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The Era of Intentional Fragmentation

How trust, niche communities and self-curation are reshaping audience engagement

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The hidden order behind digital fragmentation

At first glance, it looks like chaos.

For years, startling murmurations baffled scientists. Thousands of birds wheeled across the sky, appearing unpredictable to the naked eye. Until closer study revealed something else: that each movement followed simple, deliberate rules. What looks like chaos is, in fact, curated.

Digital audience behaviour today is following a similar pattern. What appears as scattered platform fragmentation is actually audiences deliberately engineering their own information ecosystems as a result of declining trust, platform bloat, AI-generated noise, and information overload.

The topline metrics tell you where attention is moving, with rapid growth in platforms built around niche communities on Substack, Discord, Reddit, etc. But the platform shift is only the symptom of something bigger. The real insight lies in understanding the *behavioural shifts* behind it.

The five forces of fragmentation

From Gen Z to the boardroom, audiences are actively reshaping how and where they engage. Our research reveals five converging forces driving this shift across even the most distinct professional and demographic groups.



The forces are driven through trusted networks, tightly defined communities, and purpose-built environments. What was once considered niche has become the new centre of gravity. And audiences are gravitating to where they feel fulfilled by their experience on platforms – whether that is being part of a like-minded community, having open and authentic discussions, or just being present where their peers are.

Crucially, these communities aren’t confined to single platforms; they’re orchestrated across multiple channels, each serving a specific function. In other words, audiences don’t *flock* to platforms; they *fragment* across them, activating different touchpoints depending on what they are seeking.

For organisations, this distinction changes everything. Influence is no longer won through presence alone, but through relevance within the right communities and networks.

At FleishmanHillard, our UK Digital and True Global Intelligence teams have unpacked behaviours of four distinct audiences - Gen Z, C-suite executives, healthcare professionals, and IT decision-makers - examining why they are fragmenting, and where they are consolidating. We’ve mapped ecosystems and communities where real engagement is happening, giving organisations the insights needed to become trusted nodes within their target audiences’ designed networks.



Real engagement no longer lives on the biggest platforms. It concentrates wherever trusted relationships, authentic communities, and purposeful spaces already exist”.

01 – The trust recession

AI-generated content, algorithmic manipulation, unverified sources and declining confidence in traditional media outlets are driving audiences away from what they perceive as ‘untrusted sources’.

02 – Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

Users are unbundling platforms by role, because no one platform can do *everything* well.

03 – Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

People follow trusted individuals and communities, not logos. In other words, attention accrues to trusted relationships, not to the biggest or most established channels.

04 – Authenticity sensitivity

As AI content floods the system, audiences are developing more sophisticated filters and relocating to spaces where human curation is visible and verifiable.

05 – Self-curation is the new survival skill

Faced with infinite content, audiences are aggressively narrowing their inputs to protect their time, focus, and mental bandwidth.

The outcome? Real engagement—the kind that drives decisions and builds loyalty—is no longer concentrated on traditional platforms.

Methodology

To capture contextual insights into audience digital and media platform behaviours, TRUE Global Intelligence, FleishmanHillard’s in-house data and intelligence practice, conducted online, chat-based interviews with four audiences: Gen Z, HCPs, IT Decision-Makers, and Executive Management. These chat-based interviews were facilitated by Focaldata’s AI-Qual moderator. In total, 200 interviews were conducted in December 2025. Results of these interviews were organised and analysed to identify key themes and insights used in this report. Additional secondary research was also conducted to include quantitative statistics.

01 The trust recession

Trust in centralised platforms is collapsing, encouraging audiences to move to networks where information can be verified by communities with peer moderation, professional credentials and transparent governance.

I don't trust mainstream media to give me unfiltered truths about anything anymore".

US Executive

Algorithm manipulation. Personal branding superseding genuine knowledge sharing. The increase in unverified sources and AI-generated content. The abundance of branded and paid influencer partnerships. Perception of political bias and polarisation. Together, these create a perfect storm: a trust recession across mainstream platforms.

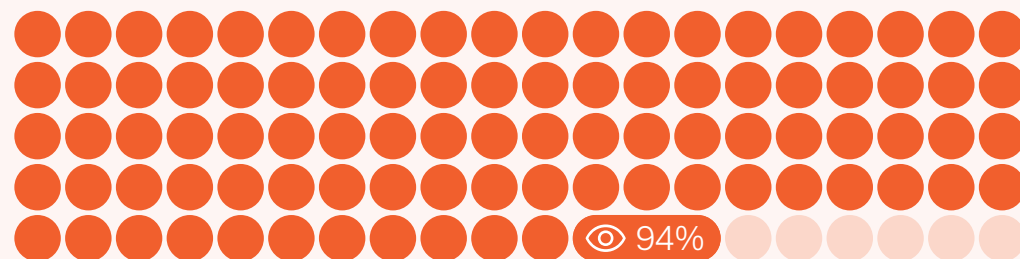
But this erosion in trust goes beyond social platforms. Traditional media outlets increasingly rely on those same channels to source and amplify stories, meaning that headlines are often optimised for clicks rather than credibility. The result is that audiences struggle to know what's verified, with a survey by the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024](#) citing TikTok and X as two of the hardest social media platforms for identifying trustworthy news.

While all four audiences we interviewed reported that rising misinformation influences which platforms they use, C-suite executives were the most vocal. Many cited political polarisation, sensationalism, and perceived bias, with one US executive stating, "I don't trust mainstream media to give me unfiltered truths about anything anymore".

Healthcare professionals arguably face even higher stakes, with unverified sources directly impacting patient outcomes. This has impacted trust across most mainstream platforms with one respondent saying "social media in general is full of misinformation. I think Twitter especially has become increasingly toxic and filled with false information".

To compound the impact of this misinformation, clinicians now regularly find themselves spending valuable appointment time correcting misled patient self-diagnoses.

So how are audiences responding? Rather than lingering on platforms where verification is near-impossible, they're moving to networks that they believe are centred around trust: communities with peer moderation, professional credentials, and transparent governance. While this response has been observed across all audiences surveyed, it's worth noting that platform trust is audience dependent. One space that has been deemed as credible by one niche audience might not be a trusted source for others.



In 2024, more than

9 in 10

people in the UK reported witnessing misinformation on social media at least once¹.

¹ [The Alan Turing Institute](#)

02 Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

Platforms trying to do everything are driving audiences away. As platforms expand features and monetisation layers, many users are responding by simplifying their digital environments.

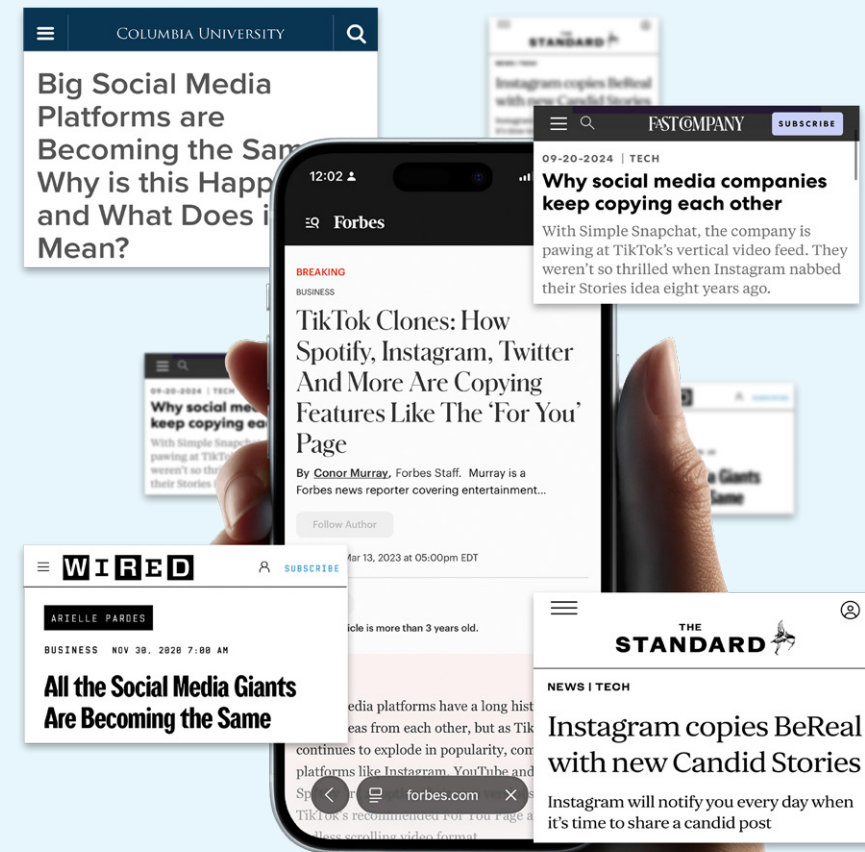
I don't like it when apps try to become everything... having too many functions kind of overwhelms me”.

UK respondent

Meta's answer to TikTok 'reels'. Threads' positioning as the 'new X'. Mainstream platforms are increasingly adding features not because users ask for them, but because they extend dwell time. However, rather than enhancing the user experience on platforms, this “feature creep” often adds unnecessary complexity to what was once a straightforward platform. For example, rather than posting a simple image and caption on Instagram, there's now the option to add music, polls, prompts, and AI captions.

This “one-stop shop” approach is upsetting the habits of even the most social-media-savvy of our audiences. Gen Z, who actively manage between four to eight platforms daily, are simply migrating to more focused alternatives when platforms abandon their core identity and attempt to become “everything apps”. One UK respondent articulated: *“I don't like it when apps try to become everything. On some social media you can shop, message, watch videos, watch short reels, play mini-games... having too many functions kind of overwhelms me”.*

Each new feature adds noise, not value. Audiences respond by turning to specialised platforms: Discord for community, Substack for content, Reddit for validation and LinkedIn for professional visibility.



03 Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

People follow people, not platforms. Fragmentation mirrors how audiences naturally cluster around trusted communities.



Audiences are migrating towards communities and platforms aligned with their values, where members feel a sense of ownership rather than being monetised, and where authenticity outweighs personal branding.

This shift is prolific across all audiences surveyed, but for Gen Z in particular, staying connected is a necessity. They are using social media to maintain relationships, be part of like-minded communities and stay informed about topics that matter to them and their peers, and the gravitational pull towards certain platforms occurs because they're where friendships deepen and where cultural moments unfold in real time.

Similarly, healthcare professionals are becoming more concentrated across clinical platforms (e.g., UpToDate, Medscape Consult, Sermo) and professional bodies (e.g., NHS, RCN, NMC) where regulatory reviews ensure validity. IT decision-makers are leaning towards platforms like Reddit, Discord and Stack Overflow for candid discussions and community moderation, and C-suite executives are choosing to communicate through more exclusive networks (e.g., Slack communities) or receive information directly via email (e.g., Substack).

In short, it is no longer where the largest platforms pull them, but about which smaller communities pull them hardest toward authenticity, expertise, and shared problem-solving. For organisations, the challenge isn't activating on platforms; it's participating authentically within communities, rather than disrupting them.

