highly influential accounts, this went down to around 0.84%.

This suggests that 50% of Instagram users have an engagement rate per post of less than 1%.

Talk about competition.

HOW ARE PEOPLE ENGAGING ON INSTAGRAM?

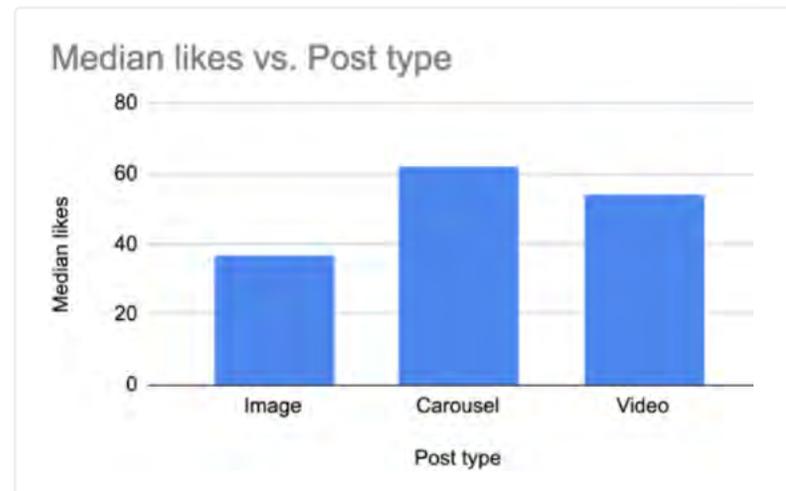
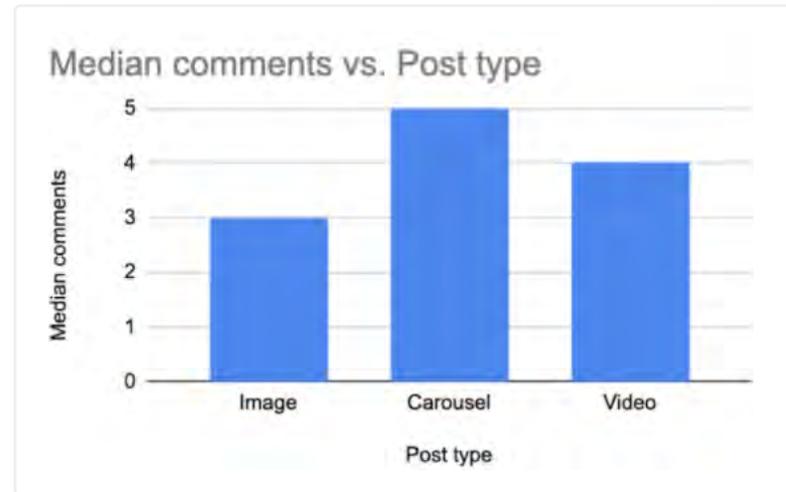
Engagement with posts via likes and comments seem to be on a downward trend from previous years, with Instagram users now engaging by saving, sharing, or simply viewing posts.

Equally, this might also represent a tendency for Instagram users to prefer Stories and newly added Reels rather than permanent posts on their feed.

In 2020, video posts were more likely to receive a higher number of likes and comments with 888 likes and 24 comments on average. This was closely followed by carousel posts, then single image posts.

This is a marked change from our research last year, which found that single image posts were above videos in both likes and comments, with carousels rounding out third place, across both the average and the median.

However, this year, the type of post with the highest median number of likes and comments goes to carousel posts, with 62 likes and 5 comments as the norm for 50% of users.



This could indicate that larger accounts are winning engagement with video posts, but most accounts are actually engaging their followers with carousel posts. Videos following carousels for median engagement could be reflective of newer video features, like IGTV and Reels, being adopted for wider use in place of standard in-feed videos.

Overall, this trend points to a shift in the type of content being shared and consumed on Instagram.

Where single image ads reigned supreme for engagement in 2019, 2020 saw them take a backseat to dynamic content that requires some level of interactivity – either scrolling through a carousel or tapping to unmute a video – from the viewer.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

Increasing Instagram engagement gets more difficult year after year, due to the constant changes the platform implements to their algorithm.

However, this doesn't mean that getting a healthy engagement rate is impossible.

You'll want to make sure that you're posting consistently and have a good balance of different types of content including image posts, video posts, Reels, IGTVs, and Instagram Stories.

Before you set your yearly KPIs, we recommend figuring out which Instagram metric is the most relevant to your business and why, and base your engagement on that.

WHAT

Captions

It has been said a picture is worth a thousand words. So why do we spend so much time coming up with the perfect Instagram caption?

Captions can help you encourage more engagement on your post including likes, comments, and even drive conversions to your offer and your website.

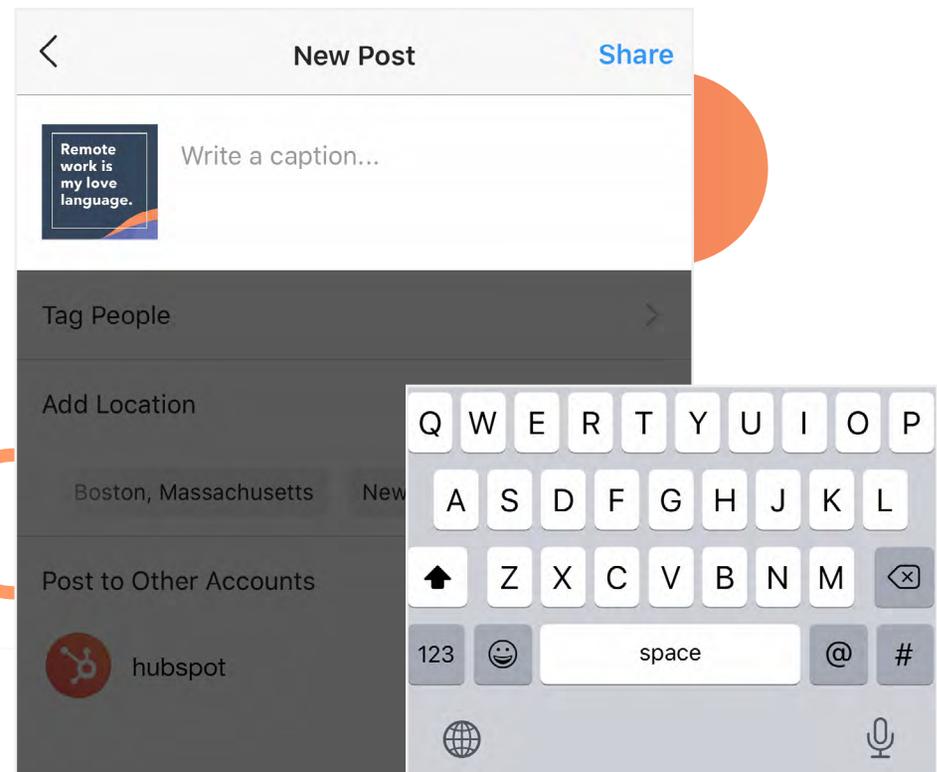
What's more, captions have the ability to provide more context and help your audience understand your brand and products better.

It sounds like the more detailed and thorough your caption is, the better engagement you will receive in your post.

But as Shakespeare famously once said, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Is this true when it comes to Instagram caption length?

Later

// A great Instagram caption will stop a scroller in their tracks – and the longer someone spends reading your caption and engaging with your post, the better your post will rank with the Instagram algorithm! //



HOW LONG SHOULD MY INSTAGRAM CAPTION BE?

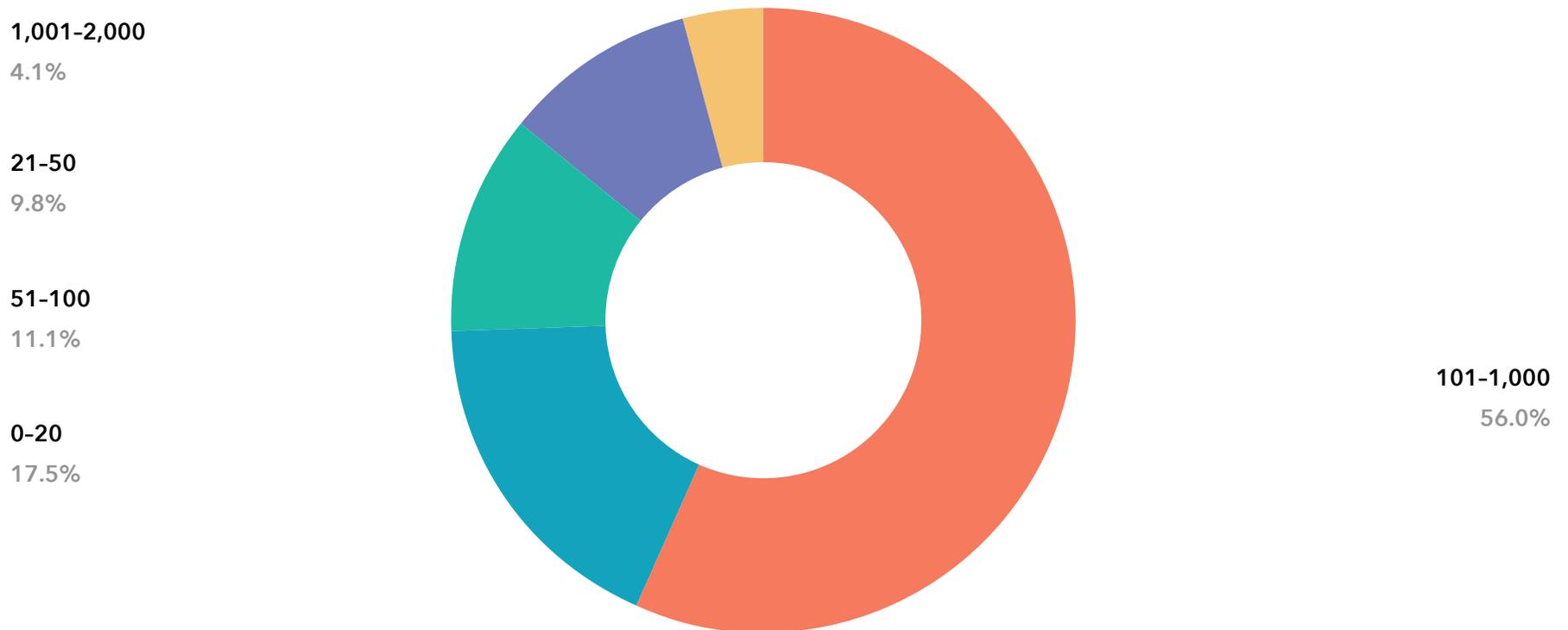
According to our data, the results are quite the contrary. We found that the longer your caption is, the better engagement it received.

For this section, it's worth keeping in mind that when looking at the average caption length, posts from highly influential profiles often skew the data toward the lower end of the spectrum.

This is because celebrities and mega-influencers can often include one word or just a single emoji as a caption, but still would receive very high engagement on their post.

Of all the Instagram posts analyzed, around 95% of posts had captions with a length of fewer than 1000 characters, and only 5% with more than 1000 characters. Around half of all posts had captions between 100 and 1000 characters.

Percentage of posts vs. Caption length



However, the median engagement rate increased as captions got longer, and was highest with posts that had between 1,000 & 2,000 characters. Going over 2,000 characters, however, made engagement rates drop.

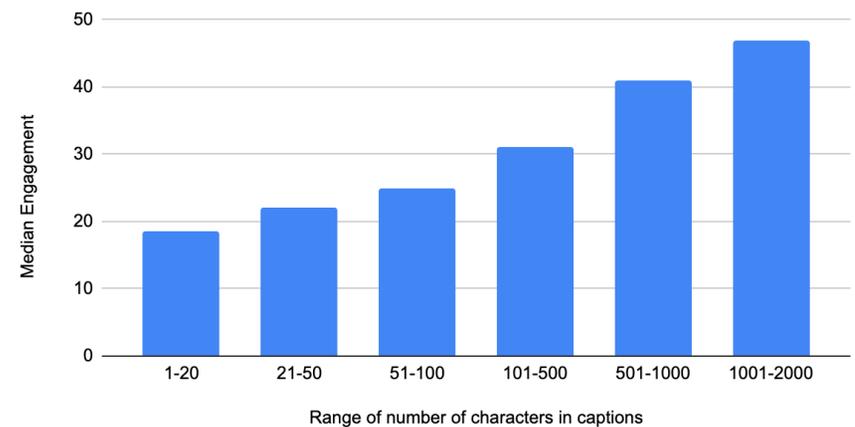
Currently, Instagram allows captions to be up to 2,200 characters long and contain up to 30 hashtags in the whole post. But according to Social Report, the platform recommends for you to “...keeping your captions under 125 characters. This ensures that your entire caption shows up in the Instagram feed.”

