

Consumer Response to Green Brands vs. Traditional Brands on Digital Platforms

**An Analysis Through a Series of
Case Studies**

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Background and Previous Insights	6
Methods	8
Data by Sector	10
Cosmetics	13
Search Engines	23
Outdoor Apparel	33
Mobile Accessories	43
Insights & Analysis	52
Application	56
Limitations	57
Works Cited	60

Introduction

As of March 21, 2020, enough governments and jurisdictions have declared a climate emergency that these declarations cover 820 million citizens (Climate emergency, 2020). Activists around the world have been sounding the alarm that actions both big and small are necessary to save the earth for future generations. As consumers become more aware of environmental concerns and social issues, many companies have chosen to promote and market themselves as being environmentally friendly. Previous research shows increases over time of consumer awareness of environmental issues (Bhate & Lawler, 1997), and, in recent years, “consumer awareness of the need to be responsible in everything from travel behaviours to eating habits has arguably never been higher” (Chater & Stot, 2019, p. 2).



Meanwhile, social media has shown exponential increases in use. According to Statista (2019), “the number of worldwide [social media] users is expected to reach some 3.02 billion monthly active social media users by 2021, around a third of Earth’s entire population.” Social media and digital platforms are being harnessed more and more by brands and causes to get their message out there. The majority of companies have websites, social media pages, and entire teams dedicated to digital marketing strategies. The environmental movement is also utilizing the immense power of digital platforms, and groups are “increasingly using social networking sites... to recruit new members, to fundraise, to promote their causes and to facilitate their campaigning activity” (Hemmi et al., 2013, p.1).

All of this information begs the question, how well do brands that employ green marketing in their digital strategies fare compared to more traditional companies? If environmentalists, consumers, and brands share the same space, how are they creating and engaging with content? This study investigates the differences in response to traditional and eco-friendly marketing on digital platforms through a variety of methods in an attempt to answer these and other questions.

Background & Previous Insights

Green marketing took off in the 1980s when European products started being labelled if they were harmful to the environment, and the practice has been growing ever since (Padhy, 2013). There have been several studies previously on consumer behavior when it comes to environmentally friendly products, leading to insights that informed the methods for this study.

1. Consumers' actions speak louder than words

First and foremost, it is difficult to conduct research on this topic. Self-reporting is unreliable for understanding consumer behavior when it comes to ethical buying, as consumers want to seem ethical even if their actions do not reflect that desire and will exaggerate (Chater & Stot, 2019). In most cases, price has more impact than the ethics of a product, but certain sectors such as luxury and beauty fare better when it comes to ethical buying (Chater & Stot, 2019).

2. Green consumer demographics

Certain sectors of consumers, including “females, those with a degree and people with higher financial literacy scores” as well as consumers in specific regions have been found to have an increased likelihood of buying ethical products (Chater & Stot, 2019). Younger generations are also more likely to be willing to spend extra money on sustainable products, which could indicate a growing market in future years. Nielsen and Fuse have both conducted studies that show if brands want to build loyalty with Millennials and Gen Z, they need to be stewards of causes like the environment (Nielsen, 2015; Fuse, 2020).

Several studies have especially found that females are more likely to buy ethically. Laroche et. al. argue that women tend to care more about environmental issues than men, and therefore will buy ethically (2001). Swim et al. found that environmentally friendly behavior tends to fit into gender roles, and people are resistant to engage in the actions they perceive as being outside of their own gender role (2019). Morel & Kwakye show in their research that although men and women tend to think eco-friendly products are healthy or of good quality at about the same rates, women are more likely to pay more to actually purchase those products (2012). Overall, women are more targeted when it comes to eco-friendly marketing (Hunt, 2020), whether that is because of previous studies or not. Whatever the reason, it definitely seems that there is a lean towards females when it comes to those purchasing from green brands.

3. Consumer attitudes

In general, having an association with being environmentally friendly is positive for brands. Rios et al. found this to be especially true when third-party environmental certifications are present, though “this effect is smaller than that of other functional attributes” (2006). Hwang & Choi also confirmed that being a green company leads to a positive brand image and “three outcome variables: intentions to use, word-of-mouth intentions and willingness to pay more”(2017). Morel & Kwakye also had similar findings, where consumers thought environmentally friendly products were higher quality and healthier, and word of mouth plays a big role in their acceptance (2012). Alex & Mathew’s research shows these elements are especially helpful for brands who are in tight competition with others.

Going into my research, I was expecting for more young, female users to engage with green brands, more engagement with the brands even if their following is smaller, and better sentiment than competitors. I was interested to see what platforms the green brands did best on, and if there were any other trends of note.



Methods

1. Brand selection

The goal of this study is to understand online behavior, attitudes, and engagement when it comes to green brands. To do so, I chose four companies that take being environmentally conscious into account with every step they take, then selected two competitors that offer a similar product without the environmental element as a control group. The selected green brands are all at different levels of establishment and size to offer some variety. They are all leaders and innovators in their fields and prioritize environmental factors over profit. Additionally, as previous research has shown that when it comes to goods deemed necessities by consumers green marketing makes less of a difference, each of these products is something that would not be deemed completely essential.

2. Data collection

The majority of data about these brands was pulled from two analytics platforms, Talkwalker and SimilarWeb. Talkwalker is a social listening platform that takes conversations from social media sites, forums and online news and uses artificial intelligence engines to categorize it all in one place. This is the main platform used for the research. Talkwalker allows for customized queries using boolean syntax to ensure the results are accurate. In the rare cases where results were not relevant, Talkwalker allows for manual sorting, tagging, etc. to override the AI system. For information about company websites and social page traffic, SimilarWeb provided data. Additionally, I used Google Trends to get information about consumer interest. All data is in the time range of October 15, 2019-April 1, 2020 when possible in an effort to collect as much data as possible. SimilarWeb data includes January, February, and March 2020 as their plan only allows for three months of data. To avoid the COVID-19 outbreak starting in late February 2020 in the United States from impacting the data, I applied a filter in Talkwalker to remove mentions of topics surrounding the virus.



Data by Sector





Cosmetics

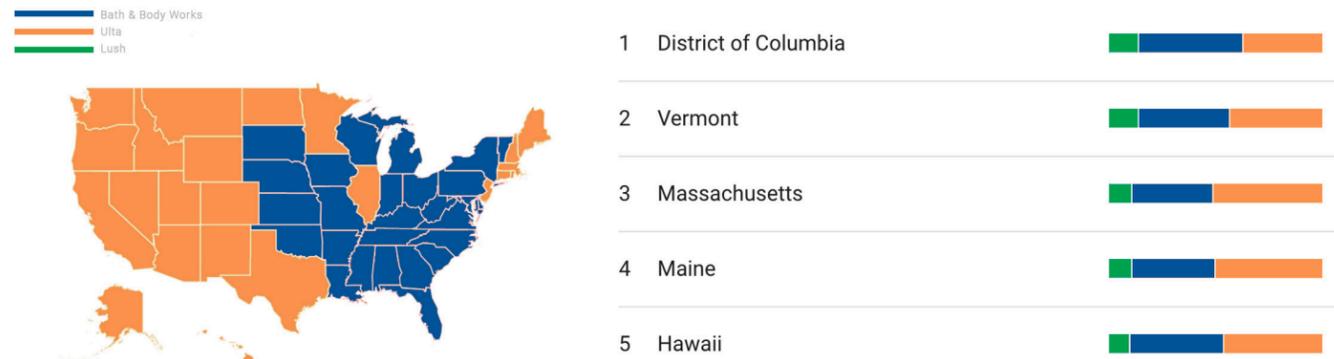
The green brand for the cosmetics sector is Lush. According to their website and social channels, Lush not only creates cosmetics using ethically sourced and eco-friendly ingredients, they also educate customers about why certain ingredients are more ethical than others and have created new ways to deliver products. Around 35% of their product, including lotions, soaps, bath bombs, and even toothpaste, are sold “naked”, while the rest are minimally packaged using recycled and recyclable materials. Shipped products are packed with compostable packing peanuts, and their gift wrap is reusable fabric and ribbon. Their products are also 100% vegetarian and many are vegan, which is shown to have smaller environmental impact, and do not contain harmful plastic microbeads or synthetic glitter. Lush has taken stands as a company as well, like donating to environmental organizations. As of April 2020, Lush’s twitter bio sums it up as: “we’re creating a cosmetics revolution to save the planet.”

For competitors, I selected Bath & Body Works and Ulta Beauty. These companies are similar to Lush in their demographics and variety of product offerings, but both are a bit more mainstream and established. They do not prioritize environmental concerns at all, at least publically.

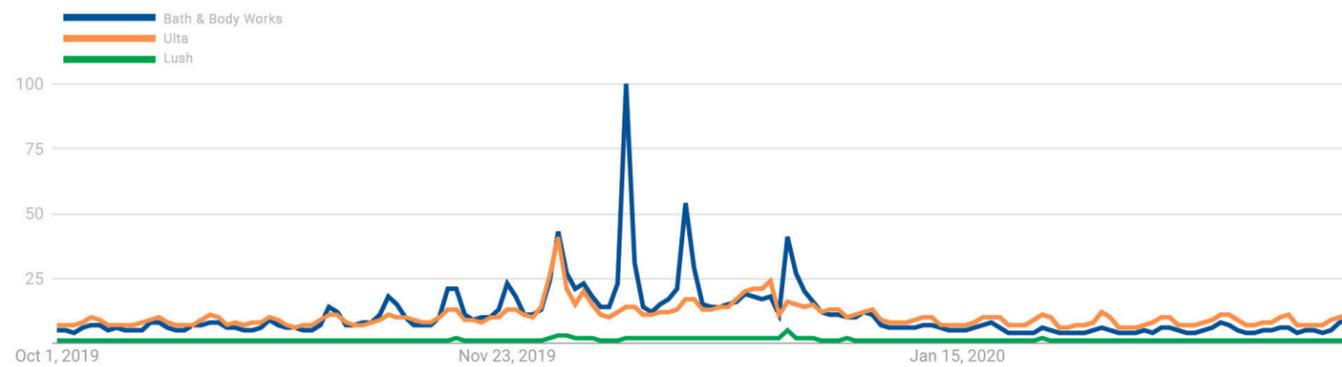
Google Search Interest

Google Trends reports show that there is generally more search interest in Ulta Beauty and Bath & Body Works than Lush, and they all spike around Black Friday and Christmas. The states searching most for Lush tend to be on the east coast, as demonstrated by the list of the top 5 states for percentage of interest in Lush. Lush does not have a large percentage of interest any state in comparison to the other two brands.

Search Interest By Region



Overall Search Interest by Brand

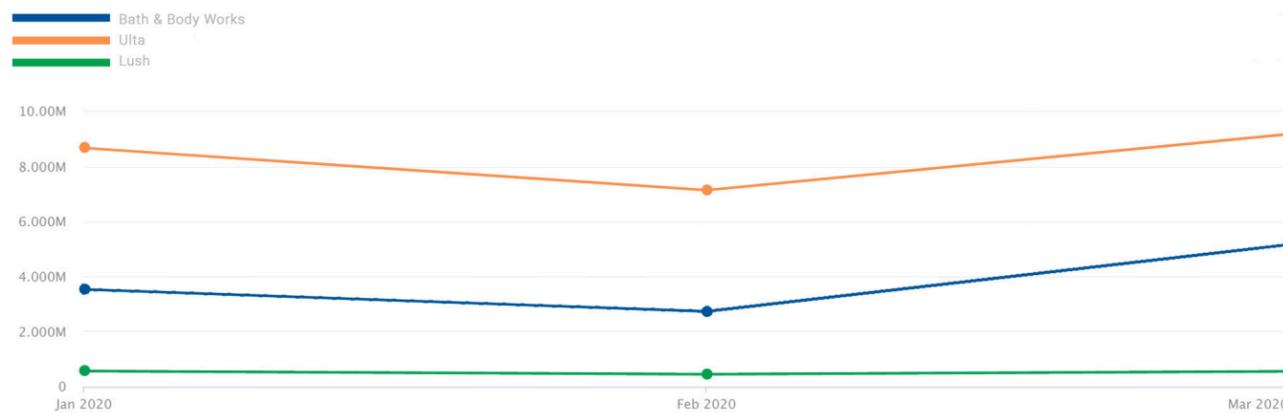


Website Analysis

For the purposes of this research, I used lushusa.com. They have several websites in different countries, but here all of the domains are based in the USA and it is easier to be consistent with them all in the same geographic region.

