

Effective Social Strategy Report Lessons from the 2019 WARC Awards

WARC[^]
BY ASCENTIAL

THE
PEOPLE'S
SEAT



Contents of the full report

Themes from the report

Social media is about people, not brands	4
What this means for...	6
Judging panel	7

Chapter one:

Themes from the winning campaigns

Social can deliver impressive, long-term returns	9
Social can facilitate creative judo	13
A smart influencer strategy can drive growth	15

Chapter two: Winning case studies

The United Nations: The People's Seat	19
Child Focus: Closer Than You Think	23
Puck: Save the Cows	24
Vans: Not Just One Creator	25
Silver Winners	26
Bronze Winners	29

Chapter three: Data

Where the shortlisted case studies came from	32
Campaign objectives	33
Creative strategy	34
Lead media	35
Hard and soft metrics	36

Themes from the report

1

Social can fulfil both long- and short-term business objectives

As social matures, it is increasingly being positioned at the heart of business and is delivering impressive returns. Two brands from this year's WARC Awards – Starbucks and McDonald's – demonstrated social's ability to combine brand activity with a promotional mechanic to steer commercial results. Judge Alex Steer, Chief Product Officer at Wavemaker, writes: "It is a grown-up, hugely powerful set of media that drives real responses from real people. It should not be consigned to the playpen of proxy metrics." He continues: "As social has grown up, it's shown itself more than capable of a fair fight... and it can make real impact on brands, customers and business results."

2

Social can facilitate creative judo

Creative judo enables brands to be Davids taking on Goliaths, and social provides a good context for this strategy. As Born Social's Callum McCahon points out: "Social still brings an unrivalled ability to form a crowd, to break down barriers and smash convention." Winning case studies that embraced this strategy included Burger King in the US that leveraged an opportunity on Twitter when rival Wendy's discontinued spicy nuggets. McCahon describes this as a "a short, sharp, tactical land-grab... It owned online conversation and shifted a load of nuggets in the process."

3

A smart influencer strategy can drive growth

Despite claims that we have reached 'peak influencer', this year's social winners showed that using influencers thoughtfully within a social strategy can lead to engagement and effectiveness. As Jakub Hodbod and Charlotte Tansill from Ogilvy write: "The future of influencer marketing is about the dynamic relationship between influencers and brands, expanding their impact from amplifiers and advocates to growth-drivers."

Social media is about people, not brands

Social offers immense opportunities for participation-led campaigns, but not enough brands are playing to its strengths, writes WARC's Lucy Aitken.



**Lucy Aitken is Managing Editor,
Case Studies at WARC**

This report scrutinises entries to the Effective Social Strategy category at the 2019 WARC Awards and draws out trends and themes around the shortlisted case studies. This is to find out what makes a social campaign successful and to offer actionable insights to marketers.

Social has matured, a point made by one of the judges, Alex Steer. However, there are still too many campaigns – some of which were shortlisted – that many judges dismissed as 'let's tick the social box.' In other words, social formed part of the comms plan, but the campaign itself did not play to the strengths of the channel.

Fast-food brands use social well

Category-wise, fast-food brands tend to work well on social: judges saw KFC's [Burger Wars](#) and Burger King's [Turning Their Tweets Against Them](#) as examples of this. Non-profit initiatives also work well in an interactive environment: the [Closer Than You Think](#) initiative from Belgian charity Child Focus and the Grand Prix winner from the UN, [The People's Seat](#), were both described by one judge as "social media at its best".

But in many categories, use of social is queried

Whether or not the campaign could have been as successful without the social component is one way that judges decided to approach the judging process. JetBlue's [Get Packing](#), for instance, was widely liked by judges, but not felt to be an inherently social campaign. Similarly, Emirates NBD's [hijack of YouTube pre-rolls](#) was seen as "one-dimensional", to borrow the words of one judge.