But this doesn't necessarily help you if your goal is to have your readers engage with your captions for as long as possible.

Based on our data and findings from several other companies, we are seeing the sweet spot of engaging caption length in the 500-1,000 and 1,000-2,000 characters range. No more, and no less – a true Goldilocks scenario.

Keep in mind that in this case, your caption character limit also consists of the 30 hashtags you're allowed to include. We'll dive into hashtag count recommendations in the next section.

Median engagement vs. Range of number of characters in captions



Later

// ...for brands and influencers, lengthy captions that champion story-telling and authenticity are driving great results... [they] are great because they allow your audience to learn more about you, your brand, and your mission. //

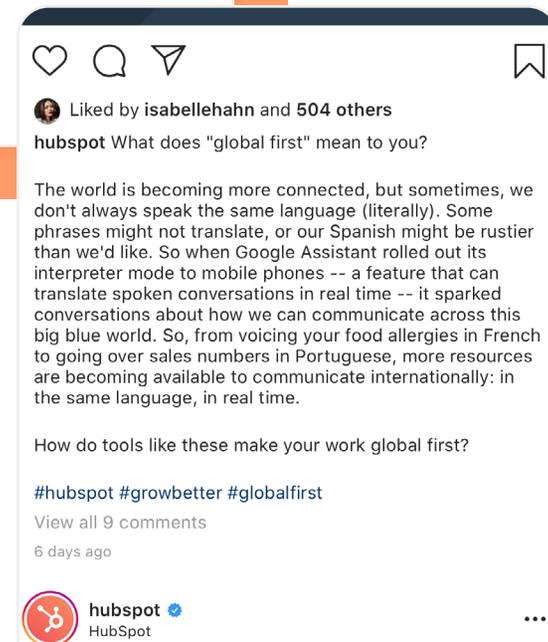
KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

At the end of the day, create your caption with thought and intention: think about what you're really trying to tell your followers.

While we're seeing the trend of longer captions resulting in higher engagement - don't drag it out just for the sake of adding length.

Longer captions are made for storytelling and helping your audience understand your brand better. So use them when they're appropriate and you have something important to say.

If you get into a habit of writing super long captions each time you post, this might deter you from posting consistently – which can also impact your overall engagement.



Hashtags

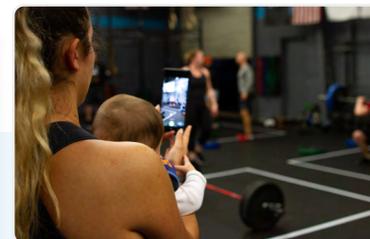
Originally introduced on Twitter to help users search tweets on specific topics by 'tagging' them, hashtags eventually gained mainstream popularity across other social networks such as Facebook, Reddit, and of course - Instagram.

On Instagram, they're typically included in the captions or comments of a post as a way to organize different topics of content. Essentially, they're keywords that people would use to search for specific posts, but they also add context to a post.

Using hashtags can be an effective way to expose your content to new Instagram audiences that care about a certain topic or niche. For example, if you wanted your content to reach users that were into crossfit but are also mothers, you could use the hashtag #crossfitmom.

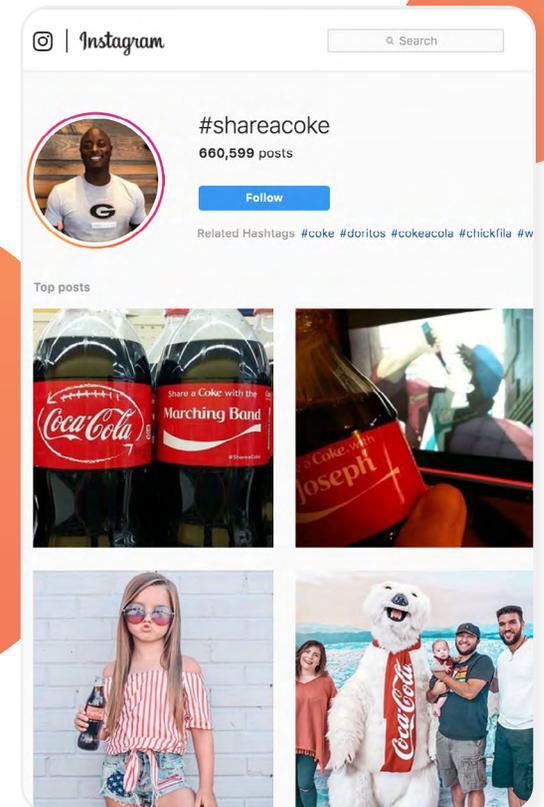
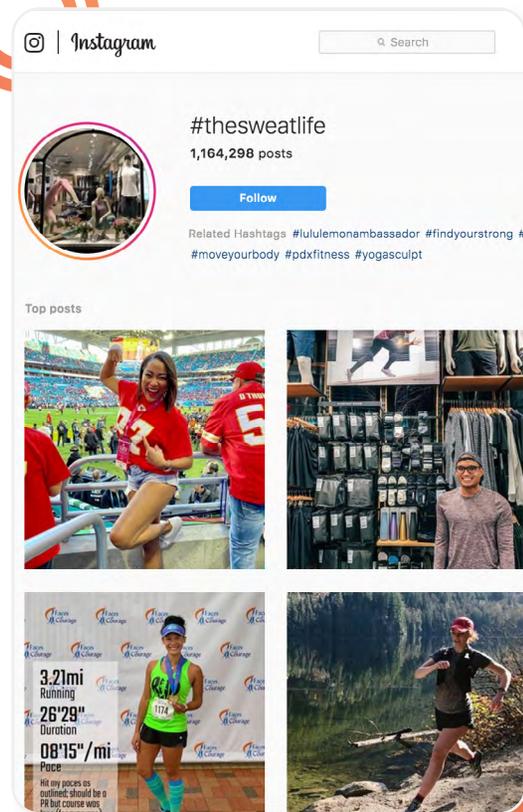
// "Hashtags are powerful. They can help your posts reach a target audience, attract followers in your niche, increase engagement, and develop a more positive and recognizable brand image. //

[Hubspot blog](#)



As hashtag use quickly gained popularity, brands were quick to capitalize on their effectiveness and started creating 'branded hashtags' to help people discover their branded posts.

Successful examples such as Lululemon's #thesweatlife and Coke's #shareacoke not only helped people find their specific branded content more easily, but was also a clever way for these brands to get their community to produce free, user-generated content.



DOES USING HASHTAGS INCREASE ENGAGEMENT?

One thing is for certain: hashtags are ubiquitous on Instagram.

With every brand and influencer jumping on the hashtag bandwagon in the last few years, it's no surprise that some **marketers are starting to doubt the effectiveness of hashtags when it comes to increasing engagement.**

So if using hashtags can still increase your engagement, how many and which ones should you use?

According to [Later](#)



// Using relevant, targeted hashtags on your posts and stories is still one of the best ways to get discovered by new audiences on Instagram. And this can translate into more engagement, more followers, and more customers for your business. //

HOW MANY HASHTAGS SHOULD I PUT ON AN INSTAGRAM POST?

According to this year's findings, the average Instagram post had 6.93 hashtags, a decrease from last year (down from an average of 10.74 hashtags).

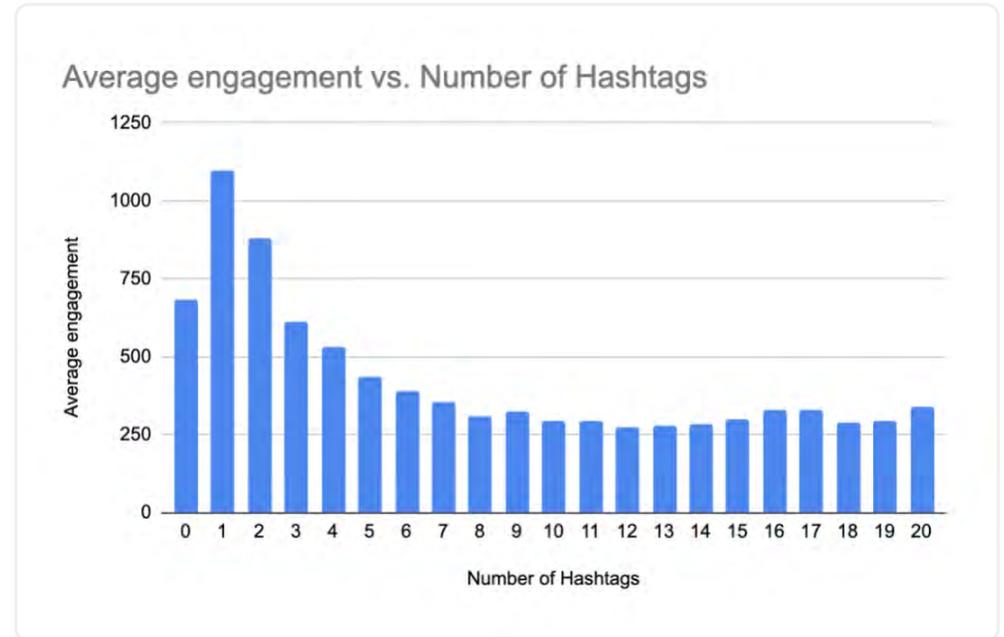
However, the median number of hashtags was just 1, which tells us that 50% of Instagram posts include 1 or even zero hashtags.

On average, the optimal number of hashtags to get the highest engagement rate was just 1 hashtag. Engagement averages for posts with 1 hashtag were significantly higher than posts having no hashtags at all. As the number of hashtags increased, average engagement rates dropped.

Now, for anyone who has been in the Instagram game for a while, this data may come as a shock. After all, aren't hashtags how you find new people in your target audience and get your content in front of more of the right people?

There are a few possible explanations for this:

- The engagement of a post tends to drop off after 1 or more hashtags are included.
- Posts from top engaged profiles will get a high volume of likes and comments on their own, regardless of if they're using hashtags or not. These posts may have impacted our averages.

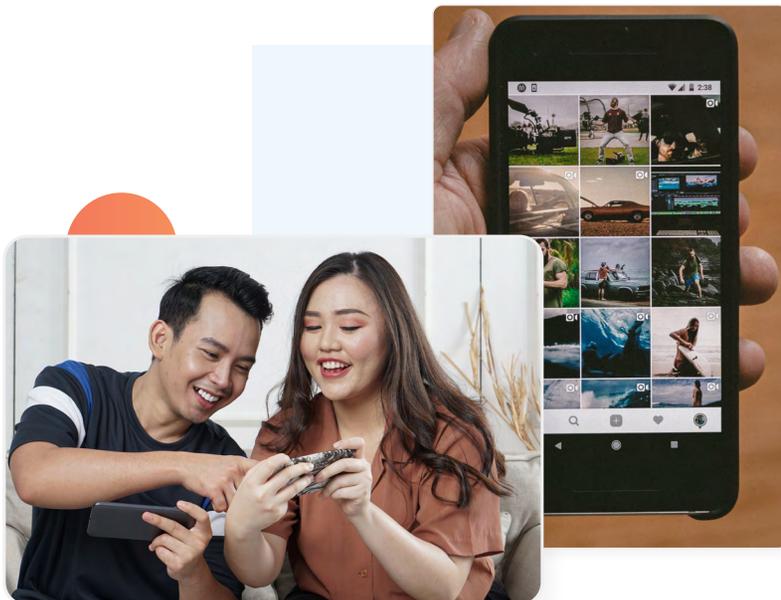


DOES IT HURT TO HAVE TOO MANY HASHTAGS?

To hashtag or not to hashtag – that is the question.

Our research found that this past year, using hashtag has had quite the impact on engagement, and just slight variations in the amount used can be a make it or break it moment for a post.

For example, having 3+ hashtags had the same effect on engagement as having no hashtags at all.