Overall Site Visits

Overall, Lush has the fewest website visits over time. This makes sense, as the other competitors are more established and mainstream. Lush has about 1.6 million monthly visits compared to 11.4 million for Bath & Body Works and 24.98 million for Ulta.



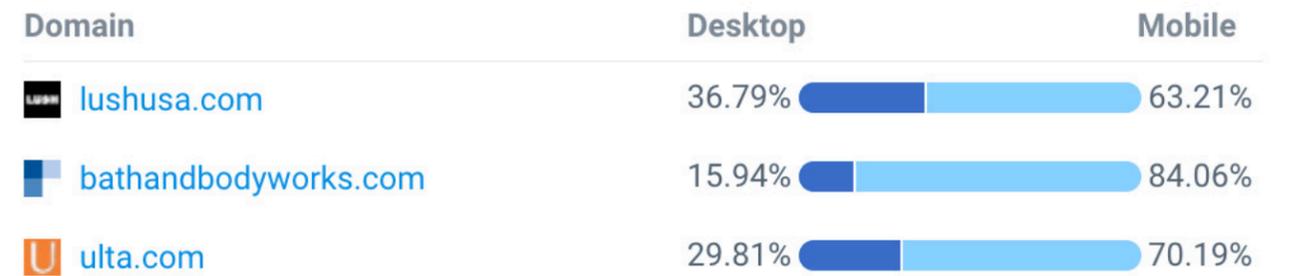
Website Engagement

Although Lush does not get the most visitors, they still manage to pretty significantly win the pages per visit metric as well as have the smallest bounce rate. This indicates that visitors engage more with the content on Lush's website.

Domain	Monthly Visits	Unique Visitors	Visits / Unique Visitors	Visit Duration	Pages/Visit	Bounce Rate
lushusa.com	1.411M	826,632	1.71	00:04:02	5.74	45.50%
bathandbodyworks.com	23.87M	10.38M	2.30	00:03:28	4.19	47.50%
ulta.com	27.93M	13.45M	2.08	00:04:14	4.22	54.03%

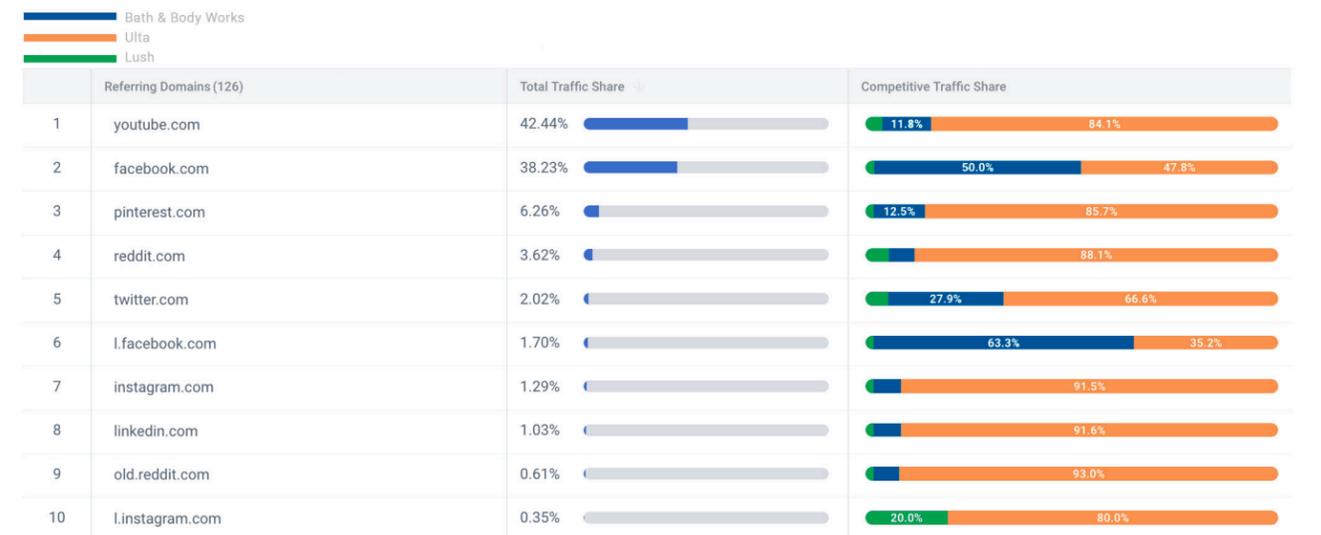
Device Distribution

Lush has the most desktop users out of the three competitors, but all three have a majority on mobile.



Social Referrals to Website

When it comes to social traffic, Lush has the highest percentage of referrals from YouTube, Twitter and Reddit of the competitive set. Youtube and Facebook have the highest amount of traffic share in this group.



Talkwalker Insights

Demographics

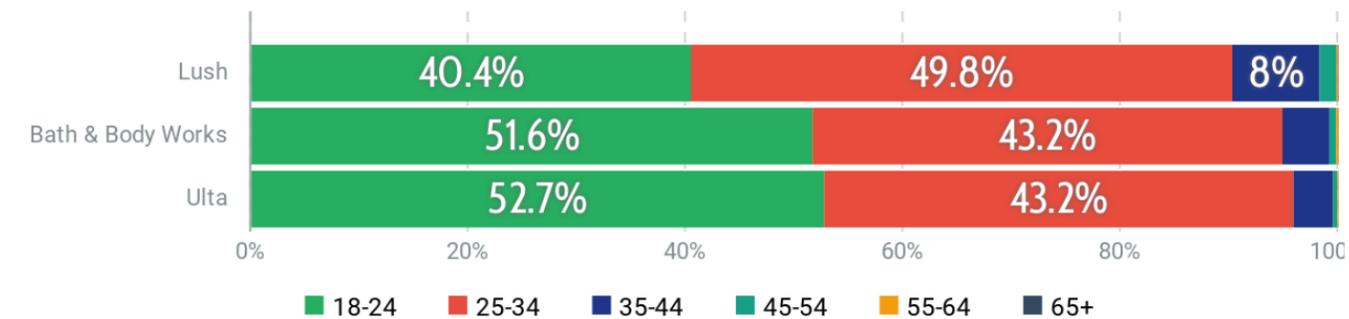
Gender

Lush has slightly more male authors than the competitors. Though this is against the original predictions, it is important to note that Lush does advertise more to men than the competitors do. While Ulta and Bath & Body Works carry some products for men, Lush advertises that all of their products are for everyone. It is necessary here to take into account that the cosmetics industry in general is historically and, for the most part currently, intended for women.



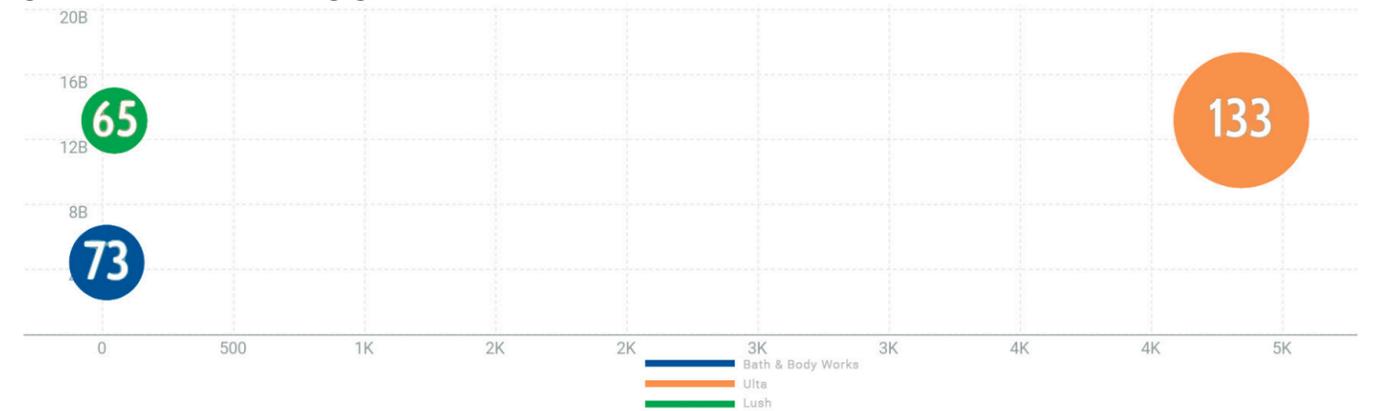
Age

Lush also has a slightly older group speaking about them online. As none of the brands have very much of an audience older than 44, this could not be very significant. It also could be because Lush's products are generally a bit more expensive than Bath & Body Works (which targets young girls) and many of the brands carried at Ulta.

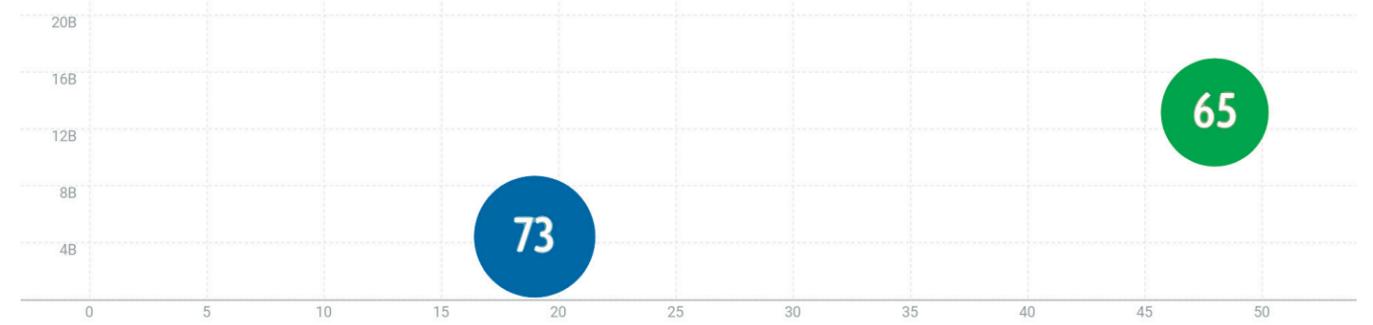


Reach vs. Engagement

Here, the x-axis is engagement and the y-axis is reach, while the size of the bubble indicates number of mentions. Of all the brands, Ulta has the most overall mentions on digital platforms. It's not shocking that they get the most reach and engagement.

