



Changing Information Channels

SUMMARY: New technologies and perspectives are giving rise to new channels of information dissemination. These channels, like TikTok or gaming platforms, are shaped by audiences seeking new forms of contact and expression and transforming what it means to be a legitimate information source.



Forecasts

- New information channels are not just new platforms but new content forms. This will cause greater audience fragmentation and a proliferation of novel content formats.
- New channels will elevate fresh voices and enable them to gain attention that eclipses that garnered by traditional media incumbents. Popularity will give these new voices greater public credibility and diminish the importance of credentials or institutional affiliations.
- Algorithms will play an increasingly dominant role in finding and creating content and determining its reach. More media voices will be “deepfake”—enhanced and customized to maximize appeal to individual viewers.
- Innovative app platforms will continuously spawn new online communities. These new collectives will increasingly be managed with native digital tools like blockchains, cryptographic security, and algorithmic governance, rather than by traditional legal and organizational frameworks.

Key Uncertainties

The longevity and impact of online influencers as cultural tastemakers



The perceived authenticity of new channels as they become mainstream



The longevity of new channels in the face of ongoing innovation



Ability of mainstream institutions to use emergent channels



Impact of regulatory initiatives to curb disinformation

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Supporting Trends

- **Adapting to the new information channels.** Media ecosystems are adapting to new media platforms. The U.S. Surgeon General is using dating apps for public health education and the LA Times has a “meme team” to make content go viral.
- **Private social media.** Emerging social media platforms are emphasizing privacy and exclusivity. Raya offers strict verification of identities, while subscription-only Discord communities create a more sheltered online experience.
- **Gen Z’s fragmenting digital identity.** Gen Z are social media natives, and they are pioneering new ways to represent their digital identity over a range of public, private, and anonymous accounts.
- **Traditional content in new channels.** Financial news is being disrupted by new media platforms, such as the Reddit r/Wallstreetbets community and TikTok, on which financial commentators are providing financial education.
- **Declining attention spans.** The American attention span is shortening in the face of technologies that provide constant distraction and interruption.
- **I read it online.** A 2020 Reuters poll found that 48 percent of Americans report getting their news most often from social media, versus 2 percent who said they got news from print newspapers.

Related Drivers of Change

- Anticipatory Intelligence
- Declining Trust
- Reputation by the Numbers
- Ethical Edge of Innovation

Notable Data Points

EXCEL GIRL ON TIKTOK

Kat Norton’s successful “Miss Excel” TikTok channel—
with over 650,000 subscribers—
 enabled her to leave consulting to become a freelance Excel trainer.

Source: The Verge.

NEWS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

30% of Gen Z and 26% of Millennials
 are using social media as their primary source for news.

Source: YPulse.

NEW DIGITAL GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Teen supporters of Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey used grassroots digital media organizing to get
20.9% turnout among voters
 18 to 24 in the 2020 primary, up from 6.7% in 2018.

Source: The New York Times.

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Strategic Insights

- New media platforms create new challenges for messaging. Platform and channel selection will become more important to strategic, targeted messaging and other content development and dissemination strategies.
- Younger association members may gravitate towards unofficial association or industry influencers on new communication channels. This could create new centers of discussion outside of the association and change the environment for recruiting and integrating younger members.
- New subscription-based platforms (e.g., Substack) pose a possible threat to membership publications, with the potential for the best community-generated content to be locked behind independent paywalls. Associations could explore ways to integrate independent thought leaders, such as sponsorships, revenue sharing, and subscription bundles.
- Associations need to explore how—or even if—the authenticity and independence of new platform voices can be integrated into the institutional information channels. Associations could act as incubators or supporters of rising community influencers.
- Curation could play a greater role in association media and communication strategies. The boundaries of curation could expand to identify emerging new voices, reconfigure the gatekeeping functions of associations for a digital age, and provide value by conserving the scarce attention of their membership.

Timing

- **Stage:** Late emergence, poised for future acceleration and growth.
- **Speed:** Rapid, due to the pace of online innovation.

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Gen Z media moguls.** New influencers leverage their audiences to create new independent platforms that rival and eventually begin to displace incumbent media organizations.
- **Algorithms of virality.** Content algorithms grow more sophisticated and evolve beyond curating content. An increasing volume of all content is created by algorithms and designed to maximize its appeal to targeted audiences.
- **Content cord cutting.** Users turn away from the barrage of media noise and focus their attention on a narrow selection of platforms, ignoring other channels.

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Take Action

- **Identify your best channels.** Scan the information landscape, evaluate available and emerging channels, and think about how to best use them for member segments. Identify others who are successfully managing different channels and learn from them. Don't guess where your members are getting their information. Understand the data and insights you have and identify gaps in how you reach target audiences.
- **Mitigate risk.** Have conversations with stakeholders to define how different communication channels support your core values or place you at risk. Develop anti-harassment policies for online communications and standards for selecting and sunseting the platforms you use. Consider these policies within your association's overall ethics strategy. Have a social media crisis plan that reflects ongoing changes in the association's communications channels.
- **Cultivate influencers but manage your brand.** Build a communications ecosystem that balances core messages with new or timely messages. Embrace diverse voices and recognize that the association may need to partner with influencers for specific messages or cultivate their own influencers. Strive to keep a position as the vetted, trustworthy voice for the industry or profession.
- **Expand how you approach education.** Bring together your communications and education teams to consider how educational programs can use different platforms. Blend long-form communications with microlearning. Layer written, audio, video, and graphical communications to create multichannel approaches to educating.
- **Develop a nimble content strategy.** Associations will need to be nimble to keep up with changing channels. Create a strategy that regularly evaluates existing and emerging channels. Streamline operations to allow for experimentation and adaptation. Invest in training to stay current with emerging technologies and leading strategies.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms alone or in combination: *knowledge entrepreneur, streamer(s), ephemeral content, social commerce, online streamer, content streamer, influencer, influencer marketing, content marketing, TikTok, Twitch, Substack.*

Who Will Be Affected

Associations with more engagement with younger demographics will be impacted more by these trends, but over time this will have widespread impacts on association communication strategies.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and line of products to provide association professionals with a continual stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including

- Regularly updated action briefs;
- Tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- Guidance in performing environmental scans;
- Opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

Check the asaecenter.org/foresightworks webpage and follow ASAE Research Foundation on [LinkedIn](#) for updates on new findings and events.