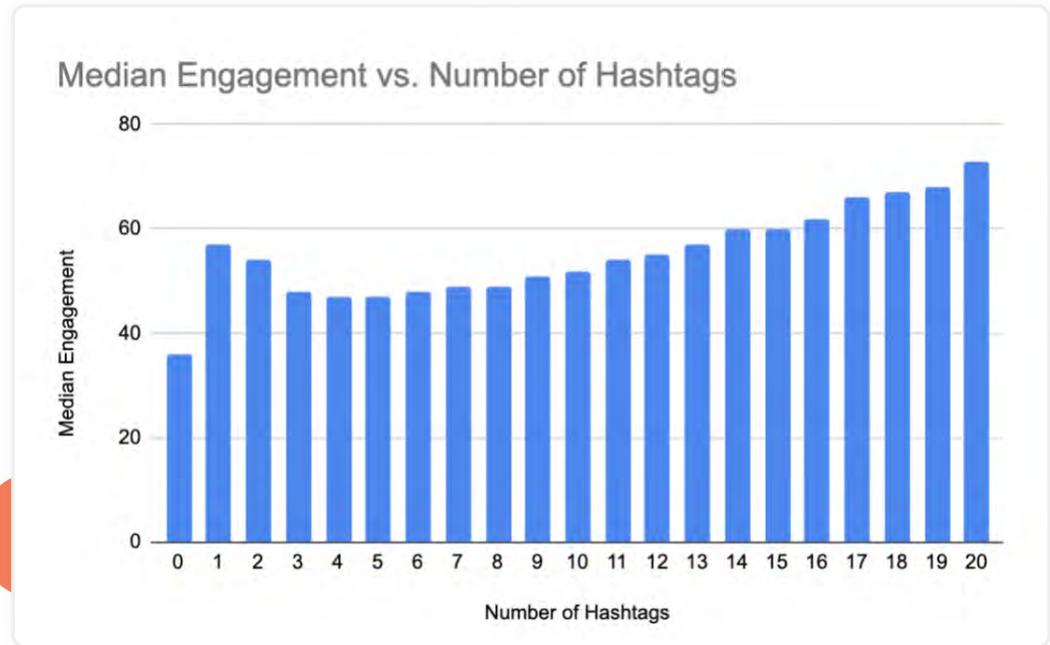


At the same time, having 8+ hashtags reduced a post's engagement rate by half as much compared to having no hashtags at all. **The engagement rate was reduced by over 70% compared to the optimal number of hashtags: 1.**

When considering the median engagement, having no hashtags had the lowest rate of engagement. Having one or two hashtags provided an improved rate of engagement, but the best was actually having 20 hashtags.

So, why the drastic jump in optimal number of hashtags when looking at average versus median engagement?

We can attribute this difference to the overall variance of engagement across accounts both large and small. Where large accounts who are less likely to use hashtags, but generate a ton of engagement, have the potential to skew the average, the median more closely resembles engagement across accounts regardless of their size.

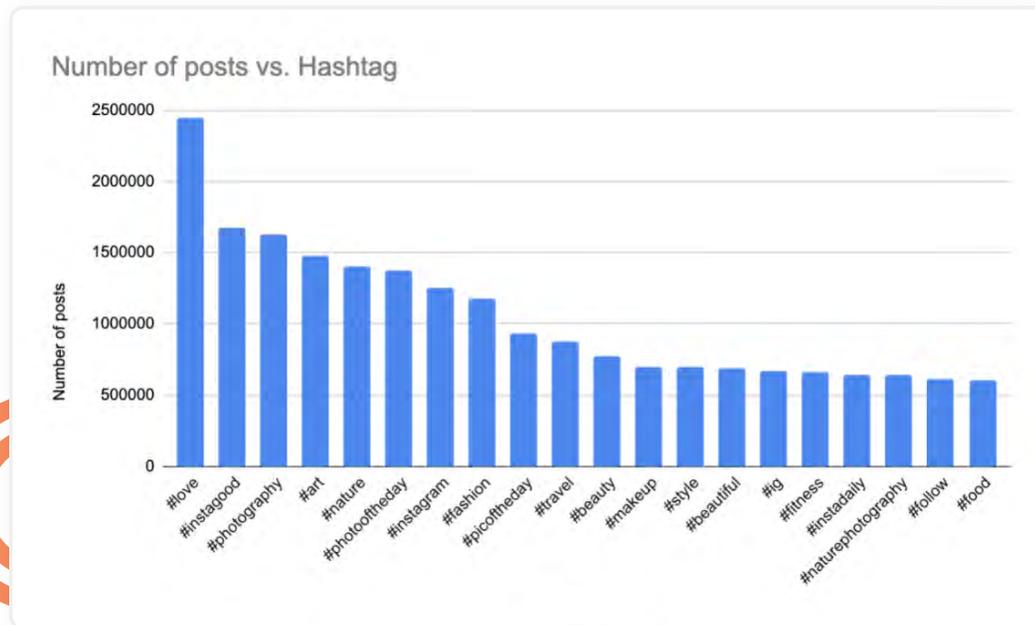


According to [Influencer Marketing Hub](#)

// You need to balance your wish to use popular hashtags against the danger of being crowded out of high demand topics...If you are making an Instagram post that is about love, you might include #love as one of your 30 permitted hashtags. But you should probably focus on using related hashtags with smaller, yet still sizeable followings, such as #wonderful, #adorable, #hug, #lover, or even #loveisintheair. //

WHAT ARE THE BEST HASHTAGS TO USE FOR VOLUME?

There are potentially hundreds of thousands of hashtags on Instagram, with new ones being created every minute. So how do you know which ones are the best to use for your post?



As Instagram set out to be the platform for visual and lifestyle content, there were no surprises when it came to the most popular hashtags on the social network this year.

In fact, this suggests consistently that the most popular categories of content posted on the platform include: #love, #instagood, #photography, #art and #nature.

True to form, when looking at the top 50 hashtags used this year, 5 of the top were related to photography, 5 to art and design, 5 to beauty and fashion, and 3 to food.

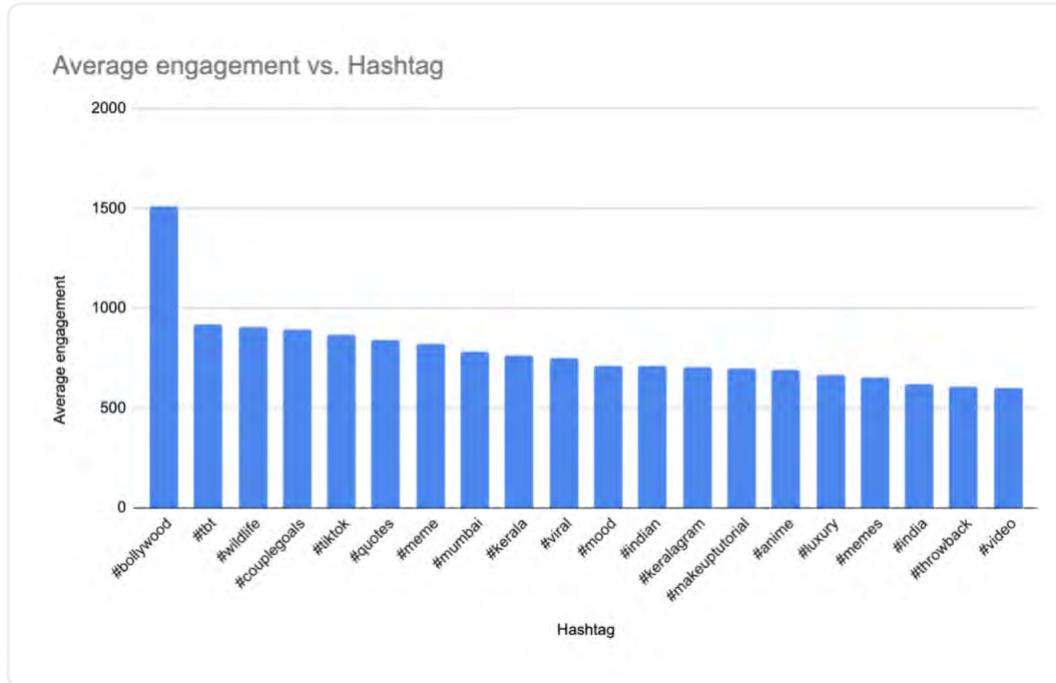
While the volume of hashtags is perhaps outdated, as this includes historically popular topics with older posts still sporting these hashtags, it still serves as an indicator of the platform's core topics for most users.

Now, you might be thinking: since the most popular hashtags equal the most used hashtags, does this mean I should be including them in my posts? **If engagement is what you're trying to increase, then no.**

WHAT ARE THE BEST HASHTAGS TO USE TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT?

As we mentioned, using the most popular hashtags will not necessarily get you the engagement you're after.

Instead, you'll want to know what the most engaging hashtags are - these are found in the posts that have the most average number of comments and likes.



#tbt



It turns out that the most engaging hashtags appear to be less generic than the most popular ones such as #love and #instagood.

The hashtag with the highest engagement rate this year was #bollywood, closely followed by #tbt, #wildlife, #couplegoals, and #tiktok.

Speaking to the global reach of Instagram and its prevalence in different regions, 6 of the most engaged hashtags in 2020 were related to India or Indian culture. This is a shift from last year's findings, where only one hashtag – #paris – was related to a location or specific culture.

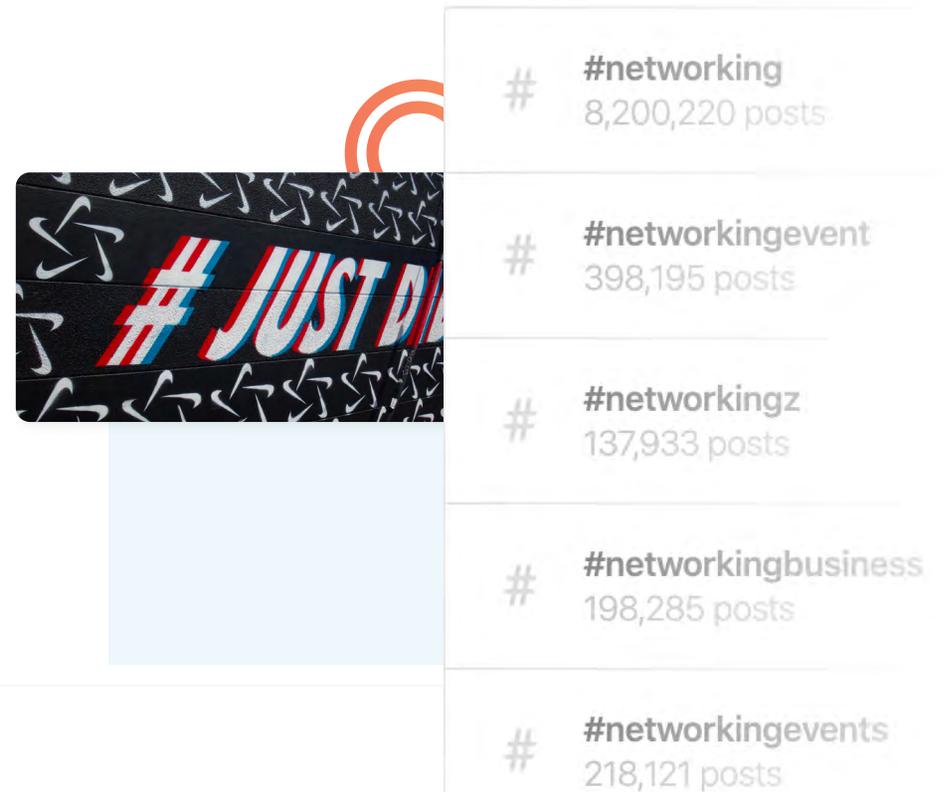
As people love nostalgia on social media, particularly in a year of staying at home, it's easy to see why #tbt made the cut as the second most engaging hashtag this year. Though, it's worth noting this is a bump down from the top spot last year.

While hashtags are typically used to share a snippet of what a piece of content is about, they can also be used to share what a piece of content is - from Internet memes to videos to text-based quotes.

This year, hashtags with a high engagement rate that described the content format included: #tiktok, #quotes, #meme, #video, #inspirationalquotes, #quoteoftheday and #repost.

#tiktok making the Top 5 also points to an interesting trend of cross-platform content promotion, wherein TikTok videos can be uploaded to Instagram as Stories, video posts, or even recreated organically as an Instagram Reel.