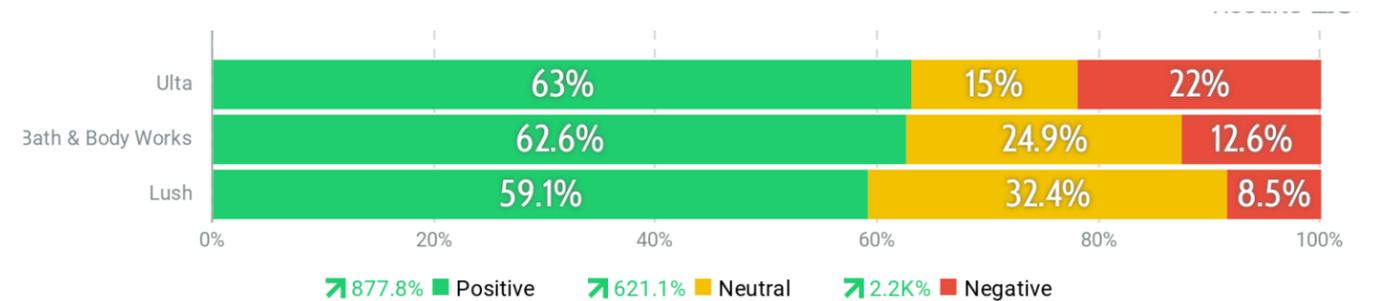


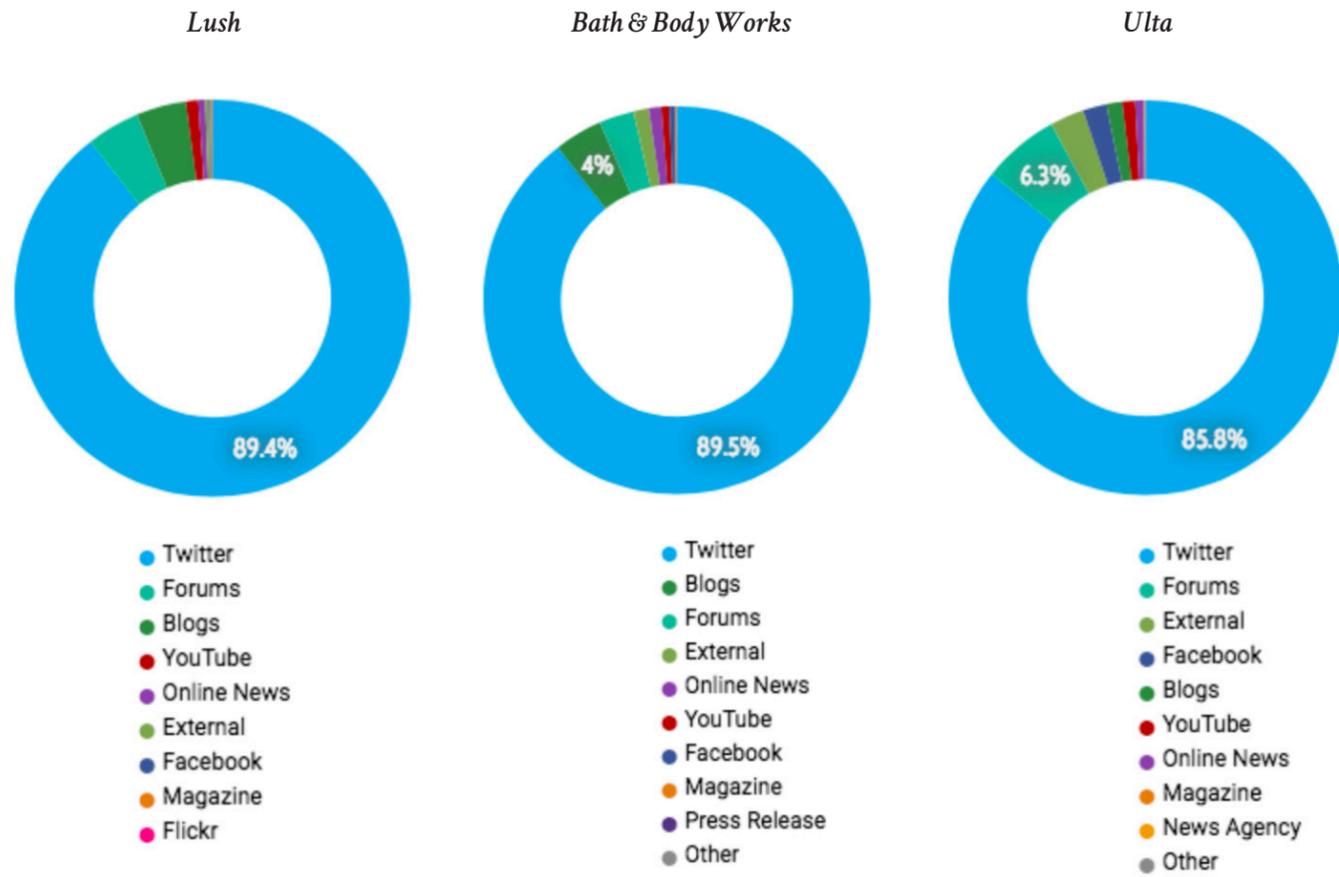
If we zoom in to just Lush and Bath & Body Works, however, posts mentioning Lush had significantly more reach and engagement, comparatively. Lush has a larger amount of engagement relative to their reach as well.



Sentiment

Of the three brands, Lush has the lowest percentage of negative sentiment. This is good for Lush as they are close to their competitors in people speaking positively about them and have the fewest speaking against them. Lush also has the highest net sentiment value (Net sentiment = (#positive posts - #negative posts) / (#positive posts + #negative posts), a calculation that calculates the overall sentiment). Lush scores at 74.88% compared to 66.54% for Bath & Body Works and 48.27% for Ulta.





Media Split

All three of these brands have Twitter as the main platform where they are talked about. Lush has the largest percentage of their mentions on Youtube and Blogs of the three. Facebook and online news sources are also smaller for Lush than their competitors.





Search Engines

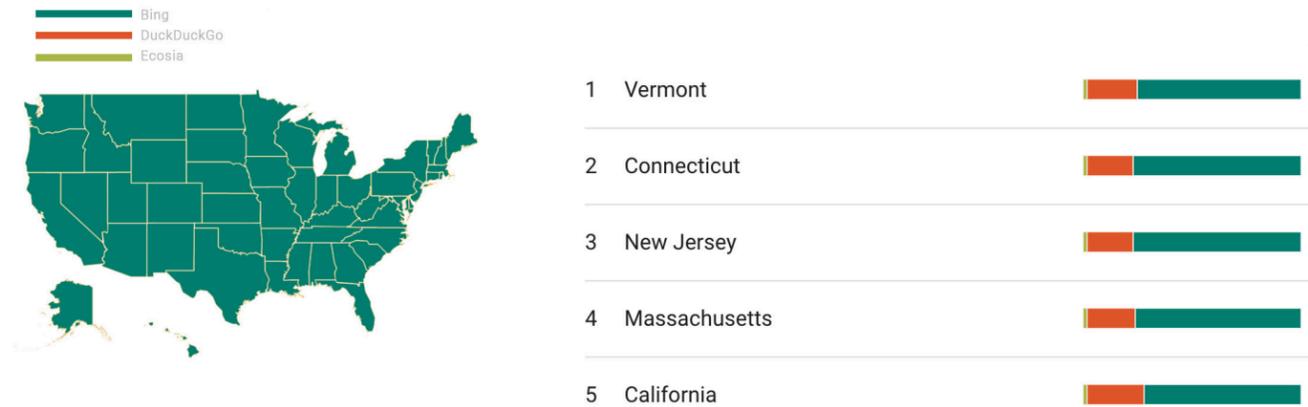
While Google may dominate the search engine space enough for its name to become synonymous with the action of searching, there are several other options available. These alternative search engines attract customers who want to break with the mainstream or who are searching for specific features. Surprisingly enough, there is an eco-friendly search engine in this space called Ecosia. Ecosia uses the profits they generate from ads to plant trees in areas that need them, as well as provide their search service without selling user data to third parties (Ecosia, 2020). They even flag companies in the search results that are either deemed very environmentally conscious, or if they are part of one of the 20 firms that are behind a third of all carbon emissions (Gottlieb, 2019).

Two competitors to look at are Bing, arguably one of the biggest search engines besides Google, and DuckDuckGo, a search engine that is focused around user privacy. Bing is especially big in countries where Google is restricted, like China. Neither brand has any environmental aspect to their business model.

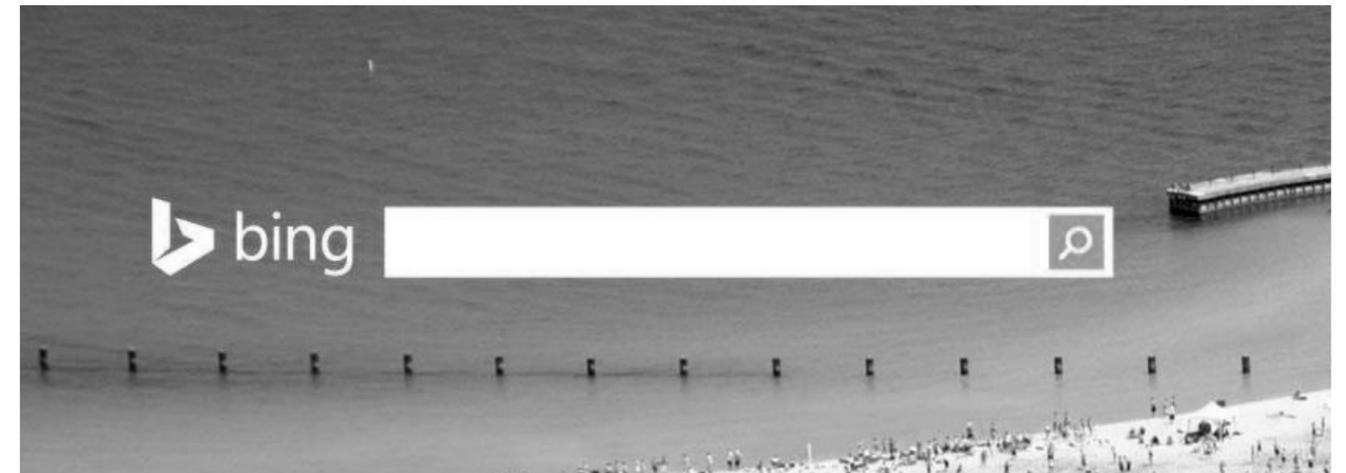
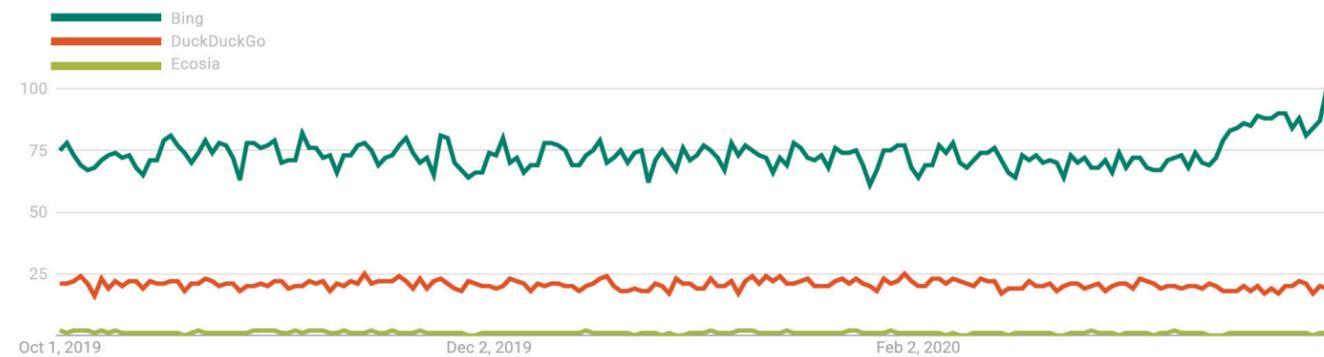
Google Search Interest

Overall Bing has the most search interest, which is not surprising as it is the most established of the three companies. DuckDuckGo still has much more interest than Ecosia. Ecosia has their highest percentages of interest in the Northeast.

Search Interest By Region



Overall Search Interest by Brand



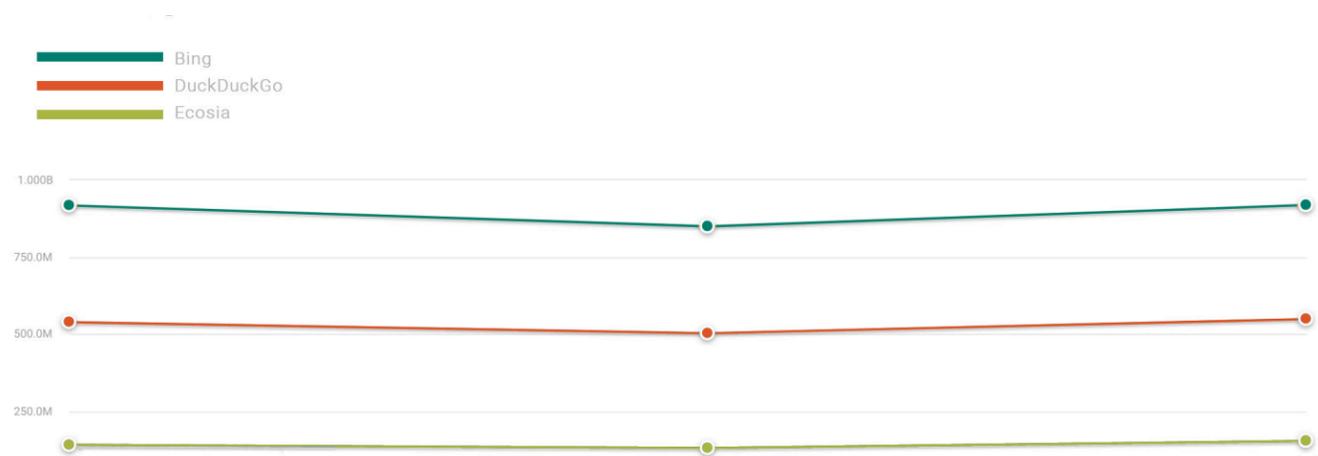
Website Analysis

Overall Site Visits

Overall, Ecosia has the fewest website visits over time. This makes sense, as the other competitors are more established and mainstream. Ecosia has about 421.5 million monthly visits compared to 4.6 billion for DuckDuckGo and 22.7 billion for Bing.