Sermo is where I actually find peer discussion that's valuable. It's physicians talking to physicians without the noise of the general public. There's no algorithm trying to monetize my attention".

US Physician

04 Authenticity sensitivity

What once passed for credibility is now under the microscope. As audiences grow more sceptical, they are favouring environments where human curation is visible and verification is transparent.

Authenticity has become the scarcest resource in digital spaces. As AI-generated content floods mainstream platforms, polished aesthetics (once the hallmark of credibility), now trigger scepticism. Personal branding has displaced genuine expertise. Algorithmic amplification has made vulnerability feel performative. The result is a fundamental inversion: audiences are now actively policing inauthenticity, and relocating to spaces where verified expertise and real human voices dominate.

Platforms, private networks and subscriptions that promote transparent sourcing, clear credentials, and explicit accuracy checks gain enormous advantage.

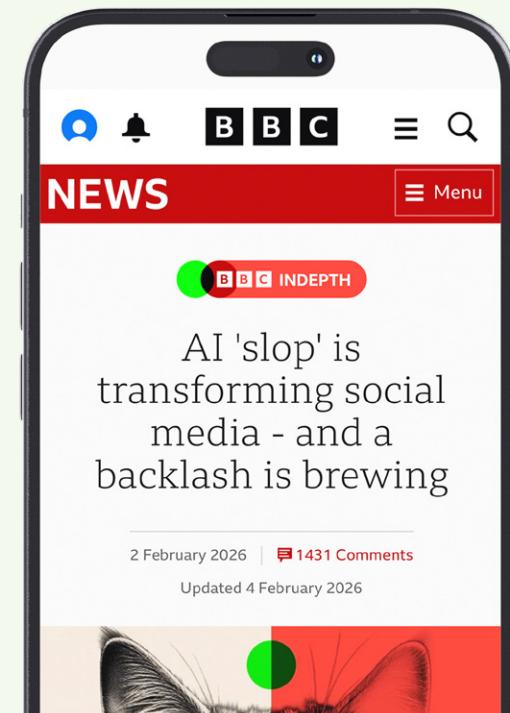
Organisations, brands and platforms that thrive will be those that abandon broadcast-style messaging and instead participate as transparent, human, accountable community members, where they earn trust by admitting limits and inviting scrutiny not inauthentic polish.

Across both social and traditional media, highly produced content now reads as potentially manipulated and unattributed video content is flagged as AI-generated. Author credentials are cross-checked obsessively. Mainstream news outlets, once trusted for their editorial polish, are now viewed with suspicion precisely because their professionalisation can mask bias or AI assistance. One respondent captured this inversion: *“Genuinely human voices feel more valuable because they stand out in the noise”*.

C-suite executives describe mainstream platforms as fundamentally performative, with one stating: *“I don’t like being actively sold to”*. What signals authenticity to executives is willingness to admit mistakes, transparent disclosure of conflicts of interest, and evidence-based reasoning. One executive noted: *“I turned to a private Slack group from CDOs. Within hours, I got candid feedback from peers”*. Audiences are relocating to spaces where inauthenticity is harder to hide such as gated communities with credential requirements and peer-moderated forums with transparent governance.

Professionally, I’ve shifted from X to LinkedIn and private Slack/Discord groups for data and AI leaders...”

US Executive



05 Self-curation is the new survival skill

Audiences understand their attention is currency and are increasingly selective about how, and where, they spend it online.

PPicking a platform depends on the moment, really. If I want to unwind and relax a bit, I will seek entertainment and go to TikTok. If I want to see what's going on, I will choose Facebook”.

UK Gen Z respondent

For years, it seemed as though time spent online would only go one direction: up. More platforms and more features meant deeper immersion. Growth seemed inevitable.

But recent data challenges that assumption. According to GWI data time spent on social media peaked in 2022. [Today, adults spend an average of two hours and 20 minutes per day on social platforms – nearly 10% below that peak.](#) The decline is most pronounced among teens and twenty-somethings, historically the heaviest users.

Simultaneously, platform touchpoints are multiplying and audiences are, on average, diversifying across more platforms; recent [GWI data suggests 6.83 platforms per month.](#) Our research shows a recurring behaviour across demographics: self-curation as a survival skill. Users are intentionally redesigning their information diets, cherry-picking the inputs that deserve their time and tuning out the rest.

In this environment, habit and platform loyalty no longer dictate platform use the way they once did. They are selected in service of a very specific purpose.

For Gen Z, no single platform dominates. Each plays a distinct role in their social and digital ecosystem – whether for entertainment, connection, news, or gaming. As one respondent put it: *“Picking a platform depends on the moment, really. If I want to unwind and relax a bit, I will seek entertainment and go to TikTok. If I want to see what's going on, I will choose Facebook”.*

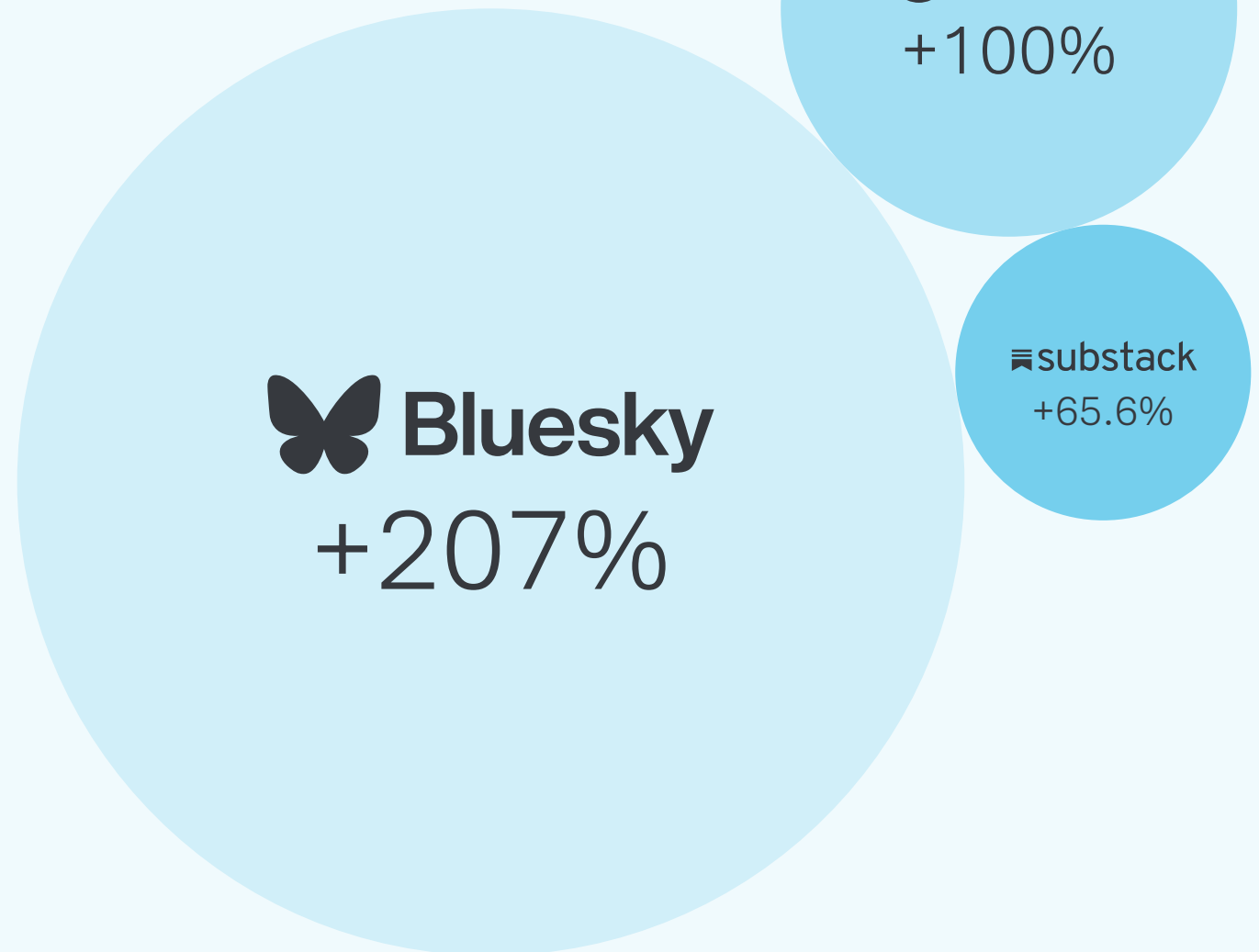
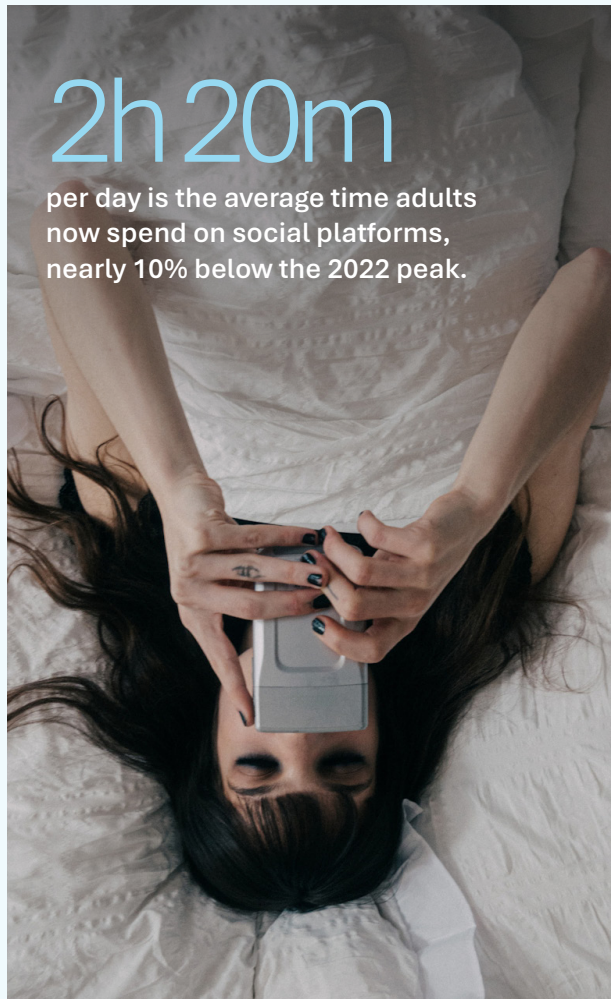
Among more time-constrained professional audiences, self-curation results in a more focused platform portfolio, with a meaningful subset of the IT decision-makers and healthcare professionals interviewed noting how they deliberately narrow their information intake to protect time and mental wellbeing—simplifying toward fewer, higher-signal sources. One UK Nurse spoke about how she manages her time on social media: *“Setting a time limit helps. Do you ever feel fatigued by the number of platforms, or have specific ways to filter or prioritise what you see? ... I tend to use only a few platforms”.*

While generative AI has lowered the barrier to digital content creation and accelerated the volume of “stop” that audiences must actively filter, platforms with a clear cultural-connect have thrived. Between 2019 and 2025, the fastest-growing platforms were those that offered something distinctive from TikTok and Instagram (Bluesky +207%; Threads +100%; Substack +65% for example).²

In a world with more platforms and content than audiences could possibly digest, time and attention are finite resources which audiences are protecting with new-found ferocity.