When it comes to our four-legged friends, 2020 saw a higher volume of posts that were hashtagged with #dog, but posts with #cats and #catstagram had a higher engagement rate. While dog lovers may be more eager to share snapshots of their pups on Instagram, it's cat lovers who are more likely to engage with content featuring their favorite felines.



KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

At the end of the day, just because you can include up to 30 hashtags in an Instagram caption, doesn't mean you should. We recommend building a hashtag strategy around 20 hashtags that are super relevant to each of your posts and your industry, as well as your brand.

This means steering away from highly popular, generic hashtags and looking for ones that are specific to your niche.

If you aren't already following your competitors, partner brands, or influencers in your industry, do so and see what type of hashtags they're including in their posts. You'll also want to 'follow' hashtags related to your industry which you can do in your 'Explore' page.

Last but not least, don't forget about branded and campaign hashtags. They're specific to your business and you can include them across various types of content on Instagram including: Feed posts, IGTVs, Reels, and Stories.

The global pandemic not only impacted the types and formats of content being shared on Instagram, but also saw a change in the way that users actually utilized the platform. No longer just a means of entertainment and inspiration, **#coronavirus** taking a top hashtag spot this year points to a shift, as users looked to Instagram as a source of information on COVID-19.

Tags

You've likely tagged or have been tagged in an Instagram post. Have you ever thought about why?

Tagging other users on the platform started out as a way to identify those people that were included in your photos or videos.

As time went on, it became good way to get more exposure on your posts:

Mention Blog

// When you tag someone on Instagram, they receive an instant notification, increasing –in theory– your chances of them getting involved with your content. //

But is it actually effective in getting people to engage with your content? With the onset of influencer marketing, we started to see more and more brands and celebrities being tagged in posts for promotional purposes, and vice versa. For this reason, some users were starting to find the behavior of being tagged in posts a bit spam-like and off-putting.

According to our 2020 Instagram Report, we discovered that the more people you tag in your content, the less engagement you'll generate on your post.

Let's see if this still holds true today.



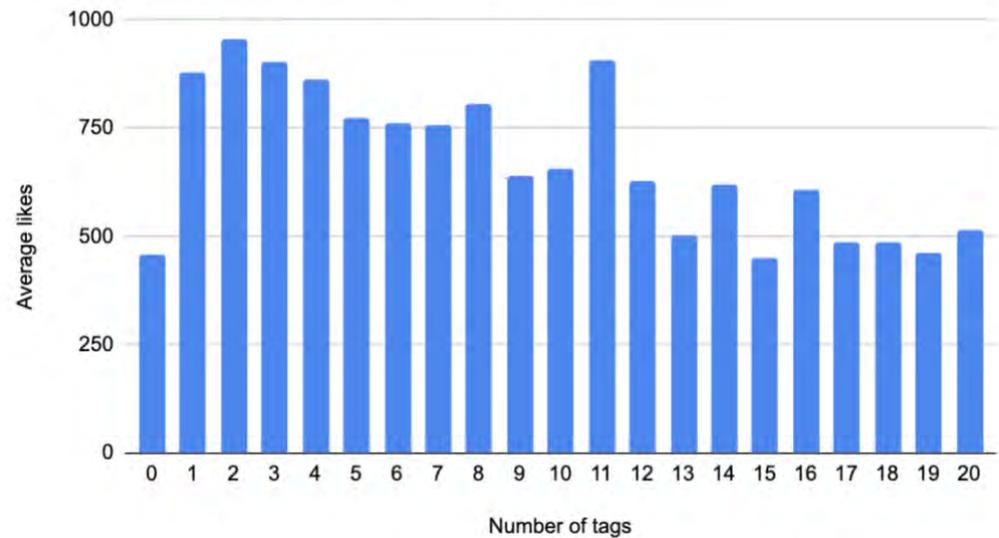
DOES TAGGING ON INSTAGRAM INCREASE ENGAGEMENT?

Currently, around 73% of Instagram posts contain no tagged users, which shows a massive uptick from last year, where just 34.4% of posts didn't tag any users. Of posts analyzed for this report, 95% had 3 or less tags.

Note: our data is only based on users tagged in Instagram posts and comments, not including those users tagged in Stories.



Average likes vs. Number of tags



If more people are tagging fewer and fewer users, does this mean that it's impacting the engagement of their content?

Our research found that in 2020, **there were more likes on posts that had tags than those that didn't.**

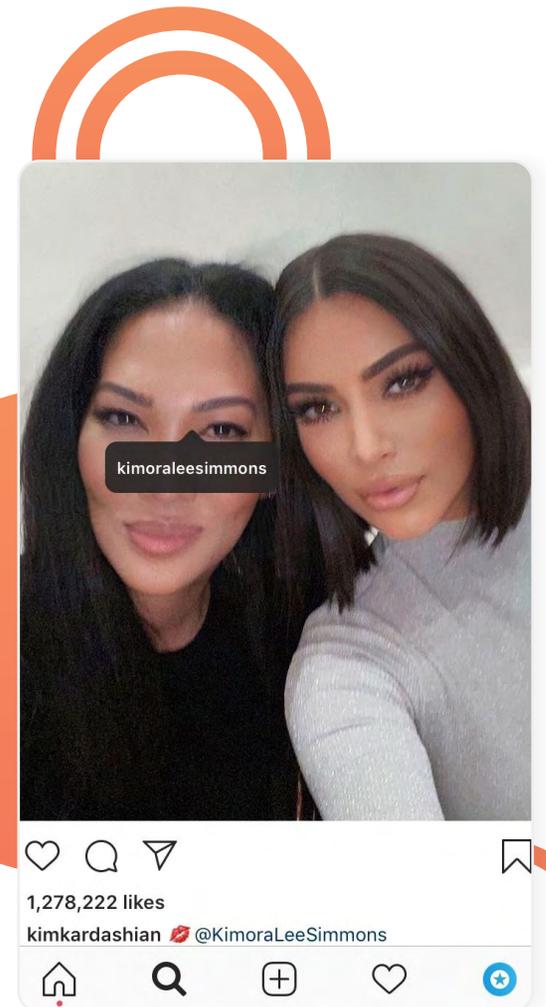
So, what is the ideal number of users to tag in your post?

The thing is, highly engaging posts on Instagram typically don't tag users. These posts are usually published by super influential accounts with large followings – which cause them to receive a large volume of likes naturally.

Of course, there are exceptions, such as when mega influencers like Kim Kardashian West tags a brand or another influential profile in her post.

By using the median number of likes instead of the average, the results are impacted less by highly influential accounts, giving us a more realistic representation.

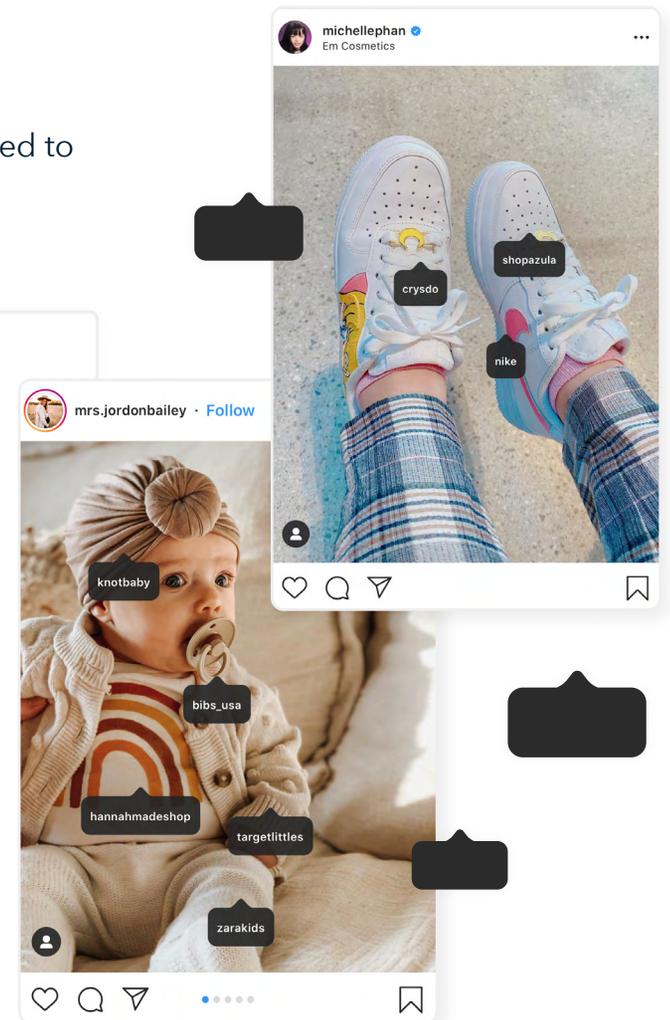
Exceptions aside, tagging 2 users was optimal when considering the averages of likes on tagged posts, and tagging 16 users was the best when considering the median of likes.



The trend was similar for comments on tagged and untagged posts: having tags increased the number of comments.

Having 6 tags was optimal when considering the averages of comments, and as many tags as possible (between 12 & 20 tags) was the best when considering the median.

As we mentioned, more and more people have been tagging users and brands on Instagram over the last few years. This has likely made the tagged profiles less inclined to like or comment on the content compared to before.

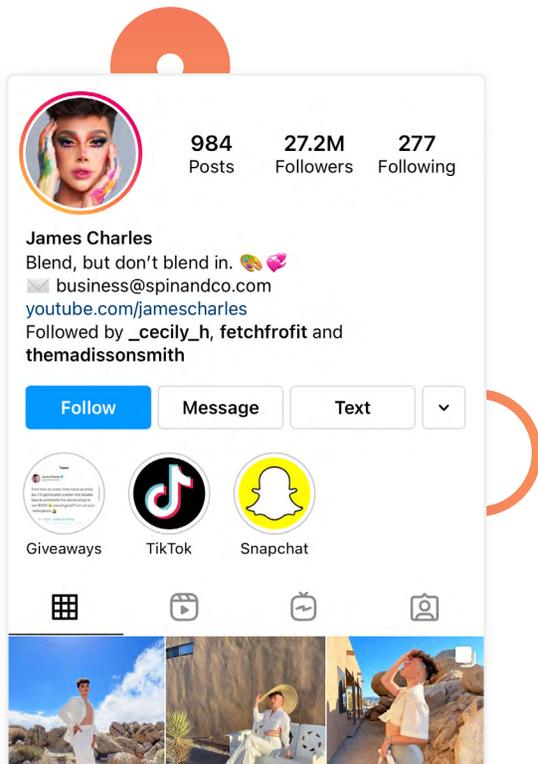
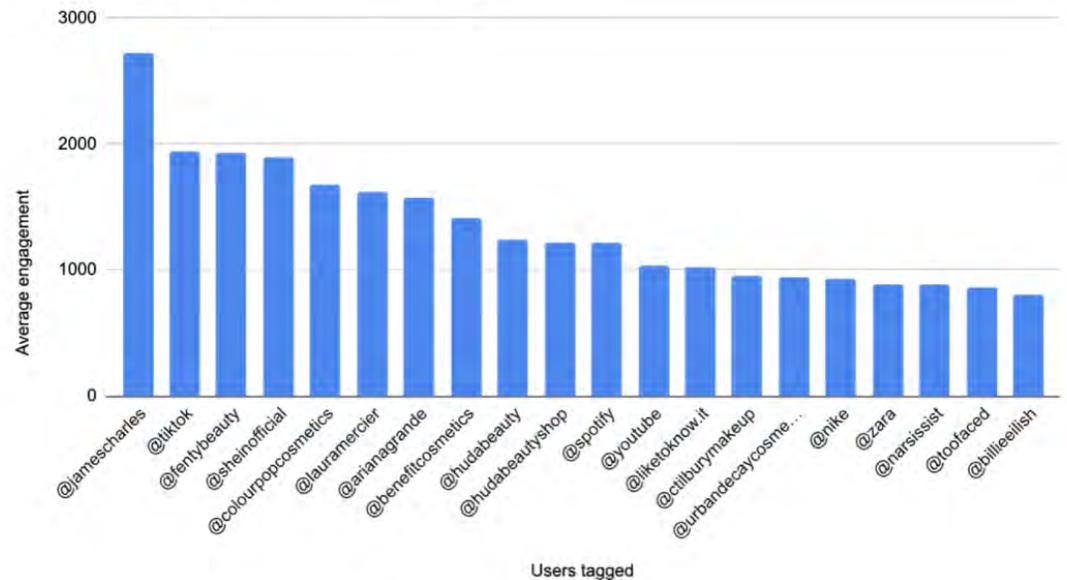


MOST ENGAGED TAGGED USER

In our 2020 report, Fashion Nova, a trendy fashion brand, was the number one most engaging tagged user. This was due to the brand being touted and tagged in posts by Instagram influencers and celebrities like the Kardashians.