Website Engagement

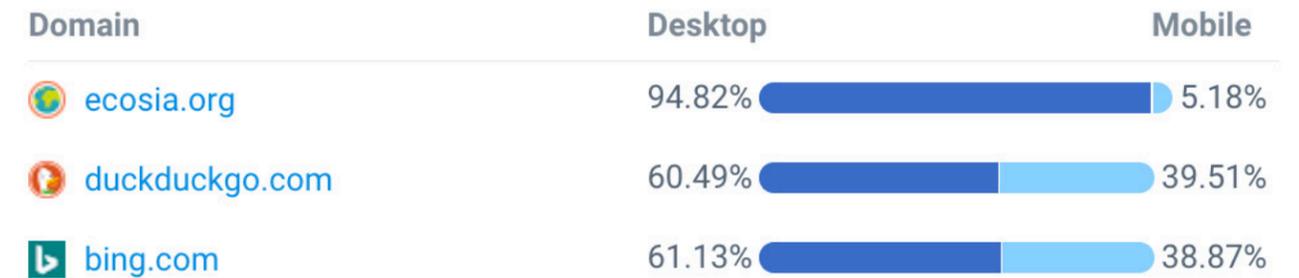
Although Ecosia does not get the most visitors, they still manage to have the longest visit duration and most unique visitors. Their pages per visit is low, but for a search engine this might be a good thing as that would indicate finding results more quickly. Ecosia also has a lower bounce rate than Bing.



Domain	Monthly Visits	Unique Visitors	Visits / Unique Visitors	Visit Duration	Pages/Visit	Bounce Rate
ecosia.org	140.5M	4.986M	28.18	00:10:35	4.37	38.40%
duckduckgo.com	529.4M	26.88M	19.70	00:09:39	7.36	17.83%
bing.com	895.1M	119.6M	7.48	00:07:02	5.61	45.61%

Device Distribution

Ecosia is overwhelmingly used on desktop devices compared to mobile devices, while competitors have a more even split.



Social Referrals to Website

When it comes to social traffic, Ecosia has the highest percentage of referrals from YouTube, as well as significant percentages from Twitter and Reddit. Ecosia also does well on WhatsApp, perhaps because of its roots in Europe where WhatsApp is more popular (Testa & Satariano, 2019).

Referring Domains (197)	Total Traffic Share ↓	Competitive Traffic Share
1 youtube.com	42.97%	10.6% 21.0% 68.5%
2 facebook.com	28.78%	13.2% 82.3%
3 twitter.com	5.47%	19.5% 73.0%
4 weibo.com	4.57%	99.8%
5 linkedin.com	3.10%	91.9%
6 reddit.com	2.83%	42.3% 49.6%
7 douban.com	2.28%	99.6%
8 web.whatsapp.com	1.93%	14.7% 25.4% 59.9%
9 stackoverflow.com	0.93%	24.8% 67.7%
10 instagram.com	0.86%	13.1% 15.5% 71.4%



Talkwalker Insights

Demographics

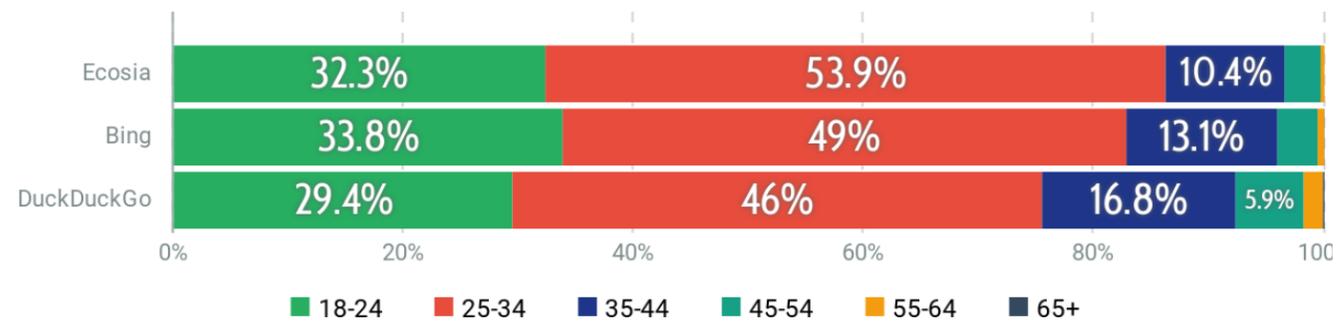
Gender

Bing has the highest percentage of mentions from female authors, but Ecosia has more female authors than DuckDuckGo which is a closer business model.



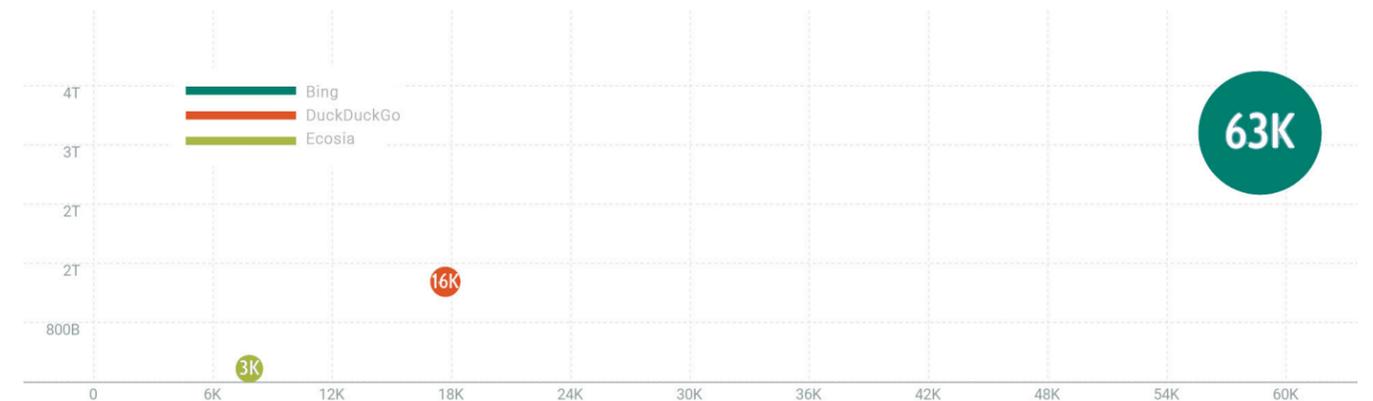
Age

Ecosia has the youngest overall authors mentioning them.

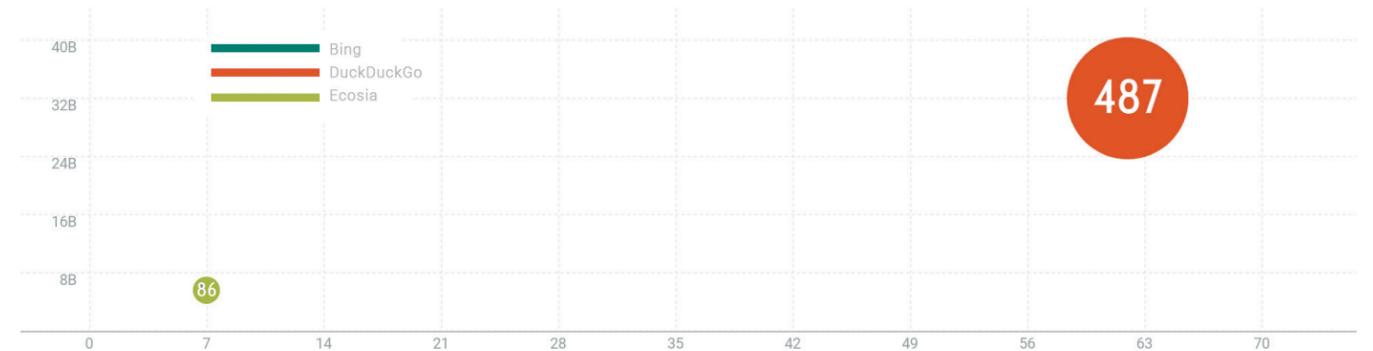


Reach vs. Engagement

Bing has the most overall mentions, so it is not surprising that they get the most reach and engagement. Ecosia does manage to get a lot of engagement relative to their reach.

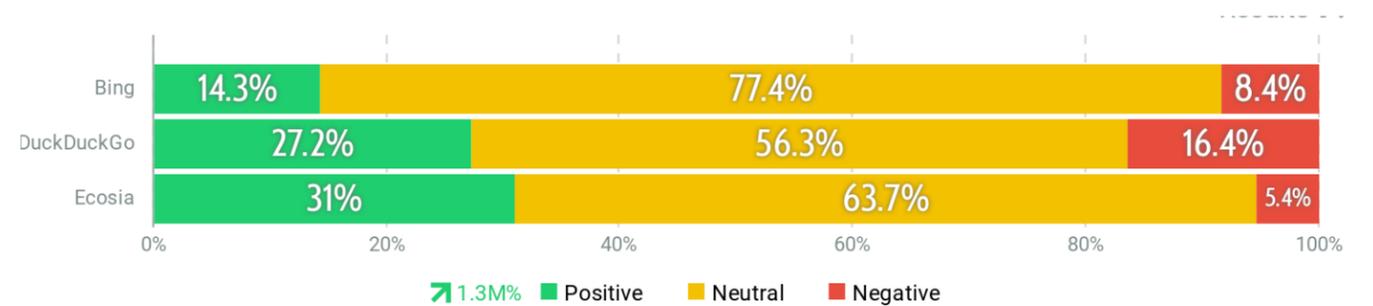


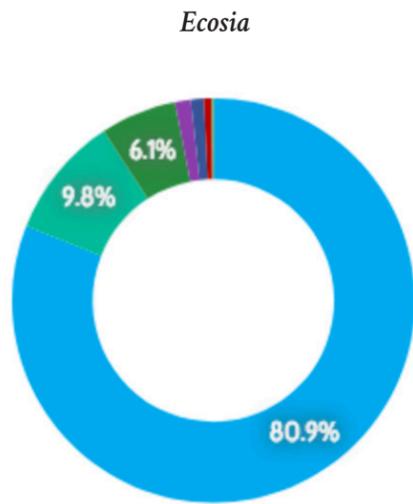
If we zoom in to just Ecosia and DuckDuckGo, Ecosia does still get quite a bit of reach and engagement, just not as much as the bigger, better known search engines.



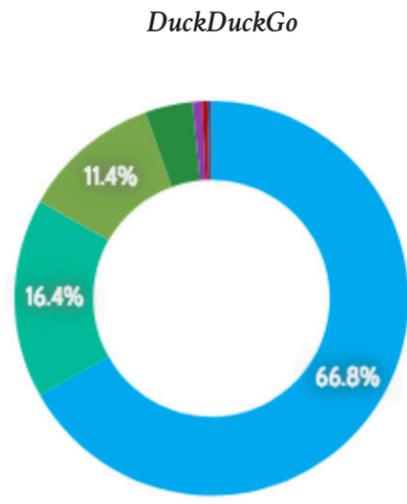
Sentiment

Ecosia has the highest percentage of positive sentiment and lowest percentage of negative sentiment. They really blow the competitors out of the water when it comes to net sentiment. Ecosia has a 70.36% net sentiment score, compared to 25.87% for Bing and 24.68% for DuckDuckGo.