² [Pulsar Platform](#)

Top 3 social apps by user growth between 2019 and 2025



Curating connection: How Gen Z chooses where to engage

Gen Z's shift away from mainstream social platforms is often misread as fickle behaviour. In truth, they're curating digital ecosystems with the same scrutiny that professional audiences apply to enterprise tools.

This generation has grown up with algorithmic environments and understands how feeds shape their experience on platforms. The result is an intentional, mobile audience that scatters quickly when platforms stop delivering clear personal value.

The unique factors driving platform migration for Gen Z

Influencer scepticism has taken hold

Gen Z has started to become cynical about influencer marketing, viewing most macro-influencer sponsored partnerships as inauthentic and commercially exploitative. This distrust is pushing Gen Z toward following smaller, non-commercial creators (micro-influencers) and direct brand channels for information – which is impacting the 'macro-influencer marketing machine' that previously dominated platform engagement.

A combination of partnering with micro-influencers who foster tight-knit communities, alongside mass-brand awareness content from owned / paid channels helps ensure a balanced, yet authoritative and trust-worthy voice.



Micro influencers have a

↑20%

higher conversion rate compared to other tiers.³

³ [Stack Influence](#)



Platform loyalty is inherently temporary

As Gen Z move through life, platform relevance shifts quickly. Apps that feel essential to someone in their late teens become peripheral by their early twenties. Snapchat exemplifies this pattern. Once a primary app for daily connection, it's now relegated to occasional messaging with close friends as users mature and their social priorities shift. One respondent captured this perfectly: *“Other people my age stopped using them as much,”* and they followed suit without hesitation.

Gen Z use of platforms is tied to life stage. What feels relevant at 16 doesn't feel relevant at 24.



As they age, they actively migrate away from “youth” platforms.

How the five forces are influencing Gen Z behaviour

01 – The trust recession

Gen Z holds platforms to a high bar when it comes to transparency and misinformation, and they're willing to walk when platforms do not meet their expectations around verification. Fake news, perceived algorithmic manipulation, or data concerns quickly erode confidence, and Gen Z has the agency to move to where they feel their values are being met.

02 - Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

Platforms piling on features, ads, and paywalls are creating decision fatigue rather than loyalty. When Instagram floods feeds with Reels, when YouTube adds longer unskippable ads, when Snapchat charges to save memories, users don't adapt; they defect.

03 – Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

Gen Z prioritises genuine connection over platform loyalty. They choose to spend their time where their friends are, because what matters is the relationships, not the app. Platform choice is fluid because community is the constant. As one respondent noted: “*I basically just go where my friends go for the most part*”. When communities migrate, they follow quickly, keeping their social networks intact regardless of what organisations decide to build.

04 – Authenticity sensitivity

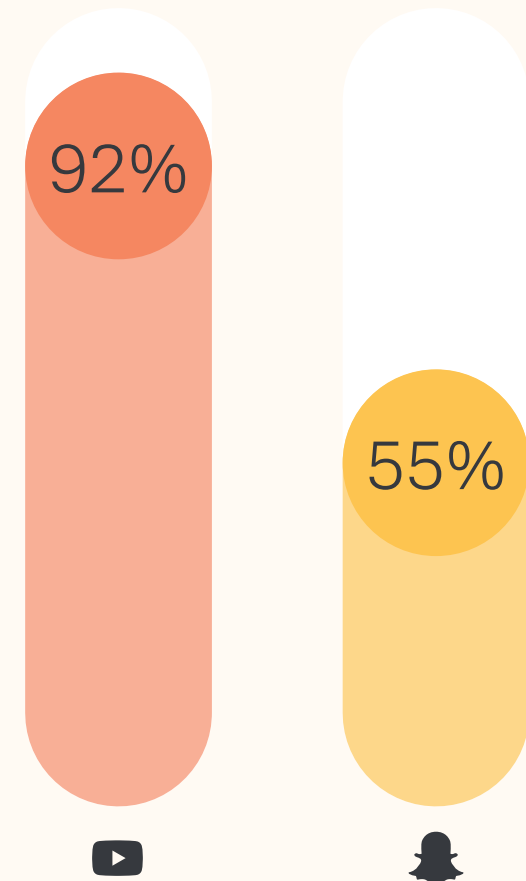
AI-generated content is pushing Gen Z away from polished, curated platforms and toward raw, unfiltered spaces where real human connection feels guaranteed. Faced with a deluge of deepfakes, AI narrations, and algorithmic noise, they're constantly fact-checking and cross-referencing on multiple platforms, while moving toward smaller, human-curated communities like Discord, BeReal, and niche Reddit spaces where authenticity is the default. Tellingly, the “perfect feed” aesthetic of Instagram is being eschewed in favour of platforms like TikTok where vulnerability and realness are celebrated.

05 – Self-curation is the new survival skill

Gen Z is carefully managing its own attention economy. Participants describe taking deliberate breaks from addictive feeds due to information overload or mental fatigue. Platform use is increasingly time-bound and intentional rather than habitual.

Participants are acutely aware that overuse of these platforms can be “overwhelming” and negatively impact their mental state. Taking a break is a recognised and regularly used strategy to reset and regain control over their digital consumption.

YouTube dominates for US teens



As of 2025, 92% of US teens use YouTube, compared to 55% using Snapchat - reflecting a change of platform trends.⁴

⁴ [Pew Research Center](#)



In 2025,

58%

of US Gen Z Discord users engaged in non-gaming discussions at least weekly, with education, activism and mental health communities among the fastest-growing server categories.⁵

⁵ Sq Magazine

Where you can find Gen Z?

 **Reddit**

r/GenZ

r/Zillennials

r/OlderGenZ

r/GenerationZ

 **Discord**

Gaming servers:

Marvel, MINECRAFT, VALORANT

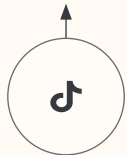
Mental health support servers:

Fight through mental health, /r/anxiety

Study group servers:

Study Together, Study with me

Gen Z – Platforms on the rise



TikTok

TikTok dominates as the primary entertainment platform for Gen Z. The platform’s strength lies in its algorithmic personalisation, which surfaces unfiltered content without the performative pressure of traditional social networks (e.g., Instagram). While the short-form video format has become default across most social media platforms, TikTok’s advantage lays in its content recommendations and its positioning as an alternative to curated, influencer-driven content.



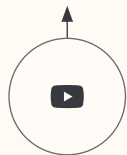
Instagram Reels

Reels have become Instagram’s lifeline, directly halting its decline by replicating TikTok’s short-form video model. Surveyed users state that they would significantly reduce their platform use if it didn’t have Reels, making the feature critical to the platform’s retention strategy.



Discord

Discord is mainly being adopted by Gen Z for gaming and other niche interest groups. Its core strength is the potential to build close-knit communities that have complete control over their communications environment, without algorithmic feed manipulation.



YouTube

Gen Z users on YouTube appreciate creator diversity and access to documentaries, tutorials and skill-development content unavailable elsewhere, as well as the ability to consume content in the background while multitasking. The platform’s content recommendations capabilities, paired with fatigue from other apps, position it as a destination for intentional learning rather than passive scrolling.



Reddit

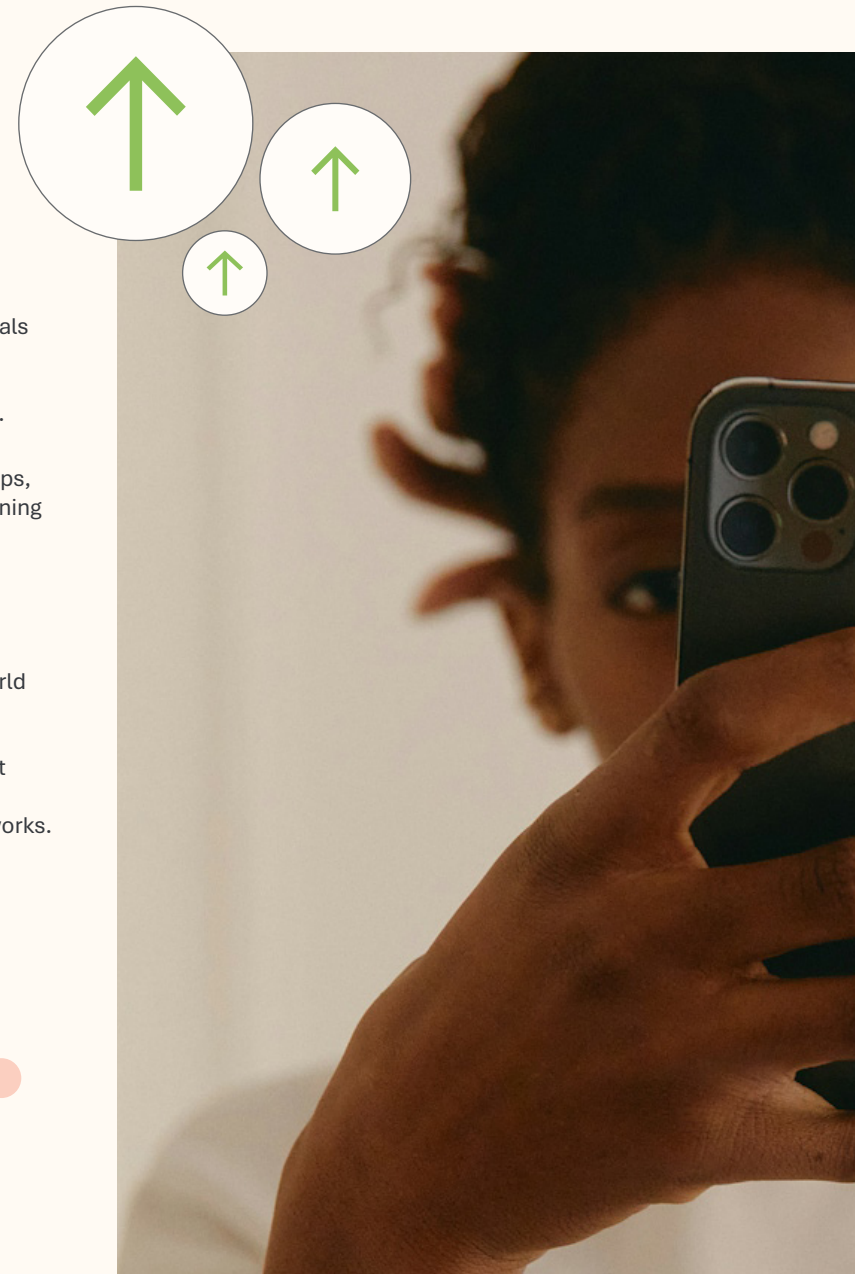
Gen Z users on Reddit seek authentic, niche expertise, which is provided through real-world advice rather than influencer or algorithmic amplification. The platform’s core strength lays in its anonymity and community content moderation, which encourages unfiltered discussions impossible on other social networks.