Who do you think takes the spot this year for top engaged tagged user? Taylor Swift? Kylie Jenner?

Average Engagement vs. Users tagged



This year's top spot was actually claimed by James Charles (@jamescharles), the Internet personality with the most followers across the platform. This was followed closely by posts tagging @tiktok.

Last year's findings pointed to a rising trend of makeup and beauty accounts taking up the top spots in the list of most engaged tagged users. This year, that trend has continued to grow, with fashion brands also breaking into the top five.

Of the Top 50 users, over half are the current most popular cosmetic brands including @fentybeauty (#3), @sheinofficial (#4), and @colourpopcosmetics (#5).

Amongst the rest of Top 50 accounts to tag to increase engagement, 43 were brands and 4 were personalities. Of those brands, 27 were beauty brands, 5 were apps, 5 were fashion brands, 2 were technology brands, and 2 were consumer goods brands.

This indicates that it was a huge year for brands on Instagram, particularly beauty brands, as posts related to makeup are found to be the most engaging overall.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

While tagging users can be an effective way to get more exposure and engagement for your brand, you'll still want to be cautious and mindful when doing so.

Here are some best practices to keep in mind when tagging:

- 1 Only tag profiles that are relevant to your post. Tagging influencers that you've never worked with or random accounts that have nothing to do with your brand is poor Instagram etiquette and can come off as spam-like behavior.
- 2 Tag profiles that you're reposting content from. This should be done in addition to crediting them for the post. Plus, when you tag them, you increase the likelihood that they'll engage with your reposted content.
- 3 Tag partners, clients, employees, and brand ambassadors. Just like tagging brands you repost from, this gives them a little nudge to engage with your content and can help increase the engagement of your post.

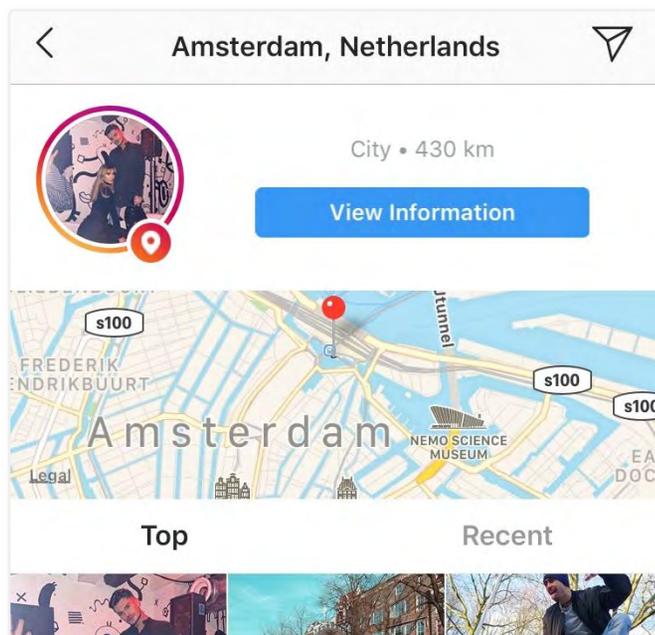
WHERE

Location

Location tagging on Instagram is a feature that has been around for some time, and there are a number of reasons why people would include a geotag with their posts.

For starters, the platform is a huge resource for discovering new products, travel destinations, retail businesses, and restaurants.

When you tag your post with a location, it has the potential to show up when an user searches the location name or keyword under 'Places.'



This can be extremely beneficial for local businesses to help increase their exposure: [Social Report](#)

// Posts with a tagged location result in 79% higher engagement than posts without a tagged location. //

This can work especially well when combined with influencer marketing.

Think about the following example: You follow tons of foodies on Instagram. You're travelling to London, UK and looking to check out the most trendy restaurants. Naturally, you'd check out local London IG foodies' feeds to see what scrumptious photos they've posted. Once you've set eyes on a few dishes based on their photos and description – you're sure to click on the tagged location to get names of the restaurant.

What's more, people love to tag places like their favorite brunch spots, which is what the whole concept of 'checking in' and Foursquare was originally built around.

Let's take a look at the trends around tagged locations.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS INSTAGRAM USED THE MOST?

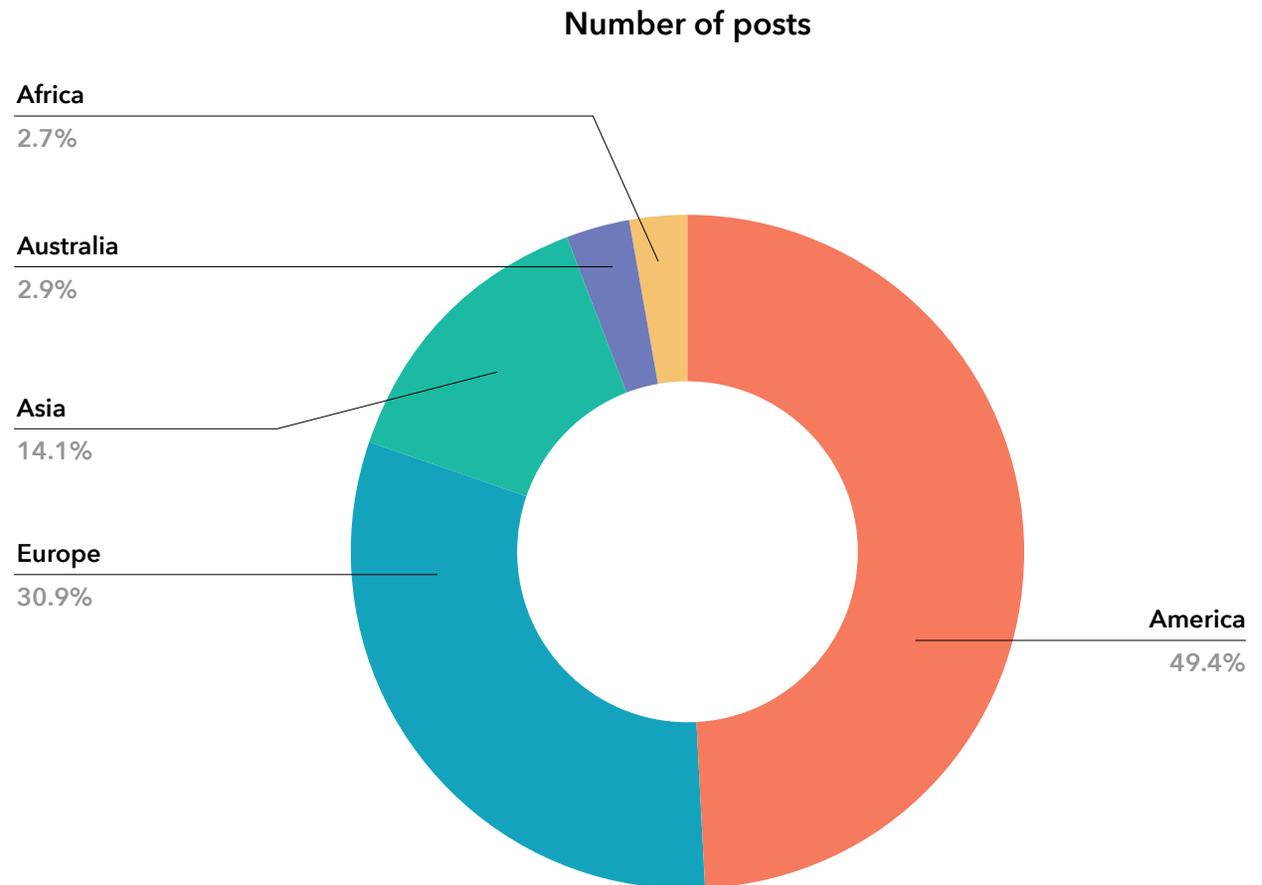
Thanks to the contributions of the USA and Brazil, the American continent accounted for around half of all Instagram posts in our analysis. This was followed by Europe (30% of posts), Asia (14% of posts), Australia (3% of posts) and Africa (3% of posts). There were only 47 total posts from Antarctica.

Only one African city appeared in the Top 50 Cities: Lagos, Nigeria. The USA boasted 16 cities in the Top 50, more than the continent of Europe (12 cities) and Asia (3 cities).

In general, European, South Asian and Middle Eastern countries were more engaged on Instagram than North American countries.

This insight is valuable for brands looking to expand their audiences and reach more users across the platform. If your brand is global, you have a better chance of driving up engagement with followers from Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East.

What's more, by focusing on driving up engagement in these locations, you can grow your following and increase awareness of your brand.



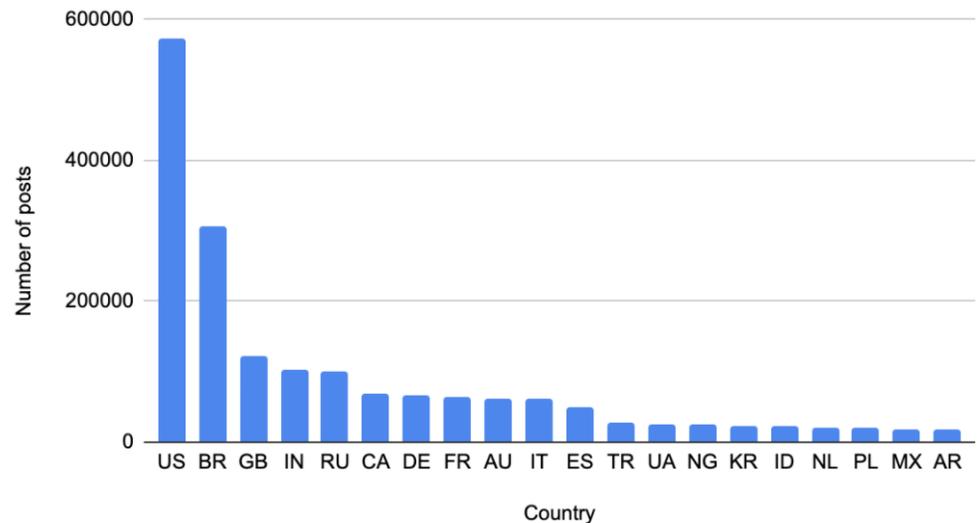
WHICH COUNTRIES USE INSTAGRAM THE MOST?

The country with the most Instagram posts was by far the USA - with 571K posts. This was followed in second place by Brazil (307K), the UK (121K), India (102K) then Russia (101K). While the USA and Brazil won for volume of posts, they were not the countries with the highest average engagement rate. In fact, the USA came in 21st place, and Brazil in 33rd place, for engagement.

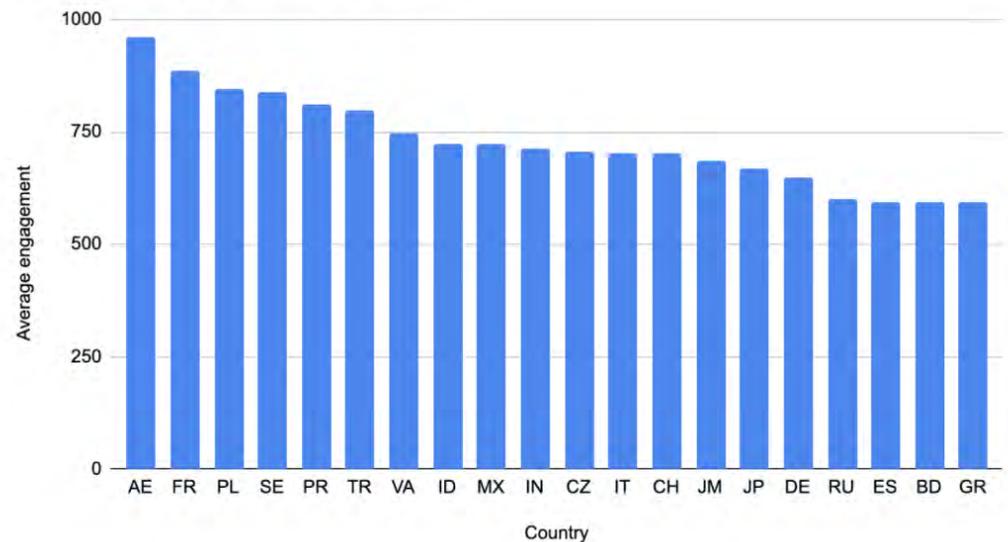
This might be due to the pickiness of the users in these regions, less likely to freely give away their valuable likes, or simply an overflow of posts. Making up over half of the total posts analyzed, the sheer volume of content being shared in the USA and Brazil may be over indexing for engagement, with fewer likes to go around between them.