Three themes that emerged from winning case studies

When analysing the case studies in detail, we identified three themes:

🕒 **Social can deliver impressive, long-term returns**

Social is taking its place at the heart of business and delivering impressive returns for brands. Alex Steer, Chief Product Officer at Wavemaker, [writes](#): "Social is more than capable of a fair fight and it can make real impact on brands, customers and business results."

🕒 **Social can facilitate creative judo**

Brands wanting to be Davids taking on Goliaths should look to social. As Born Social's Callum McCahon [points out](#): "Social still brings an unrivalled ability to form a crowd, to break down barriers and smash convention."

🕒 **A smart influencer strategy can drive growth**

Approaching influencer marketing as a long-term strategy, investing

Social media is about people, not brands

time in selecting the right influencer and using an influencer for co-creation are tried-and-tested approaches to using influencers on social. As Jakub Hodbod and Charlotte Tansill from Ogilvy write: “The future of influencer marketing is about the dynamic relationship between influencers and brands, expanding their impact from amplifiers and advocates to growth-drivers.”

And a special mention for the power of participation

The Grand Prix winner and a few other cases offered lessons in participation. The [Starbucks case study](#), in particular, was adept at helping build the brand and generate sales over time. One of the lessons learned from its winning paper was: “Social media is about people, not brands. If you’re going to be a part of social culture you need to find your place. Starbucks did this by creating unique and valuable assets for people to express themselves.”

It is the case studies that enabled that this kind of self-expression

that won the most recognition in these awards and that, according to jurors, have the greatest number of learnings for marketers.

The 2020 WARC Awards will launch on 22 October 2019. It will remain a free-to-enter, four-category global case study competition that is dedicated to celebrating next-generation ideas. If you’re interested in judging, please contact lucy.aitken@warc.com.



Burger King: “fast-food brands play to the strengths of social”
UN: “social media at its best”
Starbucks: “helped build the brand over time”

What this means for...

Advertisers

- ⊙ Advertisers should treat social platforms as a mature channel choice that can be put to the test of profitability. The winning case studies in this year's Effective Social Strategy category show how social is making a real impact on brands, customers and business results: 75% of the shortlisted papers cited sales as a hard metric.
- ⊙ Social offers an opportunity for brands to combine both long-term brand-building with short-term promotional mechanics, as seen in the Starbucks and McDonald's winning case studies. Think about how your brand could benefit from combining both within a social strategy.
- ⊙ Consider how your brand can leverage partnerships to engage with specific audiences, like [Heineken did with Shazam](#) in Nigeria.

Agencies

- ⊙ Consider how campaigns could feature a participatory component that involves the audience. User-generated content remains a successful element in many social campaigns: 40% of shortlisted campaigns in this year's Effective Social Strategy cited 'user-generated content, participation' as a creative strategy.
- ⊙ Match up brands with appropriate influencers that could help generate additional awareness and publicity.
- ⊙ Social and PR often go hand in hand, so the PR potential of a campaign should be planned upfront.

Media owners

- ⊙ Online video remains a key part of successful social campaigns so should be a hygiene factor in most social campaigns.
- ⊙ Innovate within specific formats to make them more specific for the brand and its particular objectives. Emirates NBD, for instance, used pre-roll ads to demonstrate the speediness of its money remittance service.

Judging panel



Christine Xu
Chair of the judges
Vice President,
Chief Marketing
Officer, McDonald's
China



Mark Carroll
Senior Creative
Strategist,
Snap Inc.