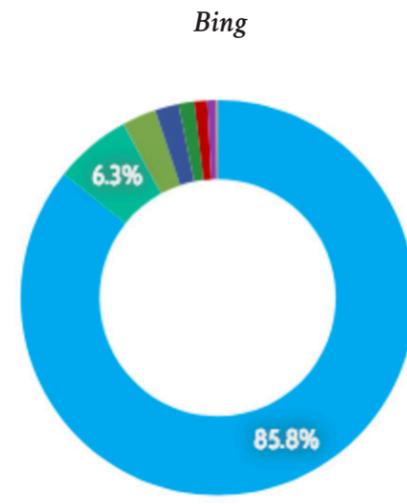




- Twitter
- Forums
- Blogs
- Online News
- Facebook
- YouTube
- External



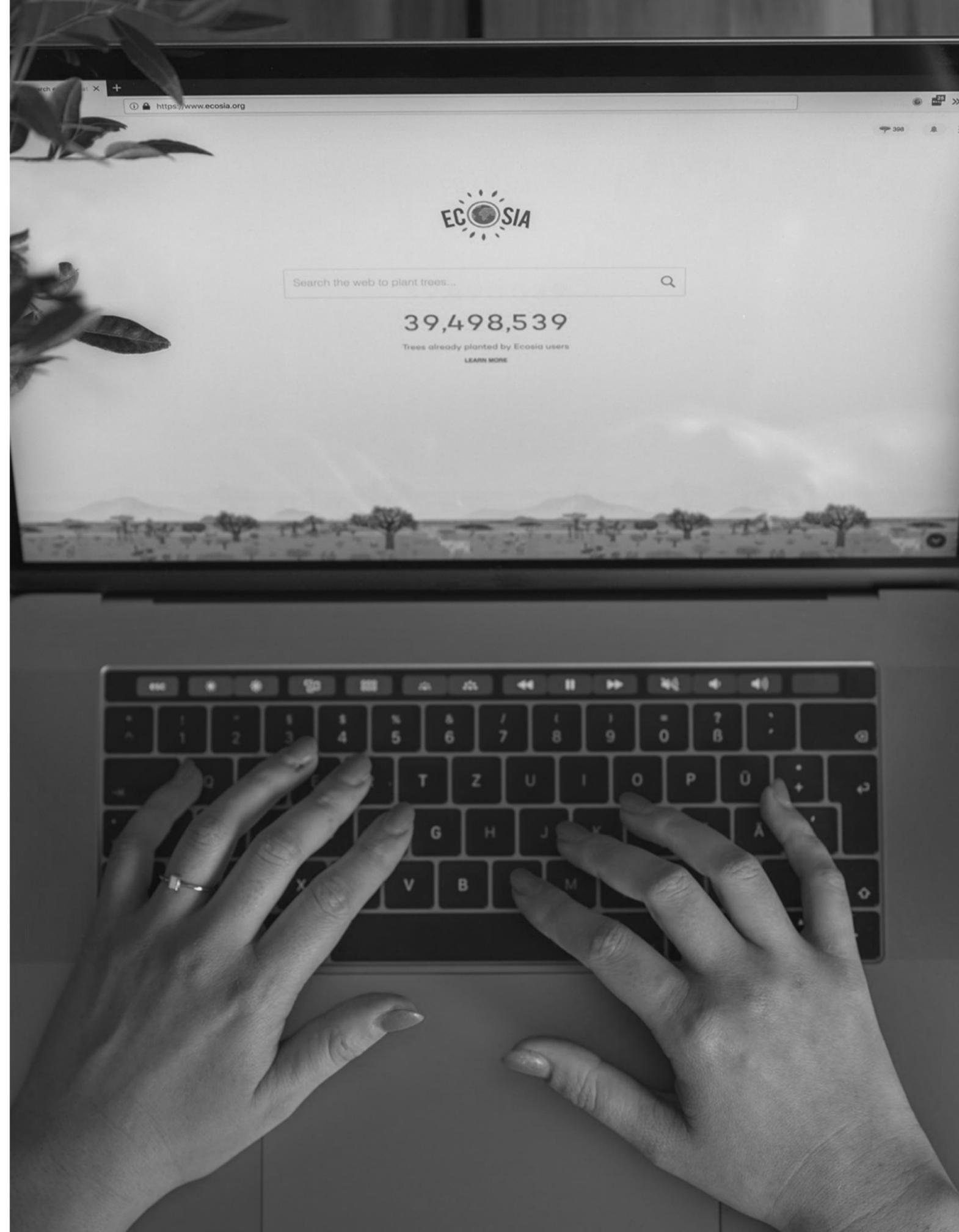
- Twitter
- Forums
- External
- Blogs
- Online News
- YouTube
- Facebook
- Press Release
- VKontakte
- Magazine



- Twitter
- Forums
- External
- Facebook
- Blogs
- YouTube
- Online News
- Magazine
- Other

Media Split

All three brands have the most mentions on Twitter. Ecosia has a large percentage of blogs and online news compared to the others.





Outdoor Apparel

Outdoor apparel has an extensive number of green brands, likely because those who are passionate about the outdoors are also passionate about the environment. But nobody is a bigger name in the space than Patagonia. In fact, when I was compiling a list of possible companies to research, it was the first to come to mind. According to the Patagonia website, their slogan is “we’re in business to save the planet”, and they have created several public campaigns to raise awareness for environmental issues. Patagonia’s model is now to slow their growth, and they are focusing on creating their products in sustainable ways that can be recycled and repaired for years to come.

The two competitors are Columbia Sportswear and Carhartt. Columbia has made a few statements about the environment, but is not nearly as developed as Patagonia at taking these factors into consideration with every step they take as a business. And Carhartt has no mention of environmental actions, but is focused more on workwear. Carhartt also promotes hunting which could lead to a different demographic than Patagonia. The three companies make similar products, but in very different ways with different brand images.

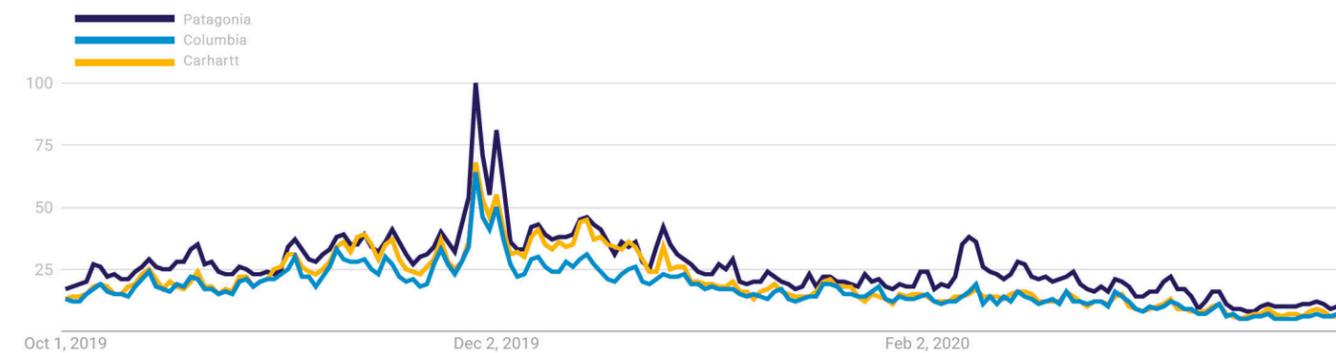
Google Search Interest

Overall, these three brands are close in search interest but Patagonia is slightly more dominant. The states where Patagonia does the best relative to the other companies in this aspect include Hawaii, a big player for outdoor adventure, and the Northeast. They area also dominant in most of the West where there are a lot of outdoor adventure opportunities.

Search Interest By Region



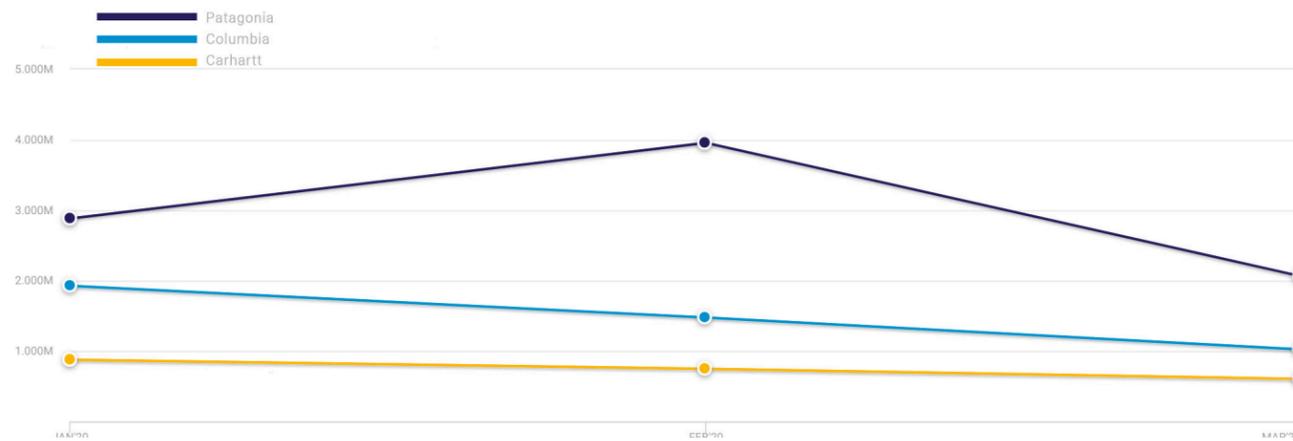
Overall Search Interest by Brand



Website Analysis

Overall Site Visits

Overall, Patagonia has the most website visits over time. Patagonia has about 3 million monthly visits compared to 11.5 million for Columbia and 744,452 for Carhartt. Patagonia is overall a more popular brand so this makes sense.



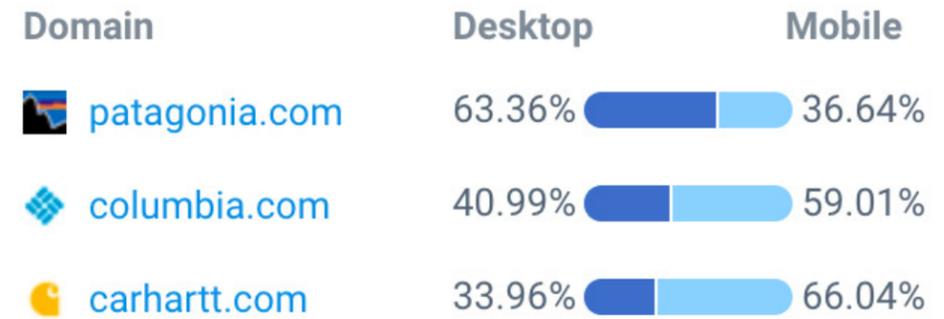
Website Engagement

Patagonia “wins” in every category for website engagement. Their pages per visit especially blow the competition out of the water. We can imagine that the people going to the Patagonia website truly want to be there and are excited enough by the content to stick around.

Domain	Monthly Visits	Unique Visitors	Visits / Unique Visitors	Visit Duration	Pages/Visit	Bounce Rate
patagonia.com	2.968M	1.584M	1.87	00:05:59	27.30	24.32%
columbia.com	1.475M	869,128	1.70	00:05:34	7.40	33.47%
carhartt.com	744,452	503,506	1.48	00:04:05	6.68	31.86%

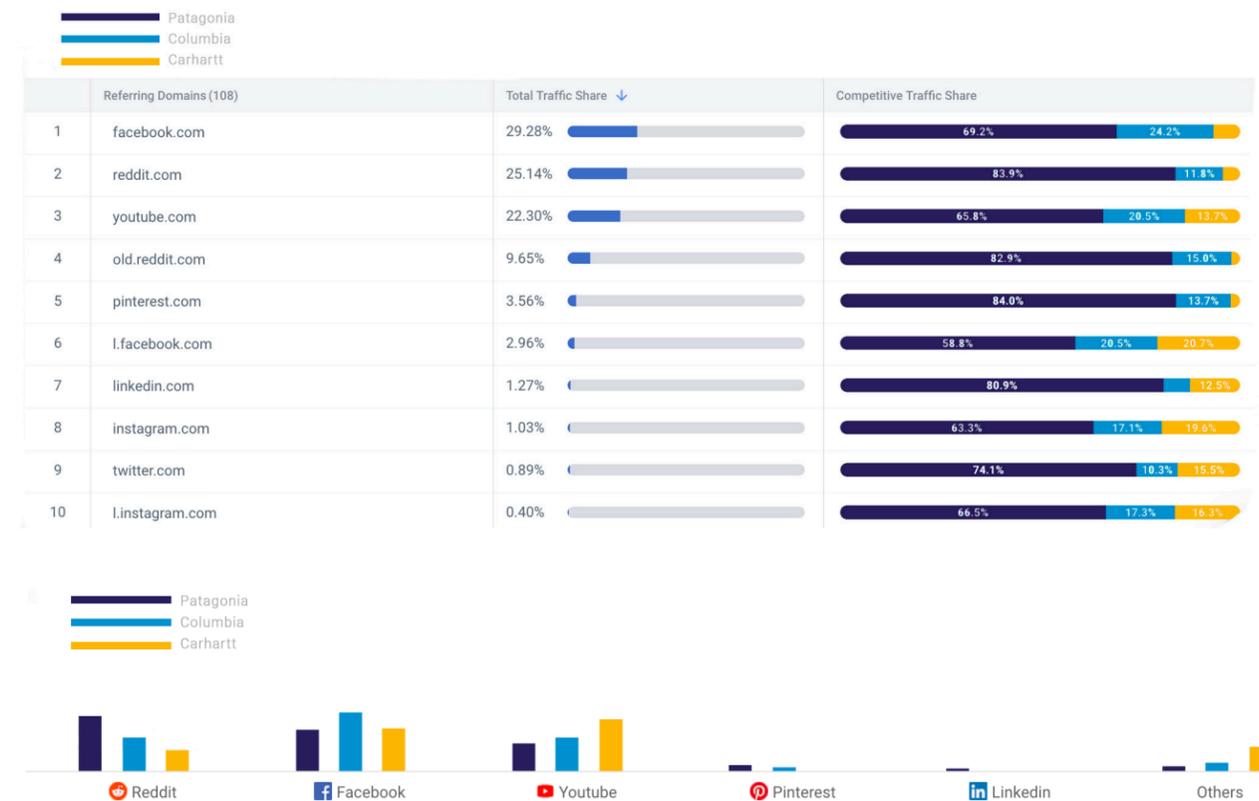
Device Distribution

Patagonia has the most desktop users out of the three competitors and is the only competitor for this period with a majority on desktop.