Instead, the top 5 countries with the highest engagement level were, in order: The United Arab Emirates, France, Poland, Sweden, and Puerto Rico (US).

Number of posts vs. Country

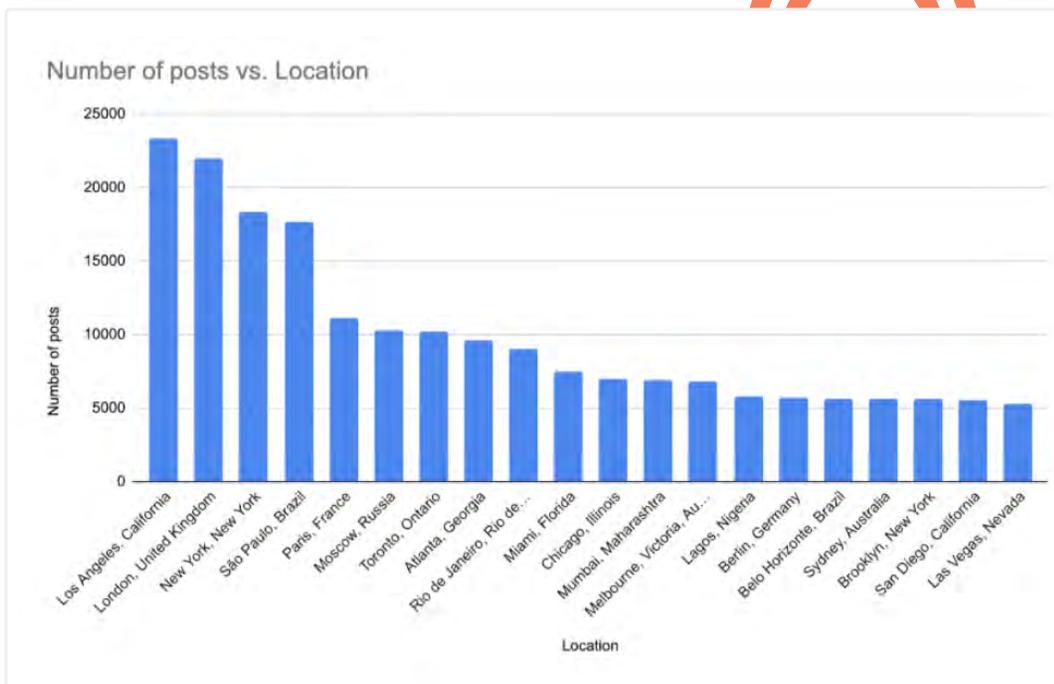


Average engagement vs. Country



WHICH CITIES POSTED THE MOST ON INSTAGRAM?

According to our data, the most tagged city in the world is Los Angeles, California for the second year in a row.



In fact, LA not only beat out some of the biggest cities in the world such as Paris (#4) and London (#2), but it also topped its east coast rival, New York - which followed closely as the number three contender, down from the second spot last year.

But the top cities weren't just limited to North America and Europe. In fact, São Paulo was amongst 5 other Brazilian cities who featured in the Top 50 Cities for Instagram posts.

However, being the most tagged city in the world doesn't necessarily mean it's the most loved.

Let's look at the top tagged city with the highest average engagement.

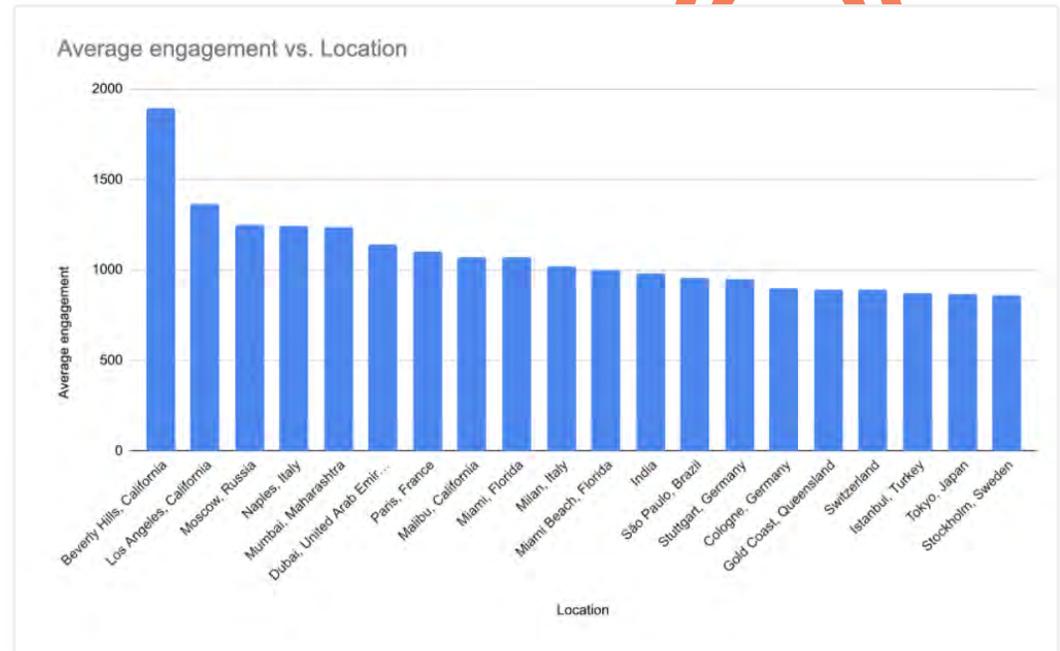
WHICH CITY HAS THE HIGHEST ENGAGEMENT RATE ON INSTAGRAM?

The city with the highest level of engagement was Beverly Hills, with a much higher engagement rate than the rest of nearby Los Angeles (2nd place, down from first last year) and Malibu (8th place).

With Beverly Hills and LA taking the top two spots, it begs the question - is 'the west coast' really 'the best coast'? We'll leave that up for debate.

Looking at the rest of the Top 50 cities for engagement, there was a mix of large metropolitan cities and capitals, as well as smaller cities. Amongst the larger cities, we saw Mumbai, India (5th), Paris, France (7th) and Tokyo, Japan (19th), with smaller cities including Naples, Italy (4th), Stuttgart, Germany (14th) and Bristol, UK (27th).

Five Indian cities were also featured in the Top 50 for engagement: Mumbai (5th), Kolkata (23rd), Surat (24th), Delhi (37th) and Kerala (49th). As the fourth top country for overall Instagram use, it's unsurprising that cities in India broke the Top 5 for engagement.



And as we mentioned earlier, while the USA had the most number of cities in the Top 50 for publishing posts, their engagement was much lower. In fact, the USA only had 8 cities in the Top 50 for engagement.

Those cities were: Beverly Hills (1st), Los Angeles (2nd), Malibu (8th), Miami (9th), Miami Beach (11th), Santa Monica (33rd), Manhattan (43rd) and New York (44th).

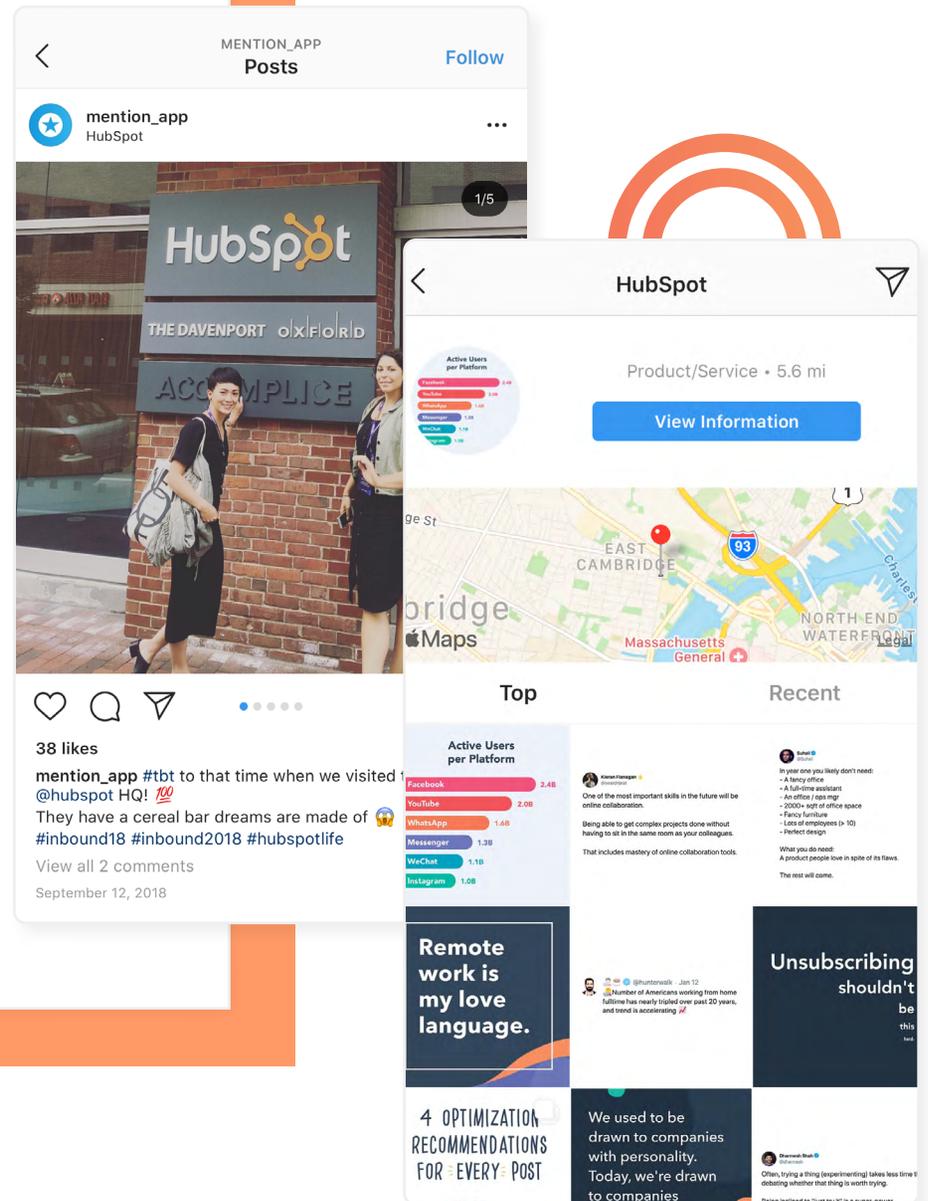
This means that a like or comment from someone in the USA is much harder to come by, so if your brand wants to reach audiences across the country, you'll need to ensure your content is compelling, unique, and – of course – engaging.

KEY TAKEAWAY FOR MARKETERS

Adding a location to your Instagram posts can be highly beneficial for local businesses.

As the platform is a huge source of inspiration for discovering new trends and 'it' spots, location tagging can only boost your exposure and brand engagement. So include your whereabouts where you can across your content: in your image posts, videos, and in Stories.

If you don't already have one, be sure to create a specific location tag for your business. Once people start to check into it, you'll be able to see all of the posts tagged with it and see what your community is saying about you.