Fran Cassidy
Founder, Cassidy
Media Partnership



Thomas Gregorski
Global Vice
President
Digital Strategy
& Customer
Engagement,
Epsilon



Catherine Heath
Partner, Executive
Strategy Director,
John McNeil Studio



Jakub Hodbod
Global Head of
Strategy, Ogilvy
Social.Lab and
Chief Strategy
Officer, Ogilvy
Czech



Kim Hoeu
Head of Paid Social,
APAC, Essence



Jai Kotecha
Managing Partner
and Global WPP
Lead, Ogilvy



André van Loon
Senior Research &
Insight Director,
We Are Social
London



Hans Lopez-Vito
Chief Operating
Officer, Greater
China, BBDO
Worldwide



Callum McCahon
Strategy Director,
Born Social



Aoife Murphy
Executive Strategy
Director,
Boys + Girls



Martin Smith
Chief Strategy
Officer, Twelve and
Communis Group
& Agencies



Alex Steer
Chief Product
Officer, Wavemaker
UK



Mike Teasdale
Founder and
Planning Director,
Harvest Digital

Interested in judging Effective Social Strategy in 2020?

Please contact
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Chapter one:

Themes from the winning campaigns

1

Social can fulfil both long-and short-term business objectives

2

Social can facilitate creative judo

3

A smart influencer strategy can drive growth



Are we selling social short?



Wavemaker's Alex Steer queries why advertisers and agencies doubt social's impact, selecting three winning cases from the 2019 WARC Awards which more than prove its ability to drive growth and profit.



Alex Steer is Chief Product Officer at Wavemaker

We live in curious times when it comes to measuring the impact of social media. On the one hand, the whole world seems to be suddenly convinced that social media – intelligently planned, targeted, measured and optimised – is capable of bringing down governments, fomenting rebellion and changing the political and cultural climate of whole countries in ways unprecedented in a generation. We earnestly believe that within the vast data centres of the social media giants, every aspect of our lives is being logged and analysed with terrifying pinpoint accuracy.

Yet on the other hand, many of us in marketing seem to find it inconceivable that social media advertising is capable of selling everyday goods and services.

That difficult second decade

As social media accelerates into its difficult second decade, the rest of the world is reeling from its shuddering impact on many aspects of how we live, talk, think, share, vote and buy. Social media has eaten publishing, journalism, e-commerce,

television and much of the discourse of public life, but over here in adland many advertisers and agencies are still nervous about whether or not it makes an impact. We are wielding a flamethrower and wondering whether it can make toast.

So it's disappointingly common to see social media case studies propped up on the usual proxies and vanity metrics, like a child's bike on stabilisers. We benchmark social activity on dubious indicators such as likes, shares, hearts, swipes, clicks and engagement rates. Why do we do this, if not because of a suspicion that this might be all social media can do? Press it too hard, we seem to think, and it might fall over; while all around us whole industries are falling over as social media presses into them.

That's why I'm delighted to see in the Effective Social Strategy category of this year's WARC Awards some examples of brands insisting that social media should be held to the same standard to which all commercial communication should be held: its ability to drive growth

Are we selling social short?

and profit for the businesses that invest in it. Imagine my surprise when these case studies prove beyond reasonable doubt that social media, the shaker of nations, can also be an efficient weapon in the battle for market share among quick-service restaurants, coffee shops and confectionery.

M&M's: disciplined venture into a new world

The [M&M's case study](#) from the UK starts with the brand heading

cautiously into a new world – launching a new product variant, and therefore unable to rely on its familiar character-led creative vehicle, and under pressure to move away from dependence on broadcast television. Under these circumstances, the temptation might be to play it safe by defaulting to other reliable parts of the media mix, or to include social media but not work it too hard. M&M's approach is impressive for its commitment to being disciplined rather than safe – developing new

product-focused creative that reinforced highly recognisable brand equities; building creative assets fit for platform and fit for purpose rather than reproducing anything generic; and investing in controlled sales match-back studies that would leave the effectiveness of its social media investment with nowhere to hide. By demanding that social prove its value, M&M's put the time and effort into doing it right and saw the reward: a £3.27 short-term, in-store sales return for every £1 spent.