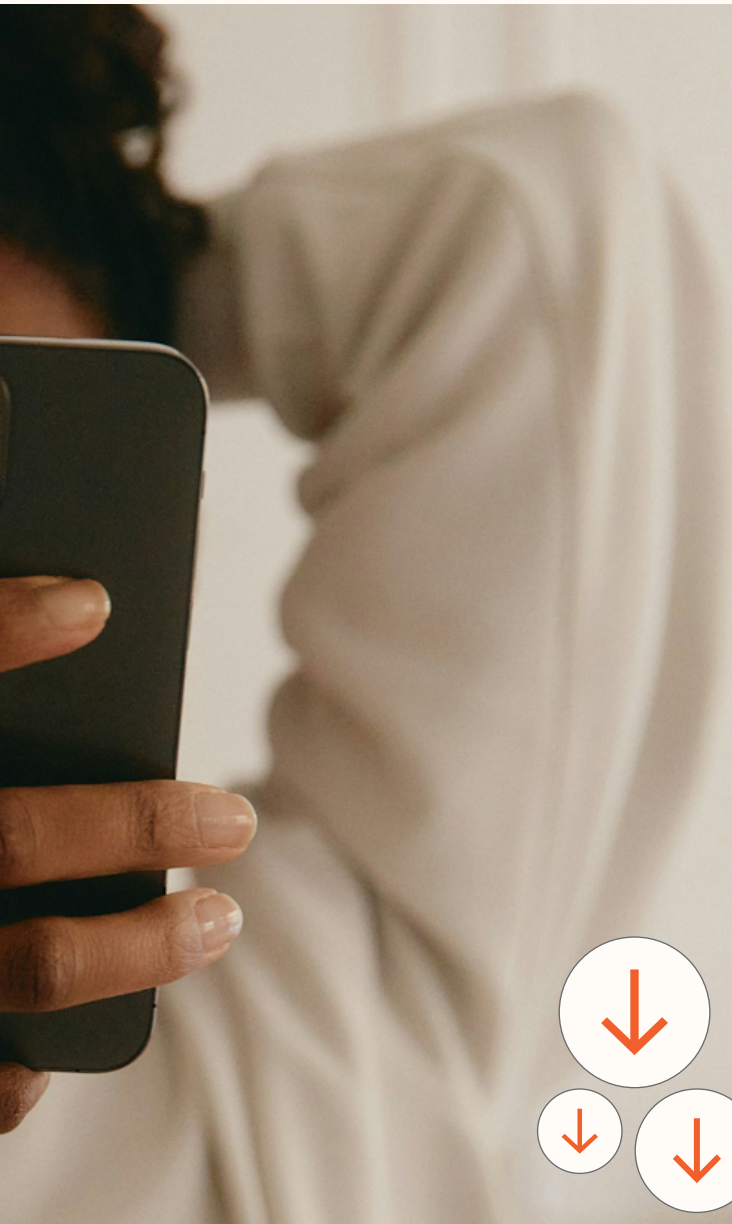
YouTube Shorts extend reach to users who do not engage with long-form content,



with a 61% average watch-through rate among Gen Z users.⁶

⁶ Sq Magazine





Gen Z – Platforms on the decline



Facebook

Facebook's lack of peer presence, primary use by older generations, and the association with family members, makes it less relevant for younger users. Its transition from user connection utility (e.g., marketplace transaction and local community groups) has also marked a move away from Gen Z-favoured authentic peer engagement.



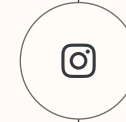
Snapchat

Originally valued for its timed content and direct messaging capabilities, Snapchat's key differentiators have been replicated elsewhere more efficiently. Messaging has shifted to WhatsApp and iMessage, direct communication to Discord, and entertainment to TikTok and Instagram Reels.



X

X continues to experience a dramatic decline following its acquisition by Elon Musk, with Gen Z users abandoning the platform due to increased toxicity, lack of content moderation and uncontrolled bot activity. This is exacerbated by the forced integration of AI features, which moved the platform away from its original purpose as a conversation hub.



Instagram (Traditional posts)

The photo feed on Instagram has been overshadowed by Reels, which now dominates both algorithmic recommendations and user engagement. The original purpose of the app of sharing a curated static feed of life updates has become secondary, with users scrolling past in favour of short-form video content.

Curating expertise: How IT decision-makers validate the digital landscape

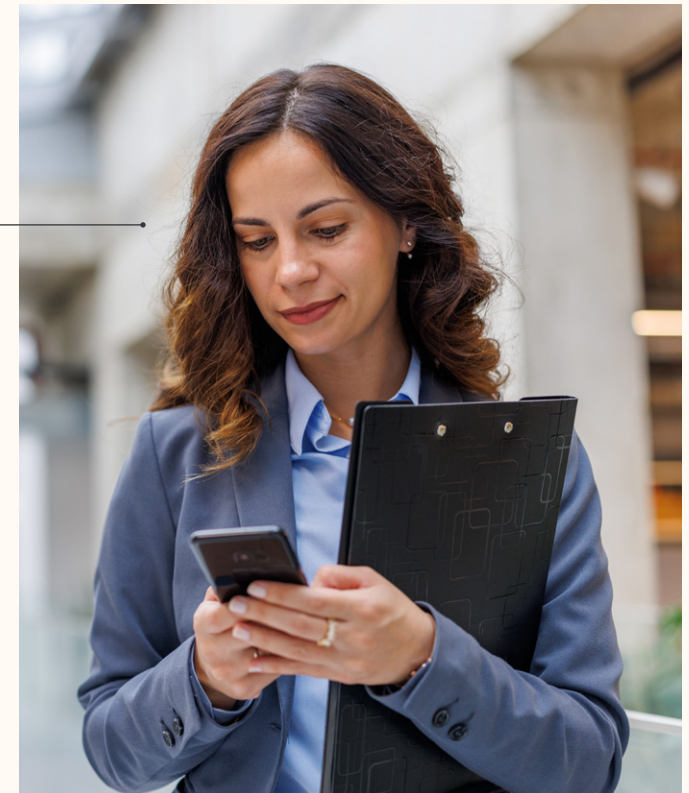
IT Decision-Makers (ITDMs) are internationally plotting their courses through the digital landscape.

Trust, relevance, and authenticity now dictate every click and platform choice. ITDMs have turned away from centralised, performative, sales-driven B2B platforms, building their own networks where credible expertise thrives. The result is a highly refined ecosystem designed for maximum trust and practical utility.

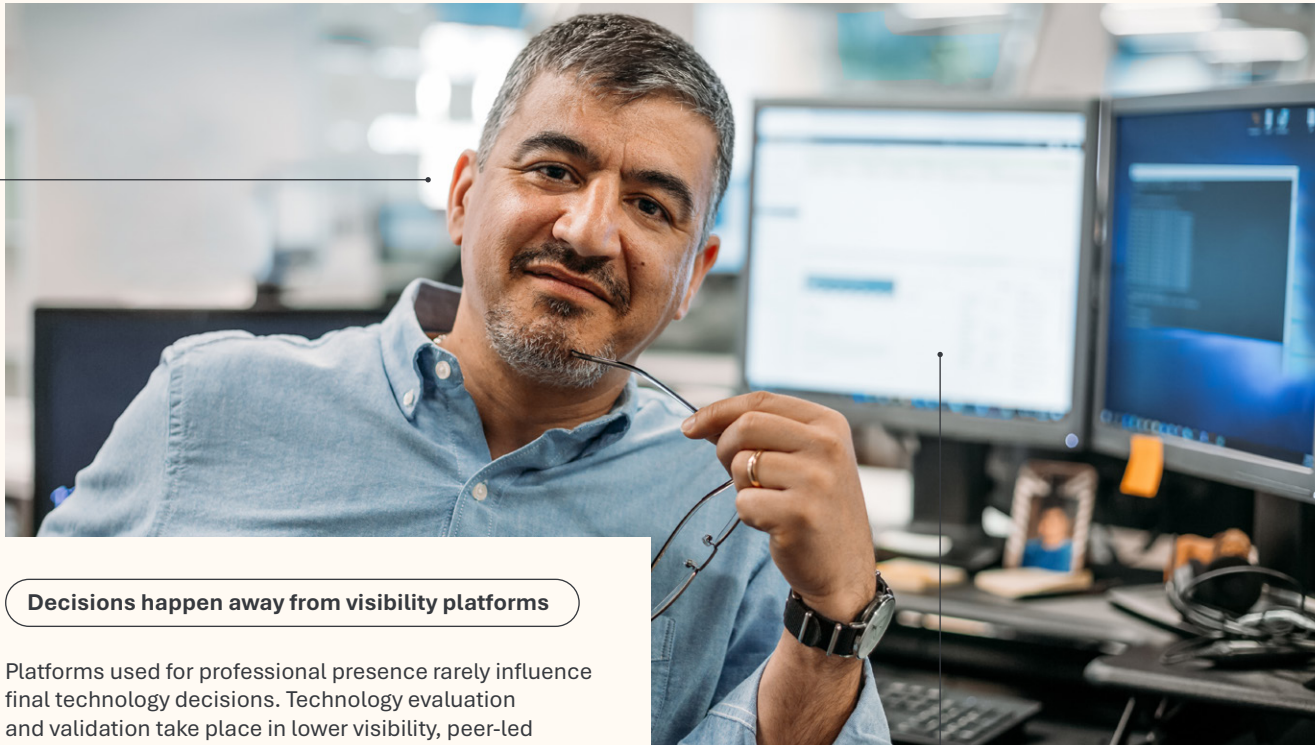
The unique factors driving platform migration for ITDMs

Peer experience beats vendor authority

ITDMs trust practitioners with real implementation experience over official brand messaging because peers “have no motive to lie” while vendors seemingly do. Peer recommendations and case studies carry more weight as the primary validation mechanism before purchase, outweighing polished vendor claims. This shift is equally pronounced in the UK and US markets, though manifested through different channels. UK ITDMs seek validation through industry-specific communities, while US ITDMs rely on anonymity-enabled platforms like Reddit where peer credibility is transparent and reputational risk keeps advice honest.



For ITDMs, peer experience now carries more weight than vendor messaging.



Decisions happen away from visibility platforms

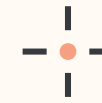
Platforms used for professional presence rarely influence final technology decisions. Technology evaluation and validation take place in lower visibility, peer-led communities and forums, not on LinkedIn or branded corporate channels where professional image management creates what is perceived as performative behaviour. ITDMs meet in Reddit subreddits, Discord servers, vendor forums, and closed user groups because anonymity removes career risk and enables candid assessment of whether solutions actually work. The data reveals a fundamental vendor blind spot: organisations invest heavily in high-visibility platforms, assuming they drive decisions, when in reality, visibility can create scepticism.

Technical credibility is key

Clear documentation, honest limitations, and technically fluent engagement consistently outperform highly produced marketing content. ITDMs evaluate credibility by testing whether vendors can explain how products work (not just the *what*), acknowledge trade-offs, and engage in technical discussion without using marketing language. The rise of AI-generated content has accelerated this shift as bland, technically inaccurate content floods mainstream platforms. This is why we are seeing ITDMs migrate toward more niche spaces where human expertise is verifiable and technical accuracy matters more than content volume.