Social Referrals to Website

When it comes to social traffic, Patagonia has the highest percentage of referrals from Reddit. They also have a pretty high percentage from YouTube and take up most of the traffic share on Pinterest from this set of competitors. cant percentages from Twitter and Reddit. Ecosia also does well on WhatsApp, perhaps because of its roots in Europe where WhatsApp is more popular (Testa & Satariano, 2019).

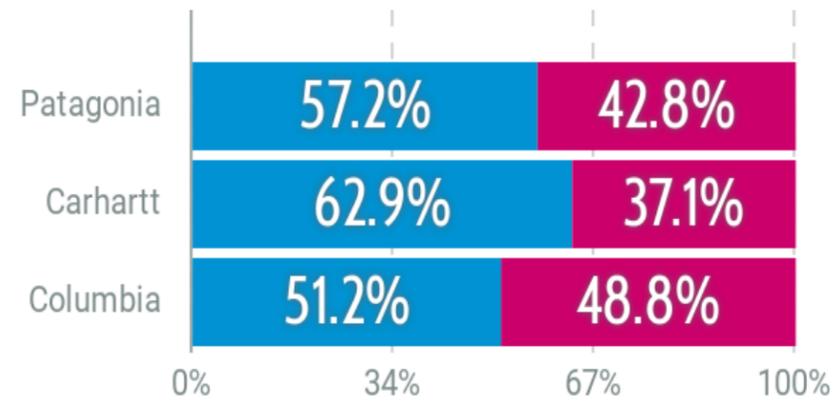


Talkwalker Insights

Demographics

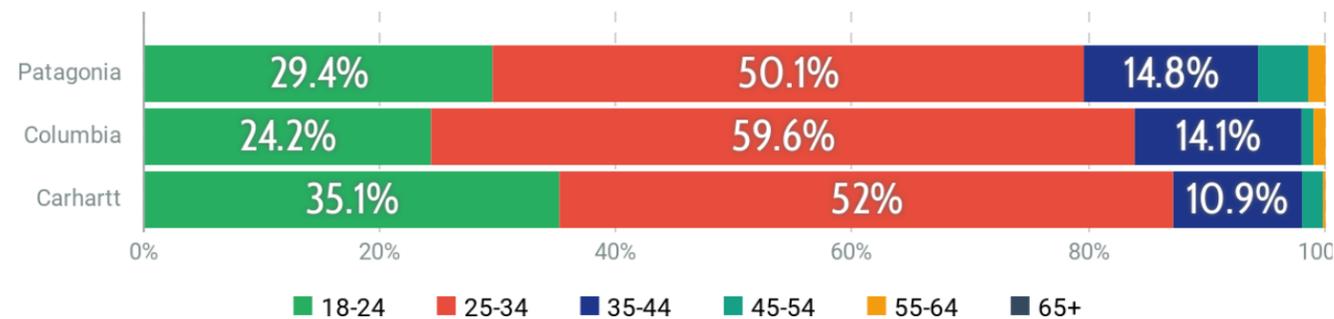
Gender

Patagonia have more of a female audience than Carhartt and a bit more male audience than Columbia. All three have a majority male audience, likely as outdoor and sportswear ads are traditionally marketed to men.



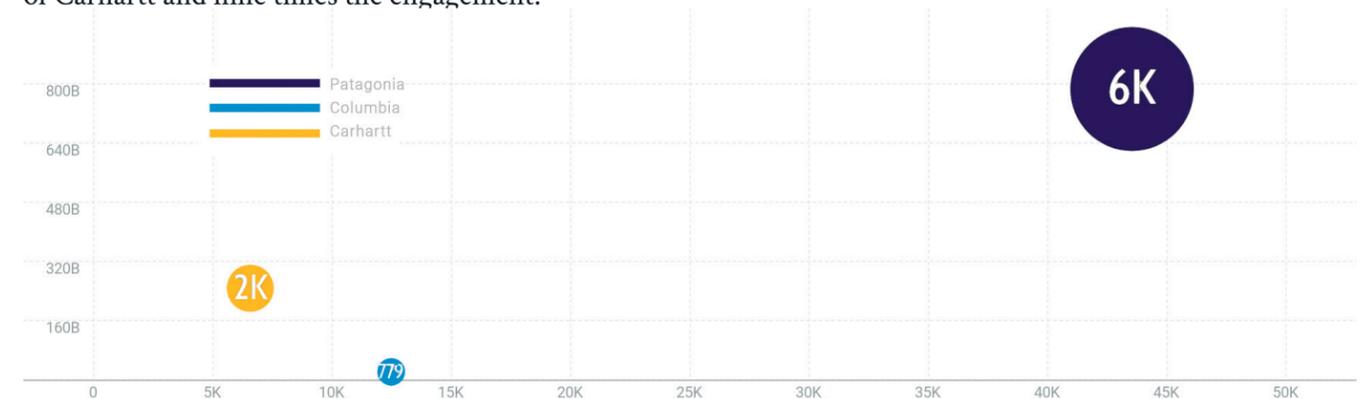
Age

Patagonia interestingly has the oldest group talking about them of these competitors, but all of them are pretty close to each other.



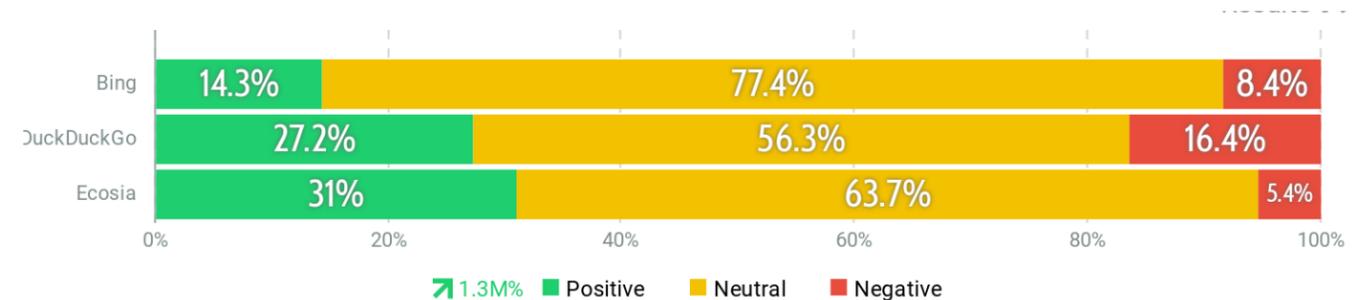
Reach vs. Engagement

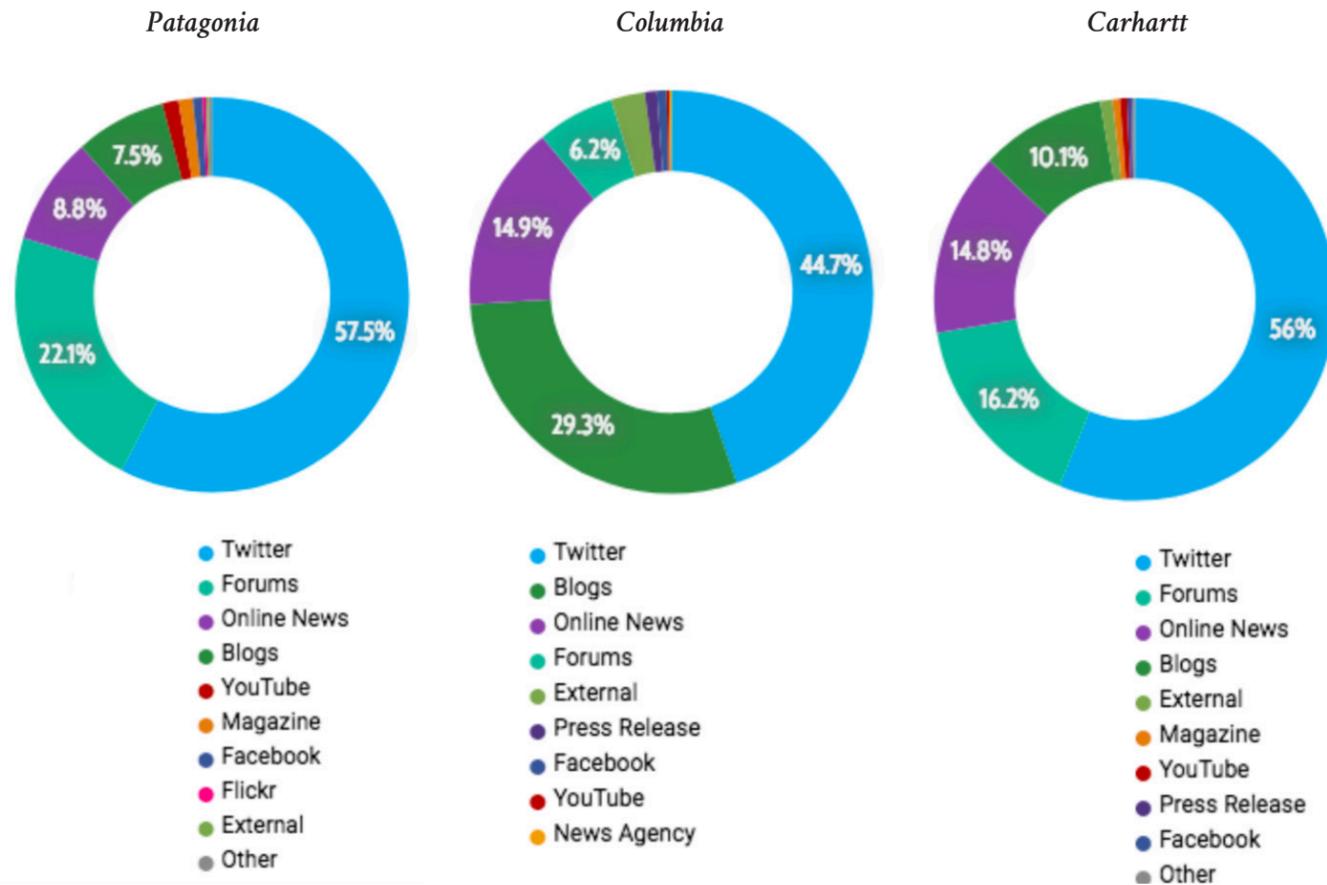
Patagonia gets the most engagement and reach by far as they have the most overall mentions. But, regardless of number of mentions, Patagonia does well proportionally for engagement. They have three times the mentions of Carhartt and nine times the engagement.



Sentiment

Patagonia has the highest percentage of positive sentiment. Their negative sentiment is largely around the stereotype of “finance guys” wearing Patagonia fleece. Their net sentiment is quite high as well but they are beat out by Columbia by a few percentage points. Patagonia scores 67.6% compared to Columbia’s 71.43% and Carhartt’s 45.75%





Media Split

Patagonia has the smallest percentage of online news sources, and the largest percentages for forums and YouTube. Facebook and formal press releases are larger percentages for the competitors.