WHEN

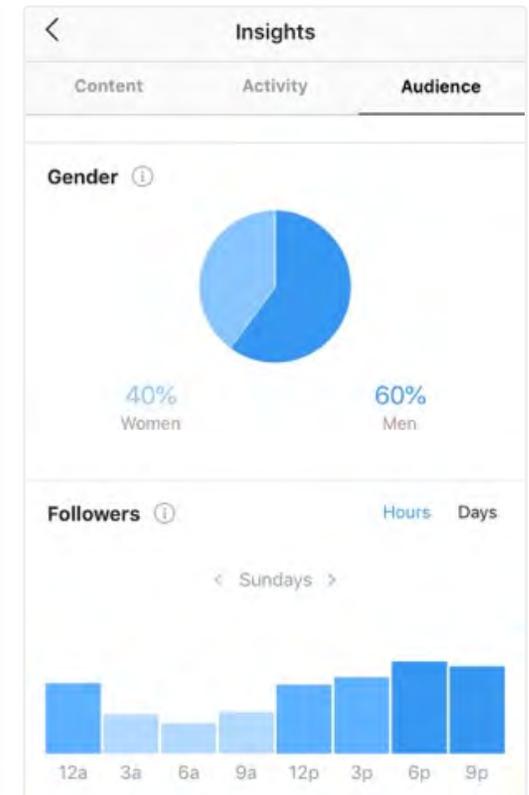
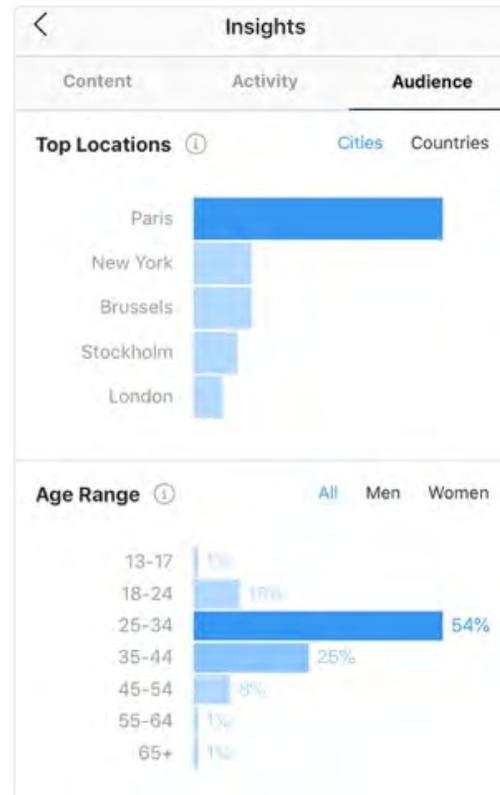
As Instagram is constantly changing its engagement algorithm, users - and businesses in particular - are always trying to find ways to outsmart it.

When it comes to what time to post in order to get the highest engagement, keep in mind that there is no simple, universal answer. [There are a number of studies](#) out there, each with their own take on what the prime times are to post.

So before you follow recommendations of one particular study, take a look at the behavior of your audience and take a few factors into account, including:

- Where the bulk of your followers are geographically
- What day/times they are the most active
- The industry you're in

Note that you'll need to have an Instagram business or a creator profile to access Instagram Insights.



Later

// Since Instagram is now prioritizing "new" content on people's feeds, your best shot at getting your content in front of your followers is by posting when most of them are actively scrolling the app.

Let's look at the trends around time and engagement.

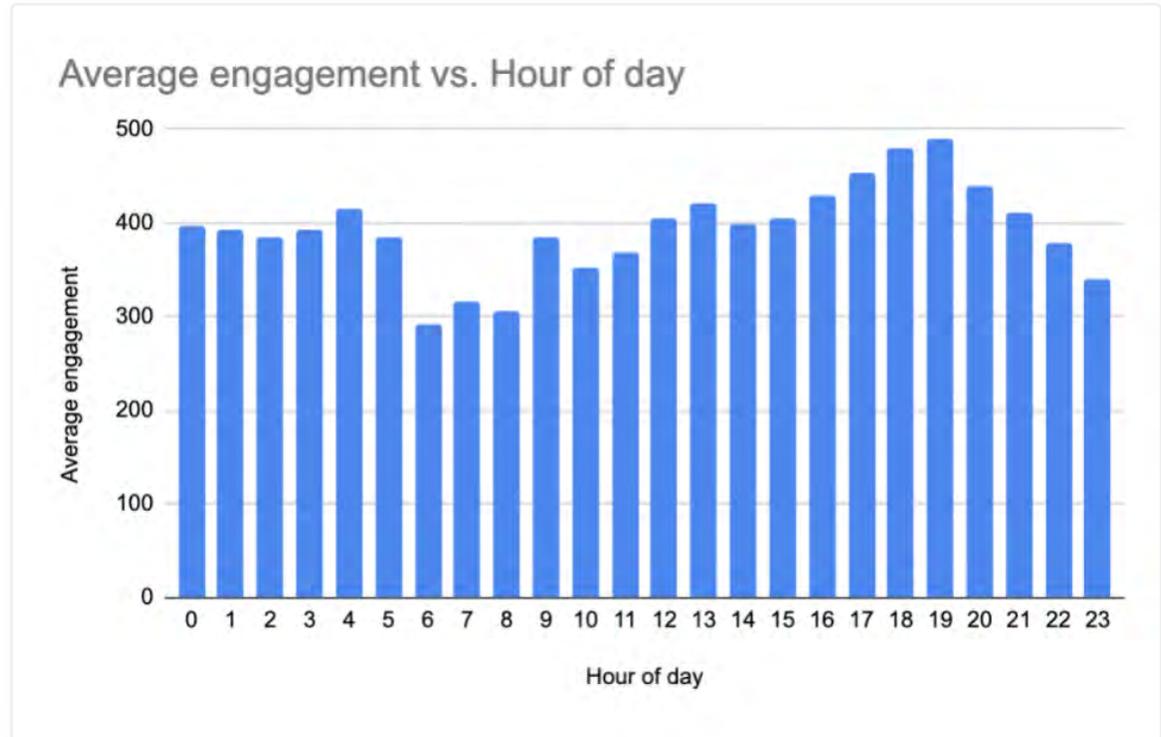
Time: global

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO POST ON INSTAGRAM?

When thinking about the best time to post on Instagram, it's important to look at both the average and the median engagement rate of posts based on the hour they are posted.

Based on our research, engagement with posts spikes in the early evening between 6:00 - 8:00pm, or 18:00 - 20:00 local time, where it is at its highest. Engagement then tends to drop quite quickly over the course of the evening and the night until midnight.

Throughout the early hours of the morning (12:00 - 3:00am or 00:00 - 03:00), engagement stays relatively stable, then steadily rises until around midday 12:00 - 1:00pm or 12:00 - 13:00, where there is a small peak of engagement.



The early afternoon tends to be a quieter time for engagement, and is on par with engagement rates in the early hours of the morning.

Around 4:00pm or 16:00, engagement starts rising again until the 7:00pm or 19:00 peak.

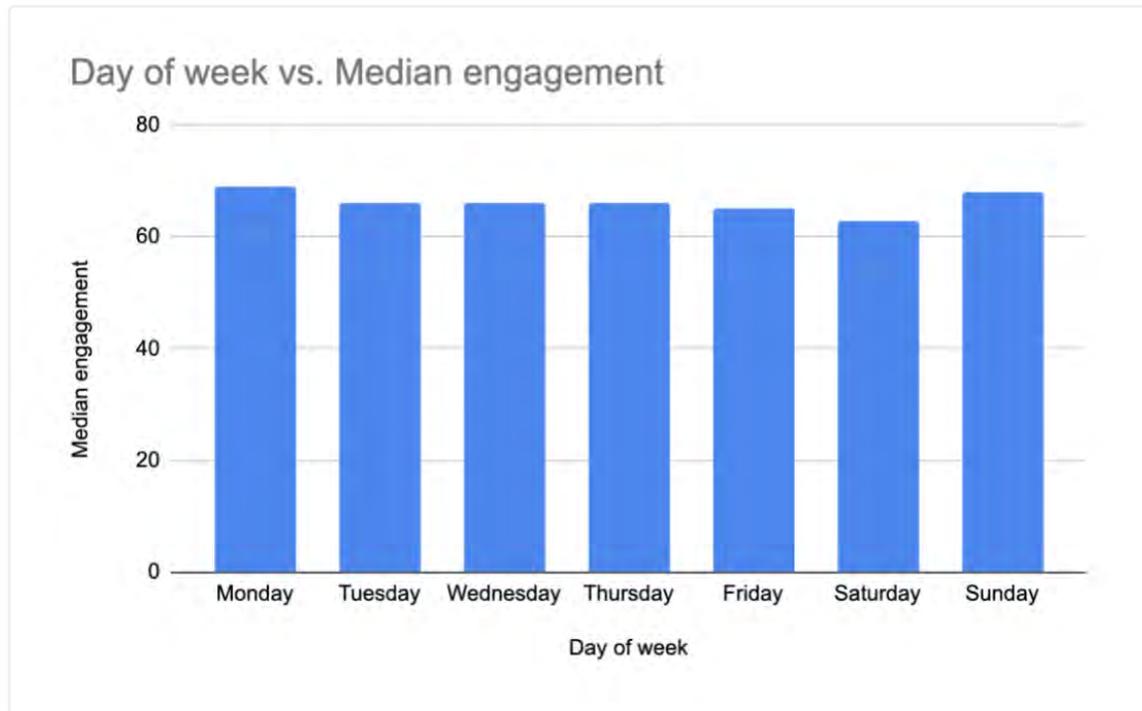
When thinking just about time of day, the spikes of engagement you'll want to plan around occur between 12:00 - 1:00pm or 12:00 - 13:00, and between 6:00 - 8:00pm, or 18:00 - 20:00, which aligns with the typical office workday.

WHAT IS THE BEST DAY OF THE WEEK TO POST ON INSTAGRAM?

Another factor to consider about posting time is related to the type of business you are. If your brand is a lifestyle, restaurant, travel or blogging business, your audience could likely be more active on weekends or during non 'office' hours.

If you're a B2B or a SaaS brand, chances are your followers will engage with your posts more during weekdays.

According to the data, there tends to be a similar rate of engagement across each day of the week. Sunday has a slightly higher than average rate of engagement than the other days of the week, with Tuesday and Thursday having slightly lower than average rates of engagement.



When it comes to the weekend, there is a small but significant difference between engagement with posts on Saturday vs Sunday - posts are more likely to be seen and engaged with on Sunday.

Considering the working week, Monday might be the best day of the week to post for engagement, followed by Friday. Lower engagement might be expected in the middle of the week.

With this in mind, you can plan your Instagram posts to align with the times and days of the week when your audience is most active, which can increase the reach and overall engagement of your posts.

By optimizing to your audience's schedule, you ensure that your brand is present and top of mind as they scroll their Instagram feed.

Time: regional

While the above statistics tell a generalized story for all the posts on Instagram, there are some local differences. For example, in Tallinn, Finland, Wednesday was actually the day where Instagram users engaged the most, whereas the day that had the least engagement was Sunday, contrary to the global trend.

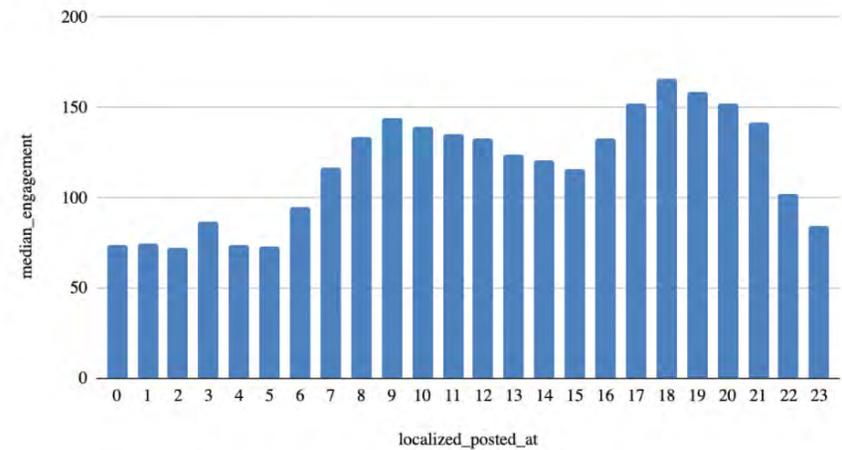


Here are some trend graphs for some of the cities we highlighted in the earlier section.