13% of ITDMs across the UK and US use Discord daily.⁷

⁷ GWI 2023 and 2024 data



ITDMs have optimised for technical credibility and authenticity. They've abandoned what they feel is false centralisation for purposeful fragmentation. The vendors that will reach them effectively are those that meet them where they actually are: Reddit, vendor forums, conferences, and niche newsletters with genuine participation, not promotional messaging.

How the five forces are influencing IT decision-maker behaviour

01 – The trust recession

ITDMs have collectively decided that brands are inherently untrustworthy. One respondent summed it up: *“There are many occasions when [vendors announce] ‘future functionality’ [but it] is never released”*. Peer recommendations now outweigh official messaging. They’re validating decisions through community feedback, independent analyst reports, and candid customer reviews, not vendor whitepapers.

02 – Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

For ITDMs, LinkedIn has become the platform of commercialisation. The rise of personal branding, vendor-led narratives, sponsored posts and AI-generated content has crowded out credible technical discussion. What was once a space for professional exchange is now treated as a visibility layer, useful for presence, but largely irrelevant for real decision-making insight.

03 – Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

ITDMs follow trusted peers, not platforms. Anonymous and semi-anonymous communities such as Reddit, Discord servers and specialist forums have gained influence because they prioritise peer credibility over personal branding. By stripping away reputational and commercial pressure, these spaces enable more honest knowledge exchange, with accountability enforced by the community rather than the platform.


04 – Authenticity sensitivity

The flood of AI-generated content has led to a breakdown in trust on the larger platforms, such as LinkedIn, news sites and blogs. They’ve learned that mainstream sources are increasingly “contaminated,” making niche communities and peer forums more valuable as a signal in an ocean of noise. One respondent from the US noted: *“Just being AI-generated, that makes the content no longer credible in my eyes... the way LLM inherently works, it doesn’t know if something is right or wrong, it just chooses the most likely answer”*.

05 – Self-curation is the new survival skill

This is critical: ITDMs don’t favour platforms; they deploy them strategically. For example, TechCrunch for trends, Reddit for troubleshooting, Gartner for vendor evaluation, conferences for networking, GitHub for product research. One US respondent noted how they use different platforms for different functions: *“For quick updates: newsletters, curated feeds, social media. For decisions: peer consultation, hands-on testing, analyst reports, and community vetting”*. Each channel serves a distinct function in its decision-making workflow. Channel switching is deliberate and functional, not habitual.

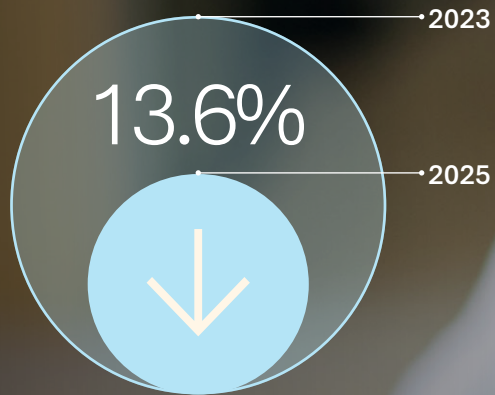
Reddit usage is growing across ITDMs due to communities self-policing, with one respondent explaining



The communities moderate themselves very well when it comes to misinformation because they don’t want their reputations to be tarnished”.

US ITDM

Daily usage of LinkedIn by ITDMs has decreased by



from 2023 to 2025.⁷

Our respondents noted self-promotion and AI-generated content as potential reasons for this.

Where you can find ITDMs?

GitHub

GitHub Discussions

“Contributors” tab on major repositories

Enterprise Vendor: Repositories, e.g., Google, Microsoft, Amazon Web Services

Issues & Pull Requests (project-level)

GitHub Advanced Security community

Topic driven discovery: #platform-engineering, #cloud-native, #kubernetes, #devsecops, #zero-trust, #observability

Newsletters

TLDR Tech

Morning Brew

High Availability Substack

DevOps Weekly

SRE Weekly

FAUN.DEV

⁷ GWI 2023 and 2025 data

IT decision-makers – Platforms on the rise



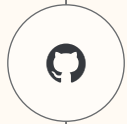
Reddit

Reddit has emerged as the fastest-growing platform for ITDMs due to it being valued as an authentic source of peer-driven technical advice where genuine practitioners share unfiltered experiences and real problem-solving approaches without commercial agendas. Additionally, Reddit's upvote-based system helps validate credible information so ITDMs feel an escape from algorithmic manipulation and influencer performance.



Stack Overflow

Stack Overflow remains the established trust hub for technical validation, leveraging its reputation-based credibility system and QandA structure to provide verified answers from experienced developers and architects.



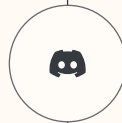
Vendor Forums and GitHub

Vendor-specific forums and GitHub are rising as ITDMs prioritise hands-on expertise, access to actual code and implementations, and niche-focused technical discussions directly from those solving real problems. ITDMs are interested in direct access to practitioners and implementers without marketing spin or self-promotion. Community-driven moderation ensures quality and bypasses vendor hype and marketing language.



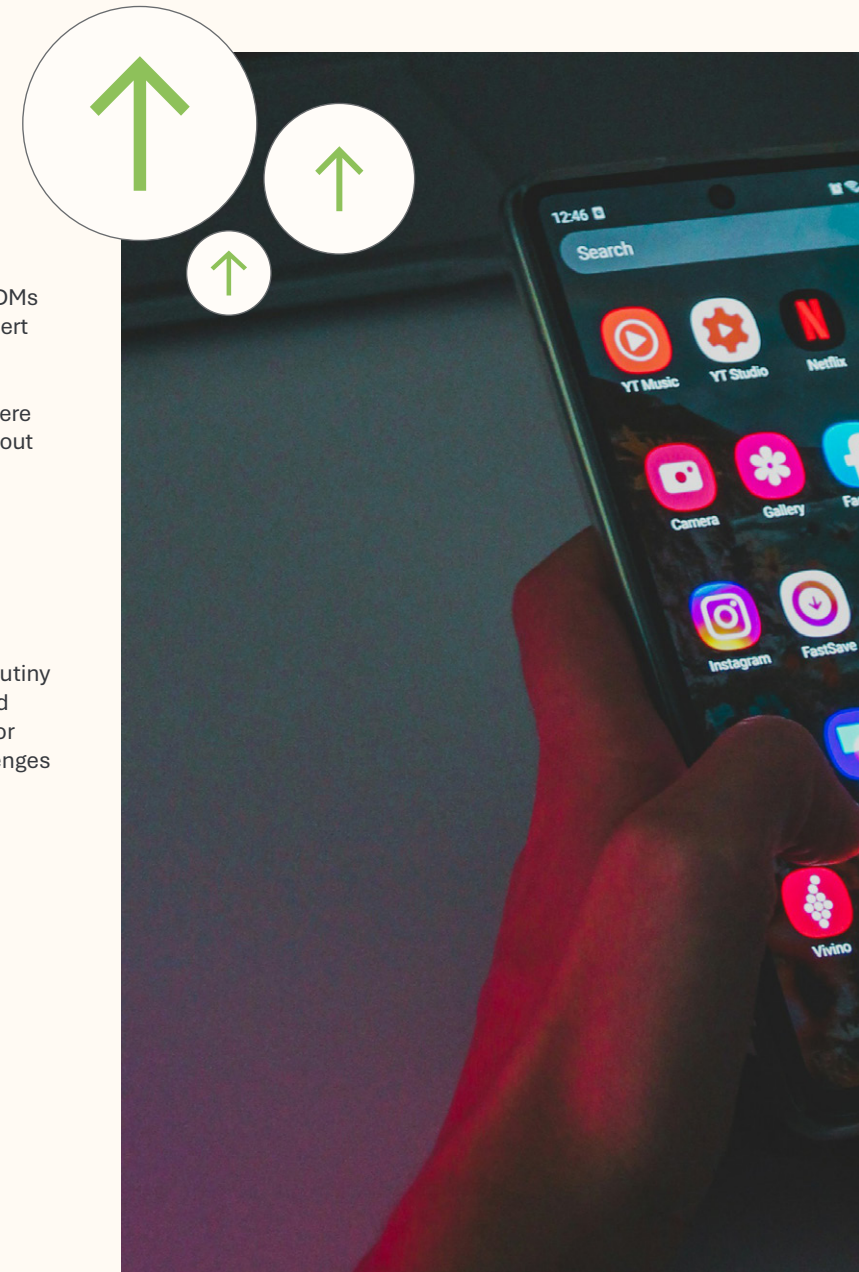
Niche Newsletters

Niche newsletters are gaining adoption by ITDMs as they're being drawn to the time-saving expert curation which shares actionable, technical insights. The experience is an escape from algorithmic feeds and AI-generated spam where independent expert voices can be heard without commercial conflicts.



Discord

Discord is in an early adoption phase as exclusive, invite-only communities enable confidential peer collaboration and focused technical discussions, away from public scrutiny and platform noise. It enables ITDMs to build trust through restricted access and allows for candid peer feedback on confidential challenges without competitive exposure.





IT decision-makers – Platforms on the decline



LinkedIn

LinkedIn is starting to experience an exodus of ITDMs due to widespread perception of AI-generated content bloat and loss of genuine peer engagement with fear of judgment on such a high-stakes platform. They believe corporate messaging drowns out authentic voices, eroding trust in content quality.



X

X has seen significant ITDM defection post-takeover due to increased toxicity, misinformation, platform unreliability, and loss of credibility as a source for technical intelligence; the shift has fragmented conversations to more focused platforms.



Mainstream News Sites

Mainstream tech news sites are declining in ITDM usage due to the slow publication cycles in comparison to real-time community sources, an overload of ads that impact usability. With paywalls limiting accessibility and editorial lag time, content becomes outdated, so they are replacing this with community-driven, real-time feedback.



Tech Magazines

With the rapidly changing tech landscape, tech magazines have lost relevance due to publication lag time, format obsolescence, and replacement by real-time, dynamic community platforms. ITDMs find outdated information and prefer immediate peer feedback over monthly editorial cycles.

They also feel subscription costs do not justify perceived ROI and are replacing them with GitHub, Reddit, and other vendor forums for current information.

Curating attention: How C-Suite executives optimise for impact

For time-pressed C-suite executives, platform selection is ruthlessly strategic. Each channel, subscription, and peer network is chosen to deliver maximum return on attention.

C-suite executives focus their attention on three to four trusted sources to make the most of their time.