Mobile Accessories

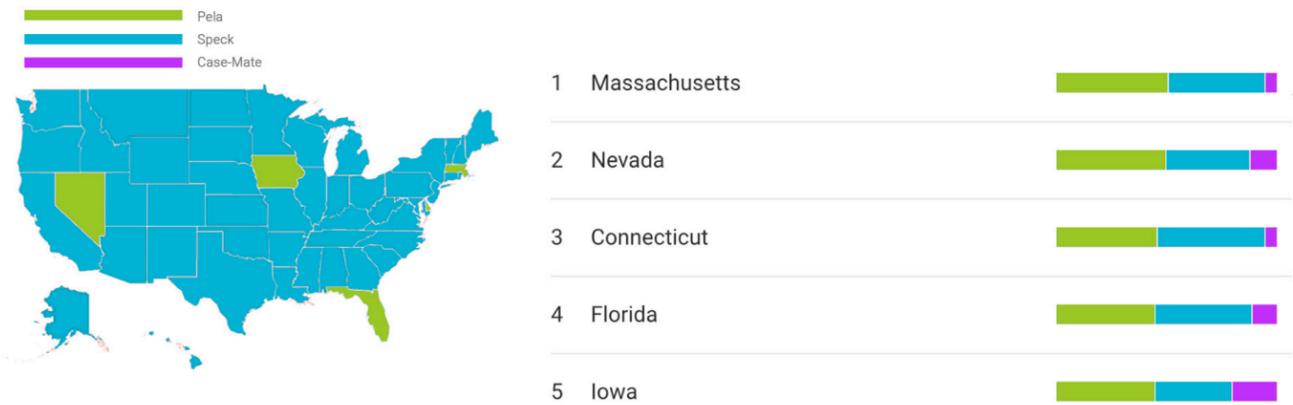
Phone cases have arguably become a necessity for everyday life in recent years. There is such a variety available on the market that companies really need to stand out to survive. Among them is Pela Case, a company creating phone cases from plant material that are completely compostable. They also have alternative packaging options to typical plastic bubble wrap and bags, and donate some of their profits to environmental organizations and to conservation efforts for the animals and plants featured in the case designs. Pela also collaborates with other green brands to post online about environmental issues and has a weekly email newsletter for their followers highlighting news in the space.

Two competitors are CaseMate and Speck Products. These are two of the top brands selling traditional phone cases, with CaseMate focusing on creatively designed cases and Speck focusing on sleek, protective products. All three companies focus on phone cases but also have other mobile accessories like headphone cases, screen protectors, etc.

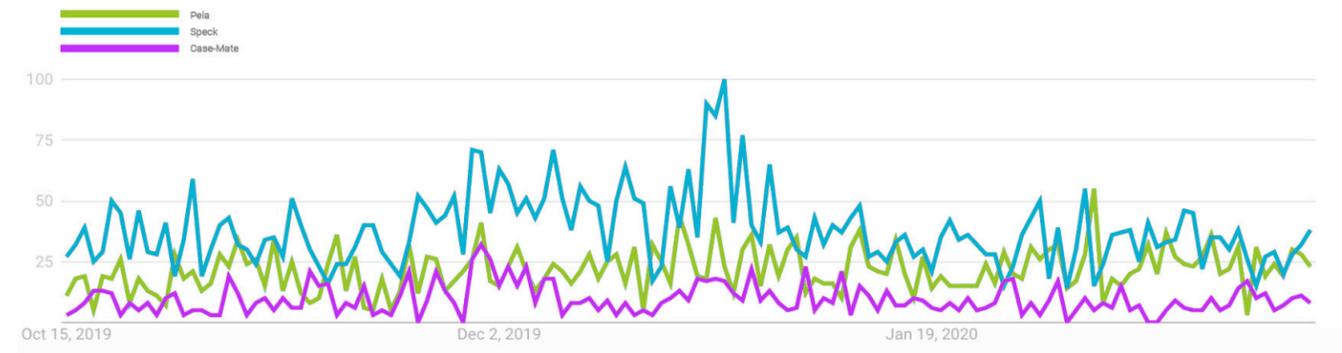
Google Search Interest

The search interest for these companies is much closer than in the other industries. Pela is especially popular in some specific states, where there might be significant word-of-mouth or campaigns happening. There is not one large region where Pela is popular, it is more scattered. Note: as many of these companies are smaller, it is more difficult for Google Trends to filter their data.

Search Interest By Region



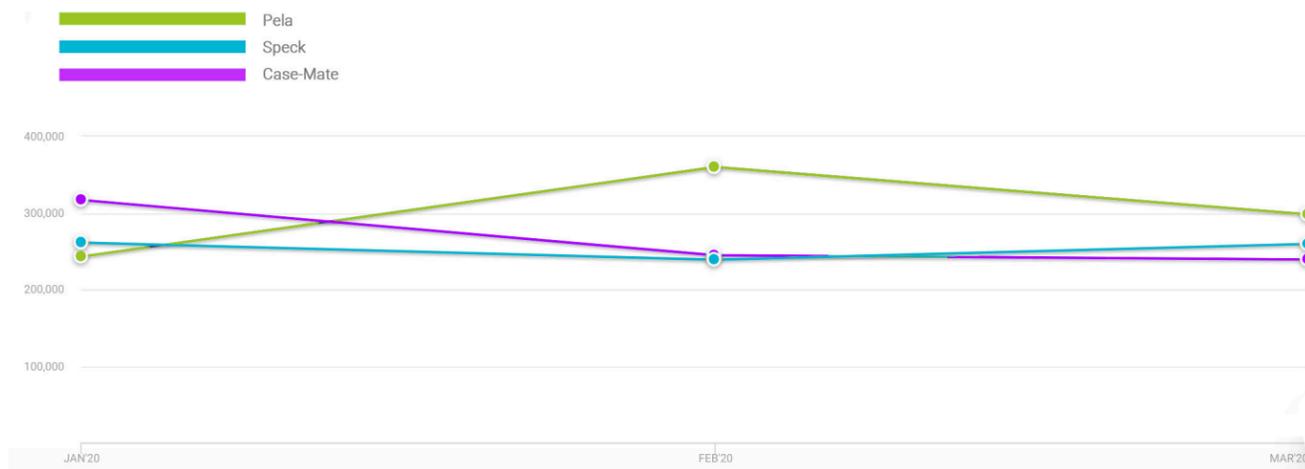
Overall Search Interest by Brand



Website Analysis

Overall Site Visits

Overall, Pelacase has the most visits over time for this period, but all three brands are quite close. Pelacase has an average of 901 K visits, Case-Mate has 801K, and Speck has 760K.



Website Engagement

Pelacase “wins” every category except bounce rate for engagement, but again the brands are quite close here. Pelacase does especially well for pages per visit compared to competitors.

Domain	Monthly Visits	Unique Visitors	Visits / Unique Visitors	Visit Duration	Pages/Visit	Bounce Rate
pelacase.com	300,454	190,890	1.57	00:02:29	4.06	52.88%
case-mate.com	267,006	187,464	1.42	00:02:06	3.57	51.40%
speckproducts.com	253,276	179,114	1.41	00:02:27	3.62	50.02%

Device Distribution

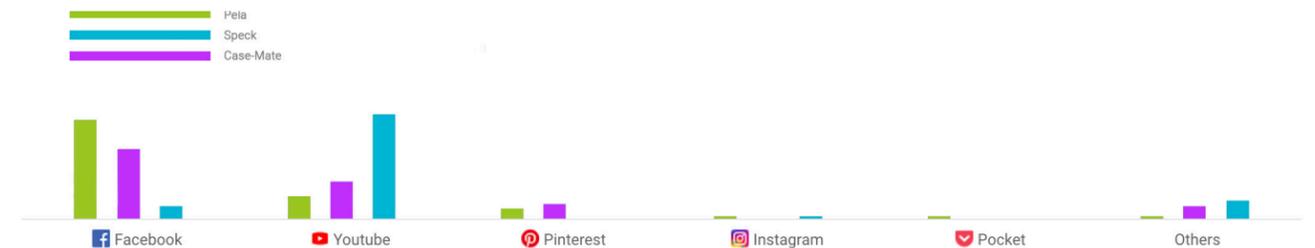
All of the competitors here are extremely close to each other for the device distribution, and all are a pretty even split between desktop and mobile.

Domain	Desktop	Mobile
pelacase.com	40.38%	59.62%
case-mate.com	42.23%	57.77%
speckproducts.com	51.69%	48.31%

Social Referrals to Website

When it comes to social traffic, Pelacase has the highest percentage on Facebook, which is different from some of the other green brands. They do have the largest percentage of traffic share on Youtube and Pinterest though.

Referring Domains (29)	Total Traffic Share ↓	Competitive Traffic Share
1 facebook.com	58.31%	Pelacase: 83.8%, Case-Mate: 14.0%
2 youtube.com	24.54%	Pelacase: 52.1%, Case-Mate: 13.9%, Speck: 34.0%
3 pinterest.com	3.00%	Pelacase: 64.9%, Case-Mate: 35.1%
4 business.facebook.com	2.16%	100% Pelacase
5 l.facebook.com	2.14%	100% Pelacase
6 reddit.com	1.93%	Pelacase: 12.2%, Case-Mate: 40.2%, Speck: 47.6%
7 pinterest.co.uk	1.09%	100% Pelacase
8 l.instagram.com	0.87%	100% Pelacase
9 docs.google.com	0.86%	100% Case-Mate
10 pinterest.ca	0.84%	100% Pelacase

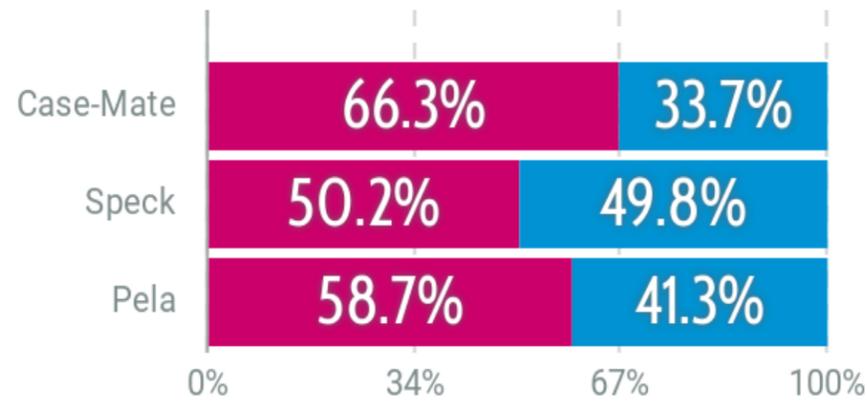


Talkwalker Insights

Demographics

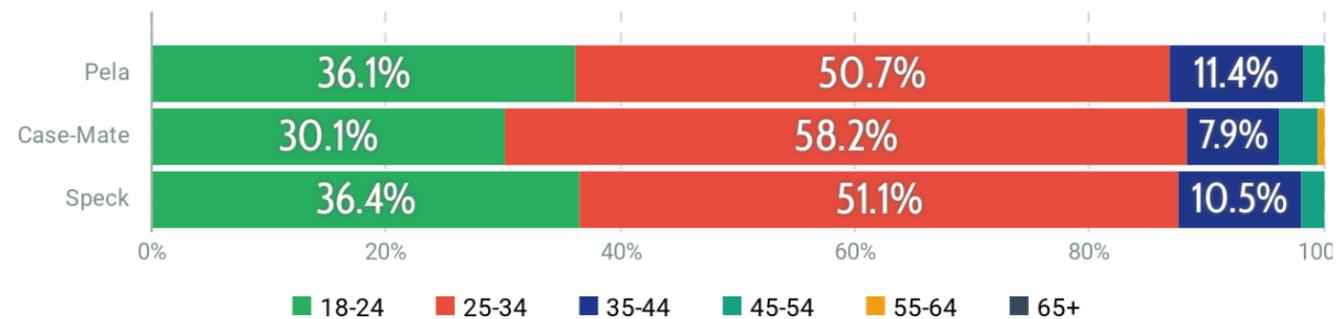
Gender

Pela and Case-Mate both have a majority female makeup in their audience, while Speck is split down the middle.



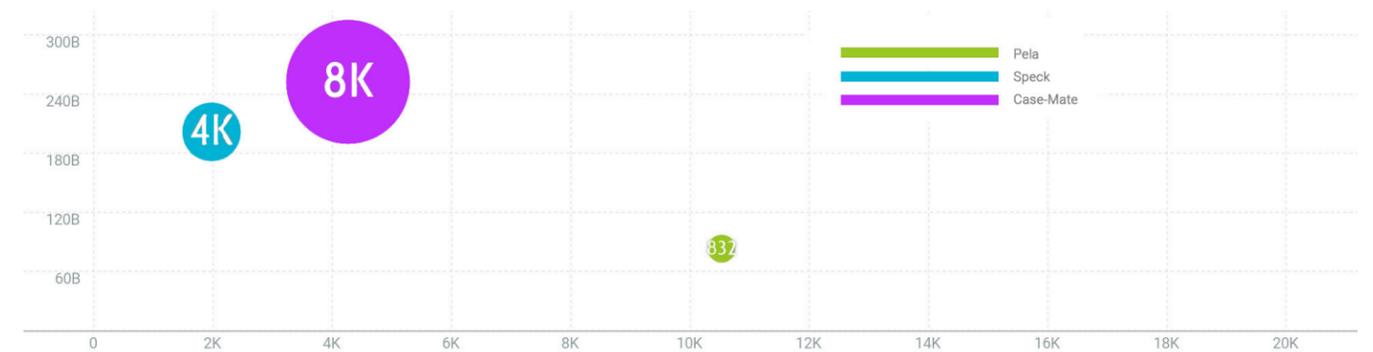
Age

Pela and Speck both have a similar age break down that is slightly younger than Case-Mate's. They all have a majority of their audience under 35, likely because posting on social media and being interested in phone accessories would be more popular in the younger demographic.