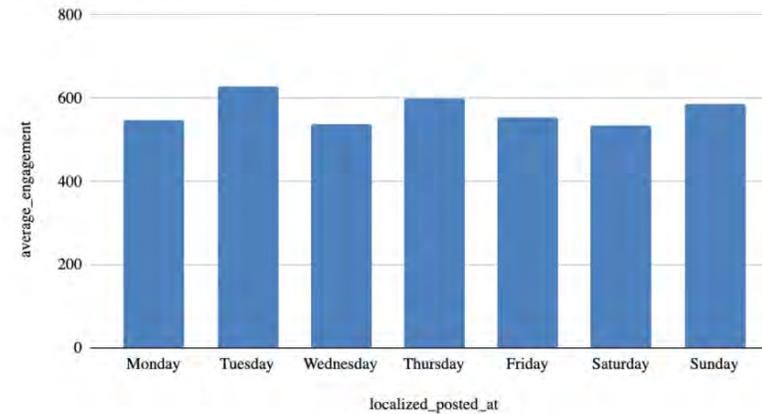
WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN INDIA?

Indian Standard Time: In India, we found more pronounced spikes and drops in engagement in the morning (09:00) and evening (18:00). Contrary to the global trend, in India, Tuesday is the strongest day for engagement.

Indian Standard Time

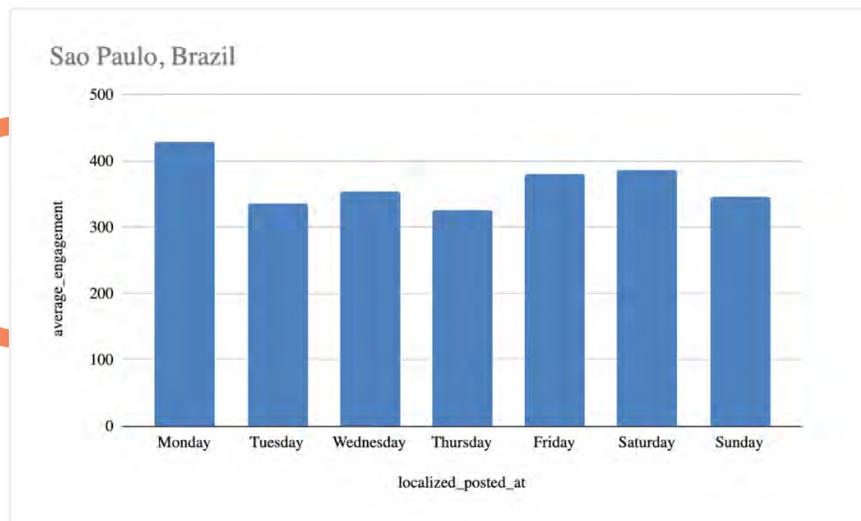
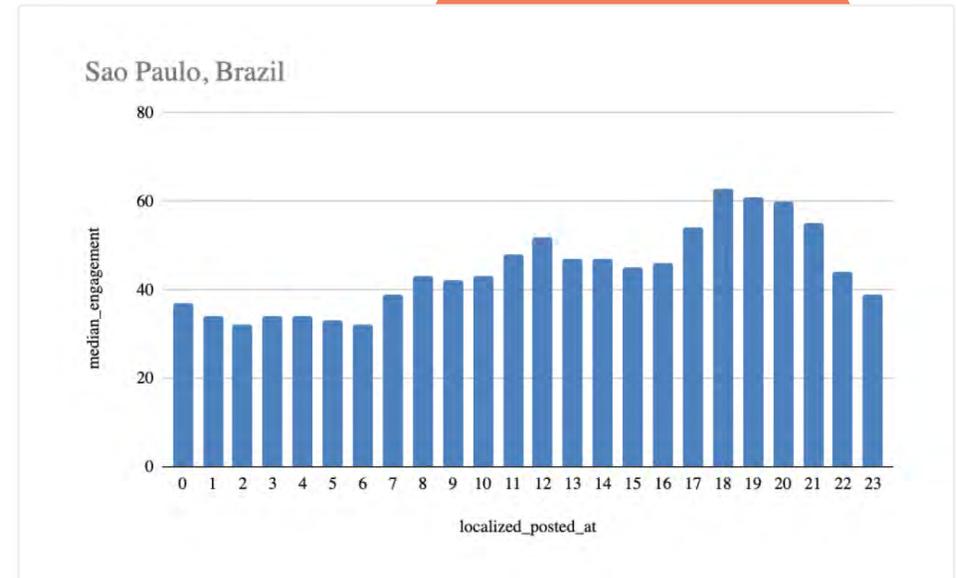


Indian Standard time



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN SÃO PAULO?

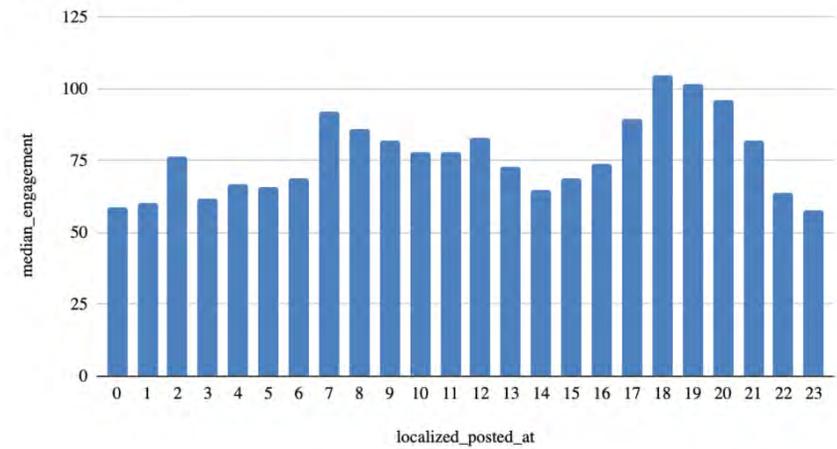
São Paulo, Brazil: For São Paulo, Brazil, Monday was found to have the highest average engagement rate, and the evening spike in engagement (around 18:00 - 20:00) is more pronounced than the global average.



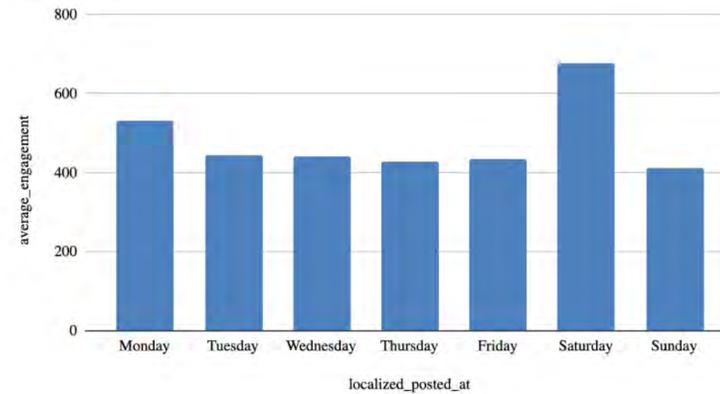
WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN PARIS?

Paris, France: Our research found that Paris, France tends to have a spike in engagement on Saturday, and engagement spikes earlier in both the morning and the evening, around 07:00 and 18:00.

Paris, France



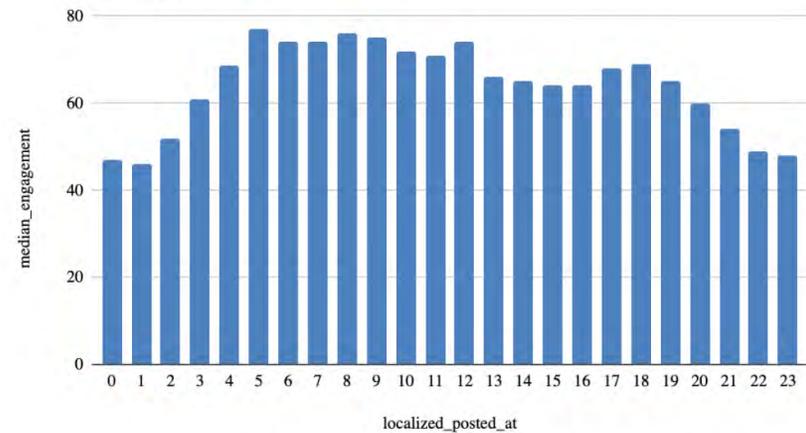
Paris, France



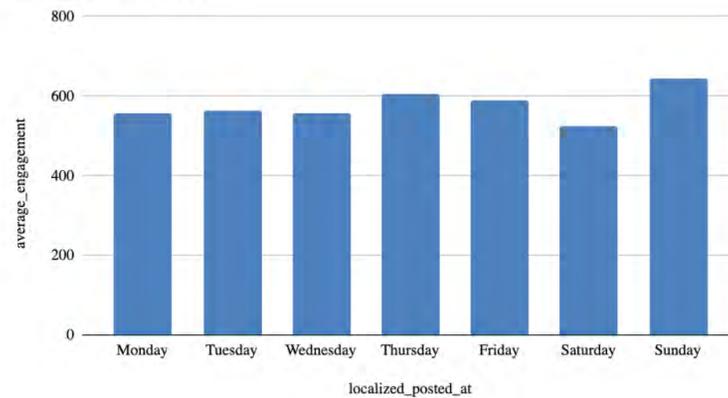
WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN LA?

Los Angeles, USA: For users in Los Angeles, USA, our research found higher levels of engagement throughout the morning, peaking at 5:00am, then dropping throughout the day until 1:00pm. In line with global findings, Sunday is the strongest day for Instagram engagement in LA, but by a more pronounced margin.

Los Angeles, USA



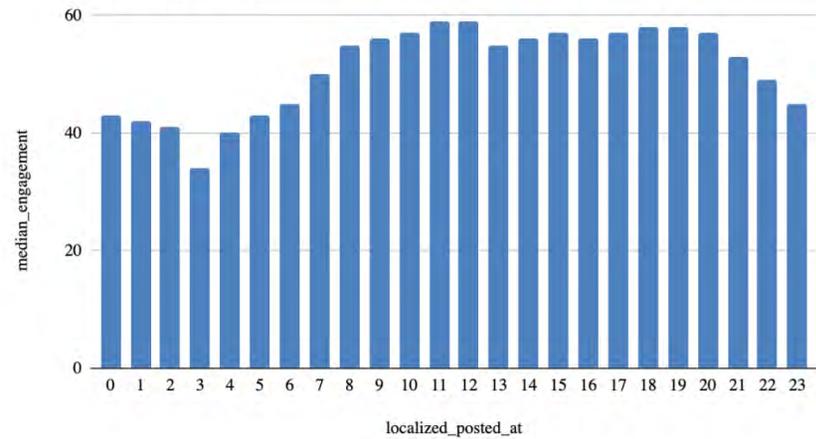
Los Angeles, USA



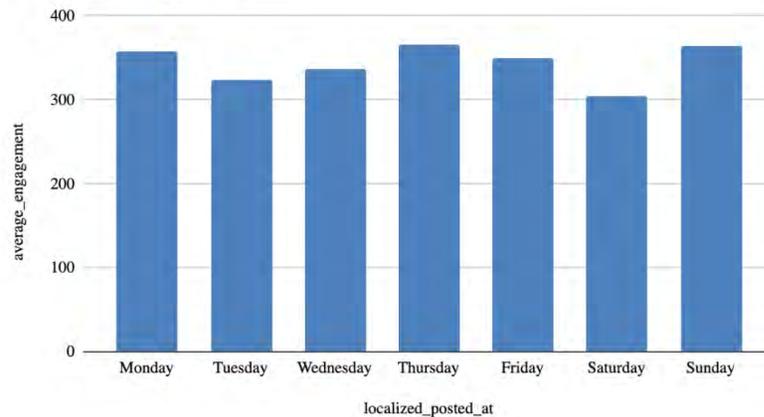
WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN NEW YORK?

New York City, USA: On the opposite side of the country in New York, USA, peak of engagement is around midday, with steady engagement throughout the afternoon. Engagement reduces in the evening and night until around 3:00am, where it begins to pick up once again until the afternoon. The best day of the week to post varies, with Monday, Thursday and Sunday being equally as strong, and Saturday being the weakest day for engagement.

New York City, USA



New York City, USA



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME AND DAY TO POST IN LONDON?

London, UK: In London, UK Instagram engagement peaks around 06:00 - 07:00 and again at 18:00, the evening spike in line with our findings across various global communities. London, however, also sees a less pronounced midday peak, and lower engagement during the night. Tuesday and Friday are the strongest days of the week to post, and similar to New York, Saturday is the weakest.