The unique factors driving platform migration

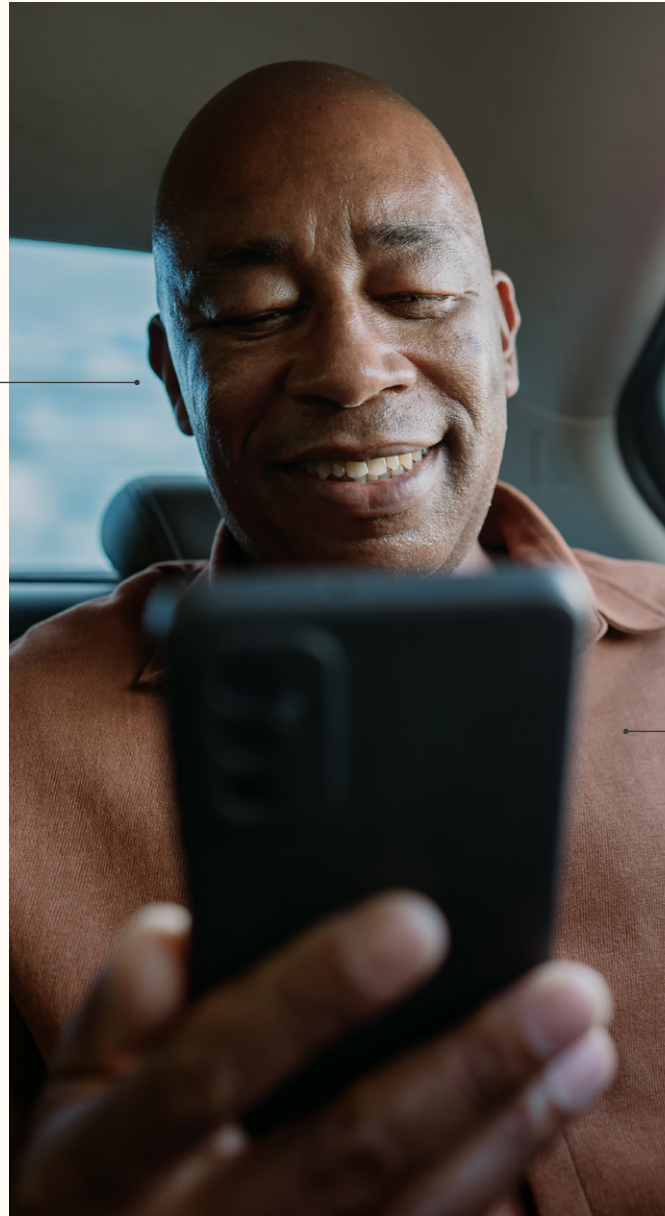
Verification has become non-negotiable

C-suite executives operate from a position of structural scepticism, building multi-step verification protocols into every information intake. They cross-check sources, reverse-search images, look for missing details and prioritise primary sources over secondary reporting. One executive explained: *“I will purposefully check what I know to be competing sources of bias to see where they align and where they differ as well as different ways of searching topics across different search platforms and AI”*.



Direct peer relationships drive strategic decisions

C-suite executives use public platforms strategically for professional visibility, while their most valuable intelligence and validation comes from closed communities and direct peer networks.



C-suite decisions are shaped in private peer networks, not public platforms.

Curated exclusivity signals intelligence

C-suite executives actively narrow their information inputs to three to four trusted sources, including specialist research platforms (e.g., Gartner, Westlaw), subscription newsletters with known authors (e.g., Leimberg, TLDR AI, Ed Slott), and private professional communities. One respondent noted: "A \$500 subscription that saves 20 hours of research or prevents a \$50K mistake pays for itself instantly".

How the five forces are influencing C-suite executive behaviour

01 – The trust recession

Executive confidence in public platforms and mainstream media has collapsed under the weight of algorithmic manipulation, vendor bias, political polarisation and deliberate sensationalism to drive emotional engagement. One respondent stated bluntly: “I do not engage as much on traditional news platforms, they tend to spin the narrative to their will”.

To verify their sources, respondents have developed rigorous filtering mechanisms: checking author track records, cross-referencing facts, and questioning claims that feel “too good to be true”.

The response is strategic retreat. C-suite executives are moving to environments where trust is verifiable: peer networks with known participants, professional communities with credentialed members and research platforms with transparent methodologies.

02 - Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

For executives, platforms trying to do everything: social and professional networking, news content and branded messaging, end up doing nothing well.

C-suite respondents noted mainstream platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook have experienced significant feature bloat. LinkedIn, while useful for professional reach and visibility, is increasingly perceived as a platform for broadcasting updates rather than genuine exchange.

The antidote is specialisation. Executives are gravitating toward tools designed to solve specific problems: Slack for team communication, private Discord groups for industry peers, curated newsletters for filtered insights, Gartner for vendor evaluation. Each serves a distinct function. One respondent captured the logic: “*Three things are key: relevance, trust, and efficiency*”. These are digital places where rules and participants are familiar and trusted, and professional-personal boundaries respected.

03 – Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

C-suite leaders follow people and communities, not platforms. If the right peers move to a new channel, executives will follow. If the right content is behind a paywall, they’ll pay.

They’re actively increasing reliance on private Slack/ Discord groups and peer networks, prioritising “practitioner authors, zero fluff, original analysis, peer validation and transparency”. Thought leaders with proven track records are in; self-promoters are out. As one executive described it: “*I turn to private Slack groups for Chief Data Officers. Within hours, I get candid feedback from peers*”.

04 – Authenticity sensitivity

Amid a surge of AI-generated content, authenticity continues to be essential. Increasingly sceptical of highly polished material, executives are continuing to seek raw, demonstrably human voices.

Many C-suite respondents expressed concerns about AI hallucinations, bias and fabrication. “*Genuinely human voices feel more valuable because they stand out in the noise*,” one respondent said. This drives three behaviours: opting for private specialised forums for “genuine feedback from peers”, checking for author credentials and signs of AI-generated content, and gravitating toward recognised industry figures with long track records.

05 – Self-curation is the new survival skill

C-suite executives are aggressively redesigning their information diets to manage time, focus, and mental bandwidth. Faced with infinite content, they’re choosing scarcity over abundance.

As one respondent put it: “*Curated newsletters and AI summaries of trusted sources cut through the clutter, delivering only what is actionable*”.

Rather than subscribing to more platforms, executives are consolidating to fewer, better sources. One noted: “*My focus was split between so many different sources, and I really needed to trim it down and refine my process*”.

Cross-checking helps executives to verify such decisions. One executive described their approach: “*I cross-check, prioritise practitioners, ask peers directly and ignore hype*”.

Where you can find executives?

Substack

Lenny's Newsletter

The Pragmatic Engineer

The CFO Office

The Generalist

Not Boring by Packy McCormick

Reddit

r/startups

r/Entrepreneur

r/smallbusiness

r/marketing

r/CFO

r/CEO

C-suite self-curation is deliberate and strategic. Executives are ruthlessly optimising their information intake as a survival skill in an era of content overload.

C-suite executives – Platforms on the rise



LinkedIn

LinkedIn has established itself as the professional platform for C-suite executives, creating a trustworthy business environment. Executives use LinkedIn to connect with others and stay informed about market trends, competitor movements, and what their professional connections are up to. When they do connect with peers, they know that they are authenticated individuals.



Discord

Discord is emerging as a gold standard for confidential peer-to-peer executive discussions, offering a very different value than public social networks. The platform's invite-only exclusivity creates a safe space where executives can share confidential challenges, competitive concerns, and business struggles without public scrutiny or exposure.



Substack

Substack is used by executives looking for curated, independent and expert-filtered content that delivers clear information. The verification of credible independent voices helps build direct audiences and ensures both content quality and relevance.

The newsletter subscription function saves executives' time, as they receive insight directly into their inbox rather than scrolling through an algorithmically-curated feed. The paid subscription model also supports quality and credibility, as executives are willing to pay for content they trust and filter out hype and unverified claims.



Reddit

C-suite executives are also beginning to gravitate towards Reddit as an authentic source of peer-driven advice, where genuine people ask real questions and share unfiltered experiences. The upvote-based community management creates credibility, as information is validated through peer consensus. Reddit also provides niche communities focused on specific industries, functions or business challenges, which create highly-targeted spaces where executives can access peer insight.

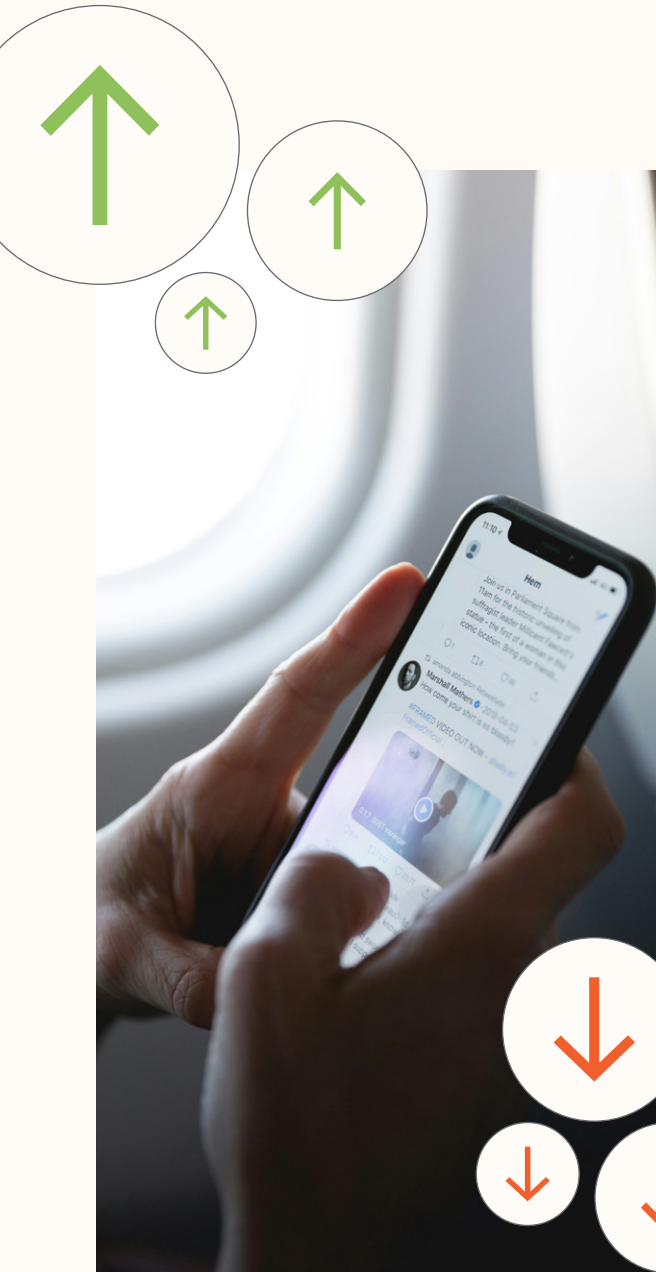


YouTube

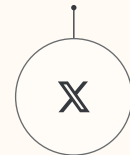
Long-form video content is bringing C-suite executives to YouTube due to the ability to provide depth and context. Expert interviews and technical tutorials from knowledgeable creators are preferred, as executives seek to understand complex industry trends, emerging technologies or business topics.

I cross-check, prioritise practitioners, ask peers directly and ignore hype”.

US Executive

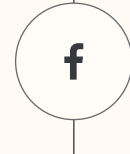


C-suite executives – Platforms on the decline



X

C-suite executives are limiting their time on X following the Musk takeover. Once a valued channel for sharing news insights and discussion, it is now perceived as untrustworthy, with the algorithm actively amplifying divisive content and toxic echo-chambers. This has made the platform exhausting rather than professionally valuable, making alternatives such as LinkedIn significantly more attractive.