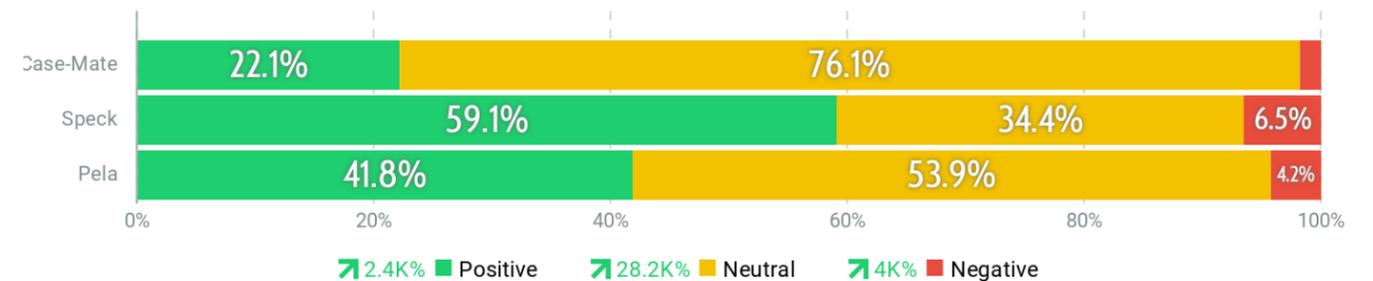
Reach vs. Engagement

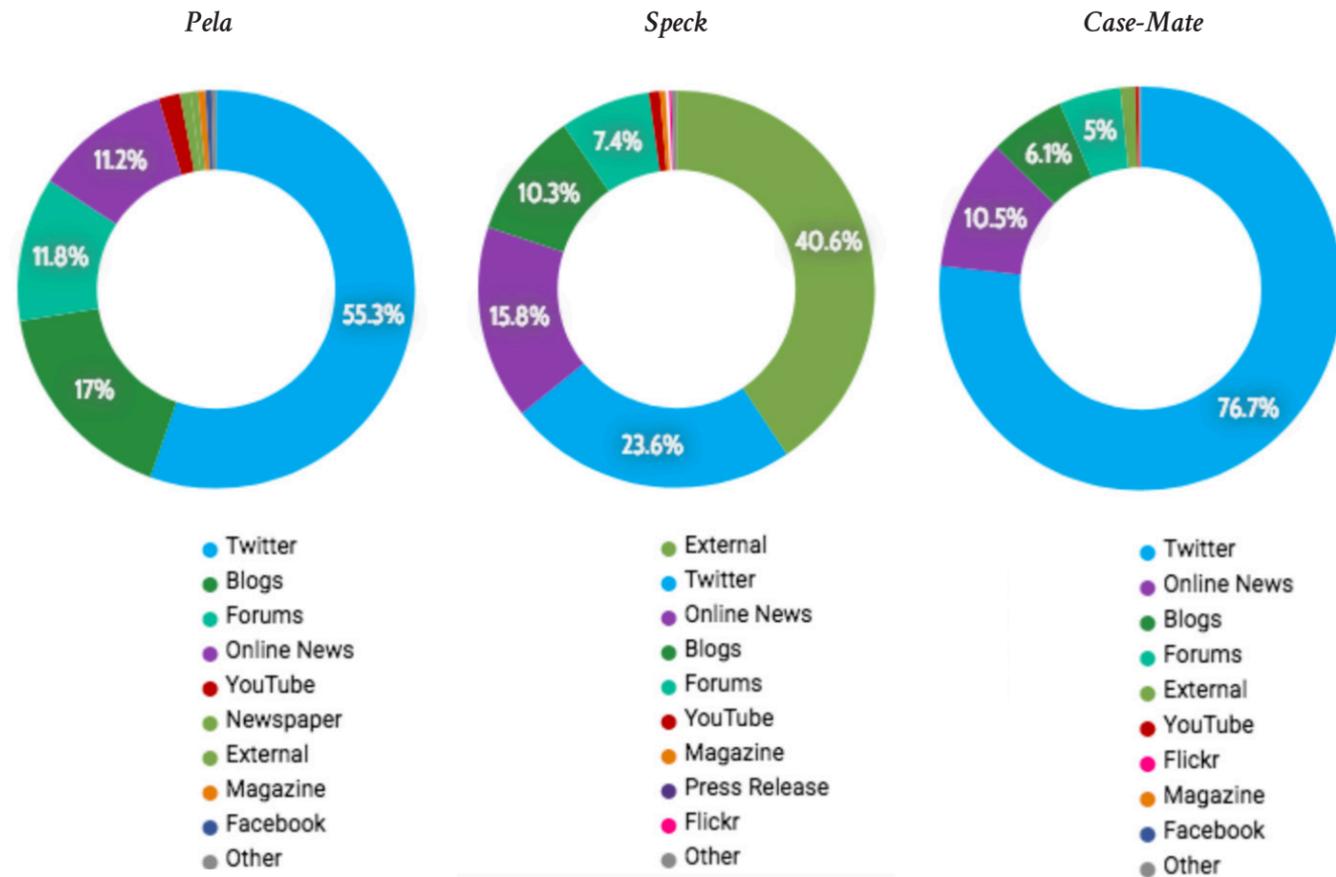
Though all of these competitors are similar in most other aspects, Pela truly manages to blow its competition away when it comes to engagement. The just over 800 posts mentioning Pela had over 10,000 engagements, while their competitors were both under 5,000 engagements. Pela does not have as much reach, but for their smaller number of posts this is expected.



Sentiment

Again, the competitive set is very close together in their results here. Case-Mate has very few results with any sentiment spin to them, and has the highest net sentiment score at 84.97%. Pela has a net sentiment of 81.56% and Speck has 80.06%. All of these scores indicate very positive sentiment and likely fluctuate who takes the lead depending on the time period.





Media Split

Pela has the highest percentage of the group for YouTube, blogs, and forums. Case-Mate and Speck rely more on Twitter and online news sites.



Analysis & Insights



Analysis

Engagement

Both on social media and the companies' own websites, it seems that green brands generally have more engagement compared to their reach or overall volume than traditional brands. Even new, small companies like Pela and Ecosia are able to beat out bigger, more established competitors when it comes to engagement. This is great news for these brands, as if audiences are actively interacting with their content, then they are becoming more involved and invested in the brand. When consumers engage with brands and vice-versa, it creates an online community that can increase brand loyalty in the future. Though engagement does not directly impact sales, it does indicate that consumers are interested in a brand and puts that brand in the front of their mind when they go to make a purchase in the future. Previous studies have proven that consumers who are actively engaging with a brand online have stronger brand loyalty (Leckie et. al. 2016). As these brand are able to create online communities, they likely are able to create brand advocates to spread the word about how great their product is, which makes their marketing jobs much easier and grows those communities at the same time.

Platforms

In general, these green brands get more mentions on and referrals from smaller social media platforms rather than giants like Facebook. Reddit, Pinterest, blogs, forums, etc. are often composed of smaller communities that are passionate about specific issues, so it makes sense that brands with a cause would do well on those platforms. As being eco-friendly has also been shown to positively affect word-of-mouth among consumers (Hwang & Choi, 2017), and this aligns as well with people highlighting these brands on blogs and other platforms where they can discuss with others and give their opinions.

All of the green brands also had especially high percentages of their traffic from YouTube. Though YouTube is by no means a small platform, it does allow for great storytelling which gives the green brands the ability to showcase how their product is different from the competition. Many YouTubers also create vlogs, which is another virtual word-of-mouth option.

The green brands tended to have audiences that leaned more towards desktop devices as well. This is an interesting finding, as many companies are shifting their strategies towards mobile. Perhaps consumers for green brands want to have more ease in investigating the details of a product and the story behind it on a desktop site. Maybe consumers are more likely to use platforms like Reddit, blogs, YouTube, and Pinterest on their desktop and therefore are more likely to be referred to the websites on those devices. Perhaps other

demographics or psychographics about green consumers make them lean towards desktop devices. Or maybe there are other factors at play that influence the choice of devices which are not able to be determined in this particular study.

Demographics

The demographic results were not as different between the green brands and competitors as expected from previous studies. For the most part it appears that the products and industries themselves influence gender and age more than if a brand is eco-friendly or not. Most of the brands did have relatively young groups talking about them online according to Talkwalker, which follows previous research that Millennial and Gen Z consumers are more interested in these products, but the data did not necessarily show green audiences as younger than their competitors. This could also be influenced by who is most likely to be on digital platforms and who is most likely to be vocal on those platforms. For example, if older audiences online do look at and engage with content but never post about or share content mentioning the brand, they would not be visible in this data. Similarly, certain audiences may choose to share their opinions on private platforms which is not available through the analytics platforms used in this study. If older audiences or more females are using private Facebook groups for example, we would not be able to see that without directly asking them where they are engaging with and talking about brands.

Region

Green brands seem to have the most interest in the Northeastern United States in common, as well as some on the West coast. Many of the states with the highest interest in these green brands also are considered to be some of the most environmentally friendly states (Kiernan, 2019). We can assume that states with more environmentally friendly practices and infrastructure likely are home to a higher percentage of citizens who are concerned about environmental issues.

Sentiment

All of the green brands in this study were close to or better than their competitors when it comes to their net sentiment values. It seems that being eco-friendly definitely does not hurt sentiment levels, and in many cases helps improve them. This is in line with previous research that found green brands tend to have more positive consumer attitudes towards them.

Application

For green brands looking to market themselves:

Green brands should focus on building strong communities on smaller platforms where users can feel connected to the company and its mission. They should also focus on finding ways to tell the story of their brand and the issues they care about through a variety of media and consider focusing a lot of this effort on YouTube. The content they share online should encourage engagement and they should continue to communicate both ways with customers. It is easy to imagine these green brands with such strong online communities and brand loyalty while also increasingly harnessing the buying power of younger generations would to grow into the future while brands who do not do the same are left behind. They also may want to focus on regions or platforms for segmentation more than age or gender.

Traditional brands considering adding eco-friendly aspects to their business model:

If they are struggling with sentiment or engagement values, going green might be a smart move for more traditional companies as long as they are making real change and not just greenwashing. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, greenwashing is the practice of making your company or product seem like it is better for the environment than it really is. All of the green brands in this study make it clear in the media they share, their product descriptions, and their missions that they put the planet over their profit so it is unclear if campaigns that come from an ingenuine place would be quite as successful. Brands trying to expand into new markets, segments, or platforms may also consider greening their practices. In an ideal world, all companies would want to be stewards for the environment, but as that is not always the case, these motivations may encourage companies to consider their practices.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are some limitations on this study. Though this study is informative in gaining an idea of how green brands are engaged with online, there is still a lot more research to be done in the future.

Success Online vs. Actual Business Success

Firstly, though some of these brands are performing well on digital platforms, that does not necessarily imply sales. As mentioned in the background and previous insights section of this paper, previous research indicates that people who think of themselves as ethical or environmentally conscious may not actually be any more likely to make decisions that are ethical or environmentally friendly. As Hemmi and Crowther say, “the growth of ‘social media activism’ may be misleading as it may merely express how individuals are constructing their own identities rather than expressing strong commitments to social movement goals” (2013, p6). It makes sense that consumers may engage with green brands to make themselves feel good and construct a “green” identity for themselves.

Scope

Another limitation is the number of brands. The scope of this study was chosen to make sure there was time for an in-depth analysis of each brand’s digital health. It gives a good picture of what could be going on for green brands overall, but it is not always appropriate to generalize the experiences of a few companies to all companies. These insights, rather, show directions future research and market testing could go to improve green marketing. It would also be ideal to have a longer time period to see if the data collected is consistent with trends or if the time period was out of the ordinary for that brand.

Privacy

One final limitation is that to do this research ethically, it is not possible to add private social media posts into the analysis. In fact, Talkwalker and other platforms, to be General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant, do not have access to this content at all. If people are particularly active in ways that are not visible to others, for example private Facebook groups or Facebook shares, this would not be counted in the data (Talkwalker Inc, 2020).

“Every time you spend money, you’re casting a vote for the kind of world you want.”

-Anna Lappé

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