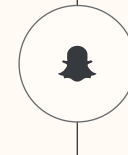
Facebook

The decline in the use of Facebook has been driven by data privacy scandals and a poor functioning algorithm. Privacy concerns have damaged executive confidence in Facebook’s ability to protect sensitive information and business data, and the algorithm is increasingly surfacing AI-generated spam and low-quality content that provides limited to no professional or personal value.



Instagram

Executives on Instagram experience severe feature fatigue and algorithmic friction, that makes the platform feel time-wasting. Users who intend a brief platform visit find themselves doomscrolling through content that’s not necessarily valuable and prioritised by the platform’s algorithms. This makes Instagram unfit for purpose when it comes to professional use, particularly when compared to LinkedIn’s business focus and Discord’s professional confidentiality.



Snapchat

Snapchat has virtually disappeared for C-suite users as it doesn’t match their demographic or needs. The platform’s entertainment focus, timed content and real-time communication offer no purpose for executive workflows, and it does not provide any industry insights, business intelligence or networking capabilities.

Curating certainty: How healthcare professionals filter for trust

Healthcare professionals (HCPs) are in a trust crisis, using fewer platforms than any other audience we studied. They are fragmenting out of clinical necessity, actively narrowing their information ecosystems to navigate misinformation, regulatory requirements, time pressures, and AI-generated content.

Many limit themselves to trusted sources, emphasising credibility and evidence. Managing patient misinformation and the burden of verifying content is exacerbated by a frustration that digital platforms are adding complexity to their work.

HCPs want fewer, safer platforms with verifiable information at speed, rather than engagement.

The unique factors driving platform migration for healthcare professionals

The patient misinformation burden

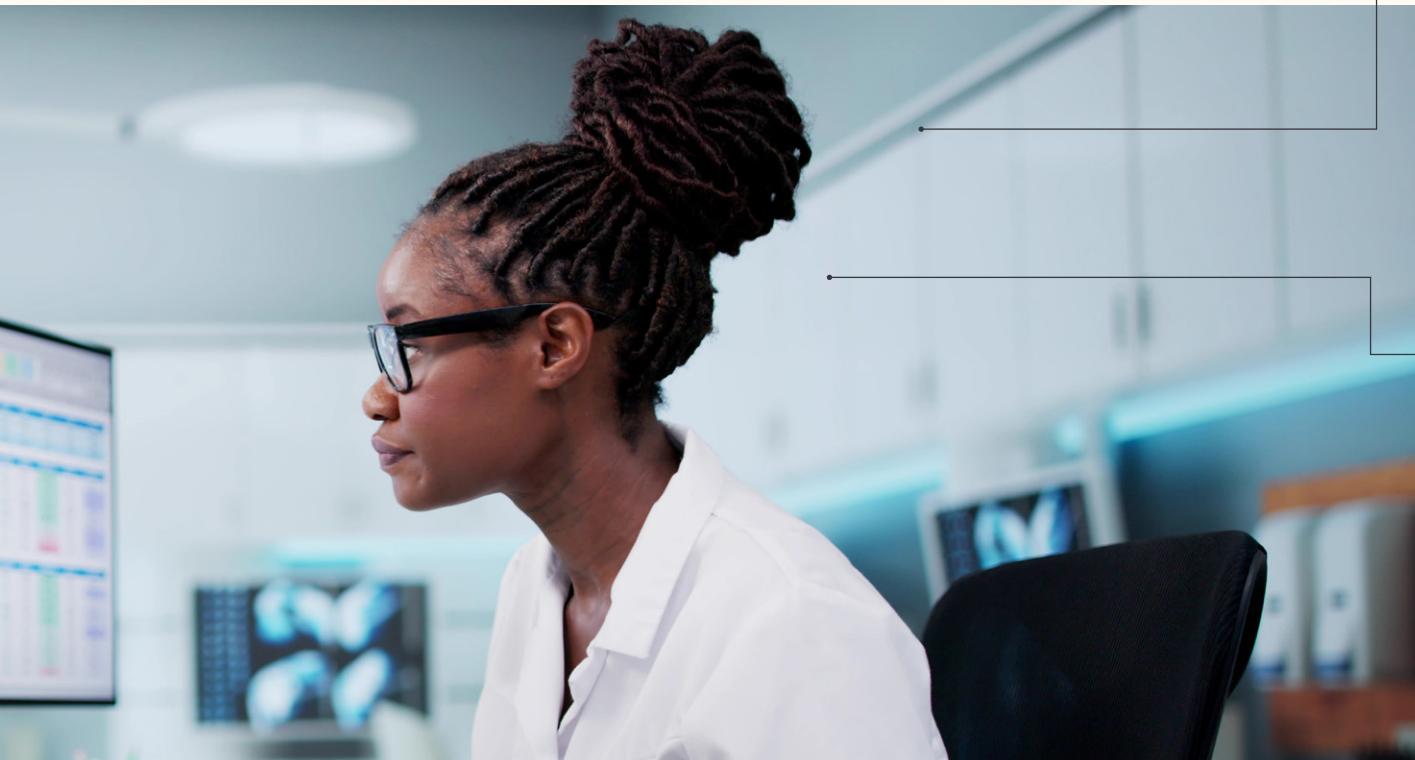
HCPs are increasingly burdened by patient misinformation sourced online. A retired UK doctor shared an example of the impact: *“A patient was very malnourished. They had read [online] that if you are starving, it reduces chances of cancer as your body eats cancer cells when it is hungry”.*

When patients bring misinformation to appointments, HCPs must act as educators and debunkers as well as clinicians, diverting time from diagnosis and treatment in already time-pressured consultations. A difficult trade-off.



DIn my field there is no room for guessing... the responsibility lies with me, and any adverse outcome would be my responsibility”.

UK Healthcare Professional



Regulatory and professional body dominance

Regulatory frameworks necessitate the use of sources like NICE guidelines, NHS protocols, and medical board regulations, which uniquely restricts information-seeking behaviour. These frameworks create distinct “trusted source hierarchies” that HCPs layer into their personal curation strategies.

The result: individual HCPs aren’t following one universal rulebook but are instead tailoring their information ecosystems to align with their specialty and regulatory context.

The verification tax

HCPs are spending measurable time checking and tracing every source, causing a “verification tax” that adds hours to already heavy workflows. Exacerbated by AI-generated content, one US doctor explains: *“When I’m checking out a new website or online group, I look for reviews and see who backs/supports it. I try to see how they uphold privacy...and if it is verifiable”.*

Transparent sourcing, clear credentials, explicit methodology, disclosed affiliations, and verifiable claims are all non-negotiables.

How the five forces are influencing healthcare professional behaviour

01 – The trust recession

The trust recession is directly tied to patient outcomes – the wrong source can put patients at risk. They report a broad loss of confidence across platforms due to unverified contributors and AI-generated misinformation that often infiltrates appointments.

They are calling for verification: *“I look at the information, the site, the look of it, the credibility, the date the information was given. These are just some of my basic steps to it”*. They also default to established institutions (e.g., NHS, NICE, WHO) which carry accountability.

02 - Platform bloat is breaking the “everything app” model

HCPs experience platform bloat as clinical noise: too many sources, competing guidelines and platforms claiming legitimacy. Additional platform features can add cognitive load to an already saturated environment. The response is aggressive consolidation. HCPs maintain a deliberate hierarchy: institutional guidelines first (e.g., NICE/NHS), clinical resources second (e.g., UpToDate), specialised research databases third. Everything else is noise.

03 – Social gravity now outweighs platform gravity

HCPs prefer interaction with colleagues or professional bodies over mainstream platforms. Specialised platforms and peer networks (e.g., Medscape, UpToDate, Sermo) perform well as they facilitate peer interaction and prioritise verification.

One US physician explained: *“I use Reddit quite a bit. I find the medical subreddits are populated with those very involved in medicine. There’s a lot of knowledge to be found and shared”*. But critically, peer presence created this trust, not the platform itself.

04 – Authenticity sensitivity

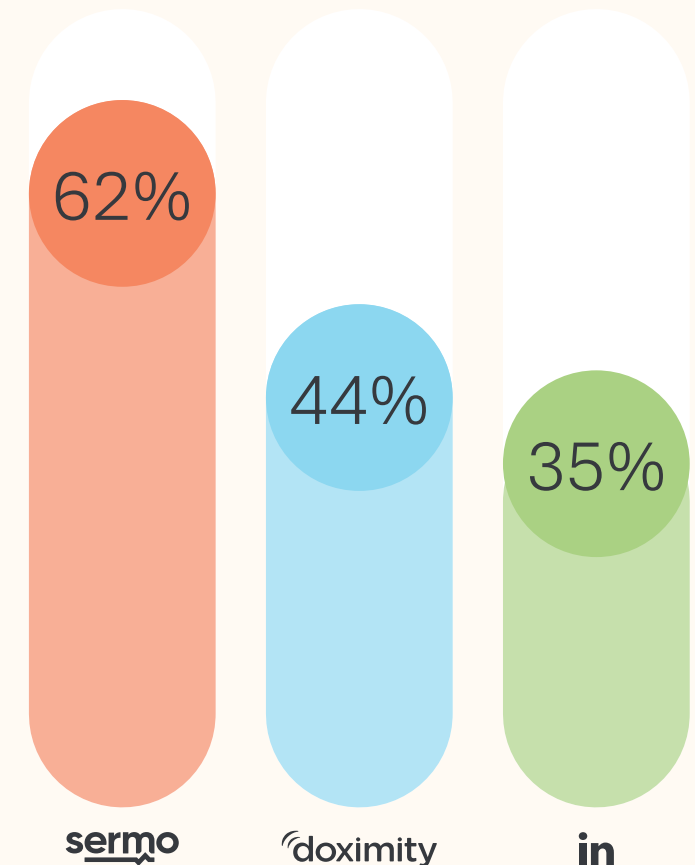
AI has caused a significant authenticity crisis for HCPs. With the volume of misinformation online, HCPs now labour over distinguishing human-authored from AI-generated content and checking credentials obsessively to ensure patient safety. They insist on verification, accreditation and paying keen attention to AI-content tells.

05 – Self-curation is the new survival skill

Information overload and notification fatigue are forcing HCPs to curate their information sources to a core set of trusted, specialised sources which they supplement with peer exchange and networks.

One US physician explained: *“I don’t feel the need to stay up to date with all clinical information... I seek out information that is important to me at the time”*.

Platforms used by healthcare professionals for professional tasks



62% of HCPs now use Sermo specifically for professional tasks, followed by Doximity (44%) and LinkedIn (35%).⁸

⁸ Sermo



It takes much longer to educate people [today] about the level of misinformation they have. It wastes time to talk about nonsense instead of being able to focus on what would have actually helped them... it makes me feel very frustrated”.

UK GP

Where you can find HCPs?

UpToDate

- Specialty topic pages
- Drug interaction checker
- Clinical practice guidelines
- Patient education content
- What's New summaries

Medscape

- Medscape Consult (discussion forum)
- Medscape Education (accredited learning)
- Specialty news hubs
- Expert commentary and clinical perspectives
- YouTube channel

Healthcare professionals – Platforms on the rise



AI Tools

Some HCPs are adopting AI Tools as a quick first stop for synthesising information and answering initial clinical questions before diving into primary sources. There is a clear need for efficiency in increasingly time-constrained professional environments.

However, it's divisive, as concerns about AI "hallucinations" and inaccuracies mean verification remains essential — and paradoxically, fact-checking AI can take longer than original research.



YouTube

YouTube is growing in use as an educational (refresher) tool, to revisit procedure videos, clinical explanations, and facilitate visual learning. HCPs show a trend of moving toward multimedia formats for complex clinical concepts.

There are emerging red flags, however, such as deepfakes and AI-generated videos which make some respondents distrust all video content unless independently verified, potentially reversing this trend.



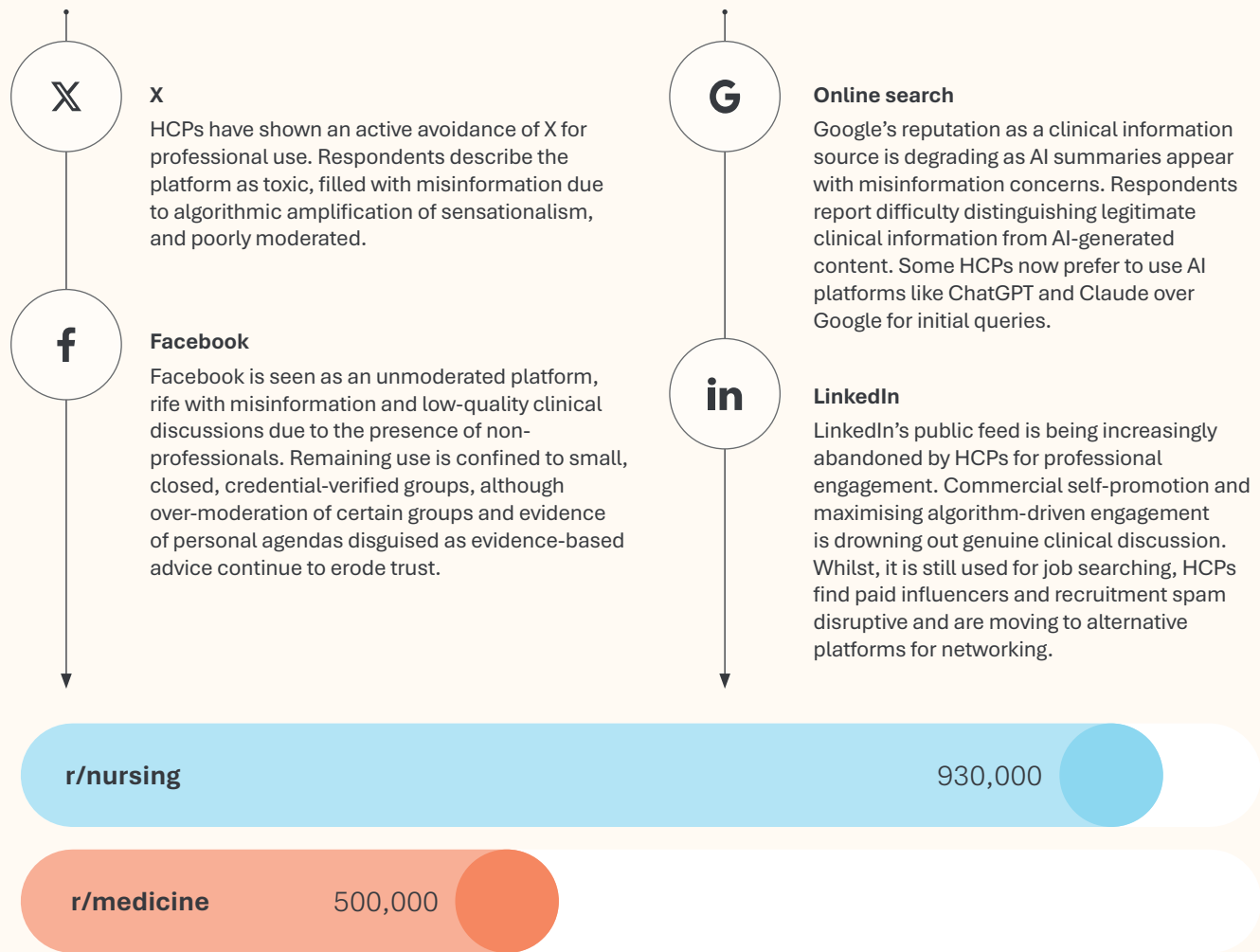
Curated email newsletters

HCPs are increasing opting to subscribe to pre-filtered, delivered-to-inbox content as opposed to active searching. They are being used to address information overload by allowing HCPs to consume curated insights at their own pace, when appropriate.

The appeal lies in the time-saving filter, though selection bias and potential paywalls remain limitations.



Healthcare professionals – Platforms on the decline



Reddit’s medical communities have seen massive growth, with r/medicine reaching nearly 500,000 members and r/nursing exceeding 930,000 members in 2025.

Stable Sources: Non-movers

Built for clinical credibility, as opposed to engagement metrics or commercial algorithms, usage patterns on medical-specific platforms remain stable.

- **Specialised Evidence Databases:** PubMed, Google Scholar, Cochrane Library
- **Reference tools:** UpToDate
- **Official Health Authority Sites:** NHS, NICE, ACOG, other professional body platforms
- **Professional Peer Networks:** Sermo, Doximity, Medscape Consult



Mapping influence in a fragmented world

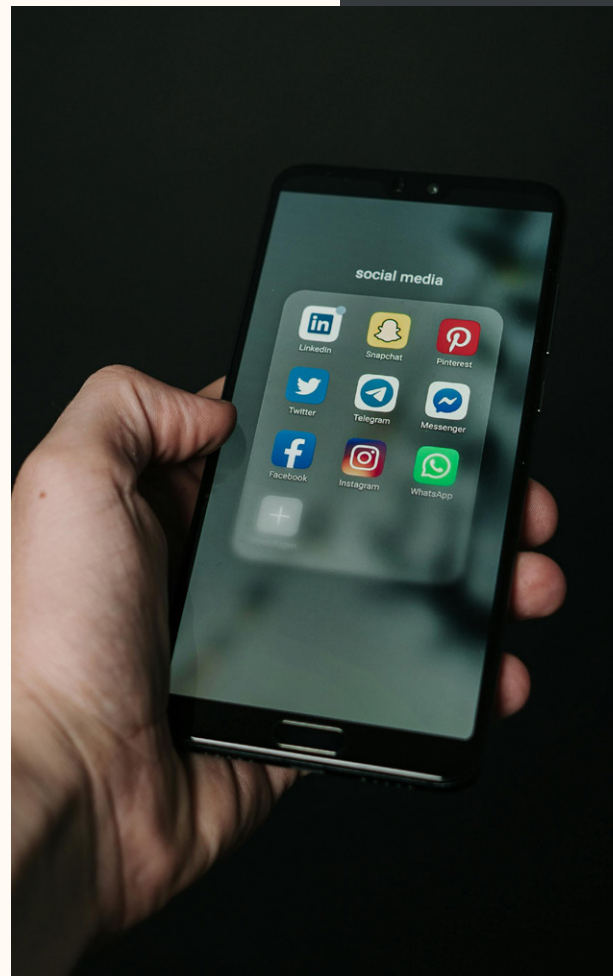
Ultimately, this is a story of opportunity.

Fragmentation may look like a barrier, but in reality, it's a roadmap drawn by the very people organisations want to reach.

Every shift in platform, every move towards smaller communities, every subtle act of self-curation is a signal of where trust and influence are quietly relocating. Organisations that are able to navigate these signals will find themselves in the ecosystems where influence truly grows, contributing to exchanges that shape decisions and loyalties.

The challenge today is not simply to show up, but to belong: to enter these spaces with the credibility of a respected participant and the discipline to contribute genuine human value. Those who do will turn audience fragmentation into their very own strategic advantage.

For more information and enquiries, please email:
DigitalUK@fleishman.com



Our capabilities

Intelligence

Audiences and Influences

Alongside identifying the outlets that matter most to your audiences and pinpointing the influencers and experts with the highest potential, we also develop virtual audiences to provide verified feedback on messaging, creative and concepts.

Business and Industry Insights

We provide a holistic assessment of communications, social performances and the competitive landscape, alongside brand positioning analysis across major LLMs to help shape how your business appears in generative search.

Reputation Risk Management

We deploy multi-modal data solutions to support every phase of reputation management, from strategic development and refinement to optimisation and mitigation. We proactively identify critical narratives to build client reputation and provide crisis and issues management solutions to protect and defend it.

Measurement

We develop KPI frameworks with measurable goals, objectives and metrics to measure campaign outcomes and demonstrate the business impact of communications programmes.

Strategy

Digital and Social Channel Strategy

We design and optimise owned digital and social ecosystems to align with business priorities, audience behaviors and the customer journey.

Paid Media

Our omnichannel, audience-led paid approach ensures the right audiences see the right message at the right moment.

GEO

We help brands improve visibility and credibility across generative search by optimising content for AI-driven discovery.

SEO

Combining technical excellence, content optimisation and digital PR, we build long-term visibility across discovery, consideration and conversion through integrated SEO strategies.

Platform Expertise

We bring deep knowledge of how social platforms function and how audiences engage across each environment to maximise reach, relevance and performance.

Website Development

We design and build high- performing websites aligned to brand and business goals, rooted in audience insight and user experience.

Activation

Social Content Development and Activation

We turn brand strategy into social- first content by blending creative storytelling, paid activation and influencer to drive relevance, engagement and measurable impact.

Paid Platform Excellence

By aligning strategy, creative and continuous optimisation, we ensure campaigns deliver scalable, efficient and results- driven outcomes across platforms.

Executive Visibility

Through tailored content, platform optimisation and strategic amplification, we build executive visibility programmes that position leaders as credible, influential voices within their industries.

Influencer Partnerships

We connect brands with trusted creators and experts to deliver authentic, high-impact content across social platforms.

Paid-Media Partnerships

We co-create campaigns with high-engagement media partners to place narratives in trusted, high- influence environments to deliver guaranteed attention and credible reach.

Digital Accessibility

Through audits, training and implementation, we embed accessibility best practices across digital experiences.

Enablement

Social Media Training

We deliver tailored training programmes that build confidence, platform knowledge and best practice across communications teams and senior leaders.

Building and Maintaining Social/Digital Agents

We build AI-powered social and digital agents based on brand guidelines and workflows to support content development, insights and day-to-day operations.

Integration and Special Offers

C-suite Activation

We design and activate campaigns that engage senior decision- makers across the platforms and environments they trust most.

Healthcare Ecosystem Activation

By combining healthcare expertise with digital insight, we help brands connect with audiences in trusted environments to build credibility, engagement and impact.

Crisis Framework

We help brands detect, manage and respond to digital issues in real time through early monitoring, coordinated response strategies and platform activation.

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