M&M's: "resisted the temptation to play it safe"

McDonald's: cheering up the losers and driving footfall

[McDonald's in Lebanon](#) was faced with a collapse in visits to its restaurants as the nation tuned in to the football World Cup. Rather than trying to outdo the world's largest tournament for attention, McDonald's de-averaged the problem, identifying the groups of people whose interest in the World Cup would drop fastest – those whose sides had just lost. It created an integrated social campaign focused on cheering up fans of the losing side, using social platforms' targeting capabilities to reach only those groups and bring them into restaurants for a consolation meal. By targeting specific groups and moving them to action through a shared social idea, McDonald's drove an 89% spike in in-store sales vs. the previous year.

Starbucks: making social media make business sense

Lastly, [Starbucks' paper](#) demonstrates the power of a sustained commitment to learning

Are we selling social short?



McDonald's: "drove an 89% spike in in-store sales"

about media effectiveness. Rather than focusing on a single campaign, the study looks at the highs and lows of social activity and measurement over an eight-year period. What shines through is the team's combination of belief and insistence: belief that a brand that thrives on social interactions should have a meaningful role for social media; and an insistence that this should be measurable and should

ultimately have a proven contribution to business results. Whereas many awards papers have a tendency to gloss over the rough edges, Starbucks pulls no punches, showing the changes in strategic and creative direction that failed, as well as those that succeeded, as it learned how to make social media make business sense. The result is a social strategy that pays back at scale, delivering £14.9 million of incremental profit,



Starbucks: "pays back at scale"

and contributing more than 2.5% of the brand's total revenue in 2016.

A grown-up, powerful set up of media

These case studies, with their proof of effectiveness, do not of course mean that all social media marketing is effective. Like all advertising, it can be badly planned, creatively unoriginal and strategically unsound. The point, though, is that these

cases prove once again that all social media marketing should be put to the test of profitability. It is a grown-up, hugely powerful set of media that drives real responses from real people. It should not be consigned to the playpen of proxy metrics. If it can bring down a government, it can sell a bag of sweets, get people into a shop, and pay its own way in a marketing plan. It won't always do so, and it faces stiff competition from a variety of other similarly effective channels – but as social has grown up, it's shown itself more than capable of a fair fight; and papers like these show that it can make real impact on brands, customers and business results.

Chapter two:
Winning case studies



Vans: Not Just One Creator

Influencers leveraged to reach new audiences and drive sales

GOLD AND PATH-TO-PURCHASE AWARD

Agencies: Starcom, MRY
Advertiser: Vans (VF Corporation)
Market: United States

Footwear and clothing brand Vans used influencers and social to successfully broaden its appeal among teens and young adults in the US, generating revenue and brand awareness.

“
The product was at the heart of the campaign, delivering strong results – and they executed on the insight very well.
Mark Carroll – Senior Creative Strategist, Snap Inc.

Objectives

Vans wanted to build awareness for its Customs range and drive an increase in sales and positive ROI of customised Vans on the brand’s e-commerce site.

Insight

The brand wanted to leverage underground culture to help promote its Customs range, realising that they were perfectly suited to the artistic freedom demanded by creatives, and sought growth beyond its traditional representation within action sports and music.

Strategy

Sixteen influencers were selected from a diverse range of creative pursuits – such as tattoo art, foodie photography, poetry and cosplay – and their bespoke communities were transformed into programmatic audience segments. A steady stream of content pushing followers to the Vans Customs website was released through each influencer’s Instagram account to retain attention and build momentum.

Results

\$895k
in direct revenue

22%
increase in ad awareness

[VIEW FULL CASE STUDY](#)



Takeaways

- ⦿ Look for audiences in areas where your brand isn't usually represented.
- ⦿ When working with creative influencers, try not to place too many constraints on them.

The United Nations: The People's Seat

Innovative participation-led social campaign galvanises global action

GRAND PRIX AND LIVE AWARD	Objectives		
Lead agency: Grey London Contributing agency: Facebook Advertiser: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (The United Nations) Market: Global	Insight		Takeaways
“	Strategy	Results	

Want to discover more analysis, insights and case studies on effective social strategy?
Request a demo at: warc.com/demo

[VIEW FULL CASE STUDY](#)

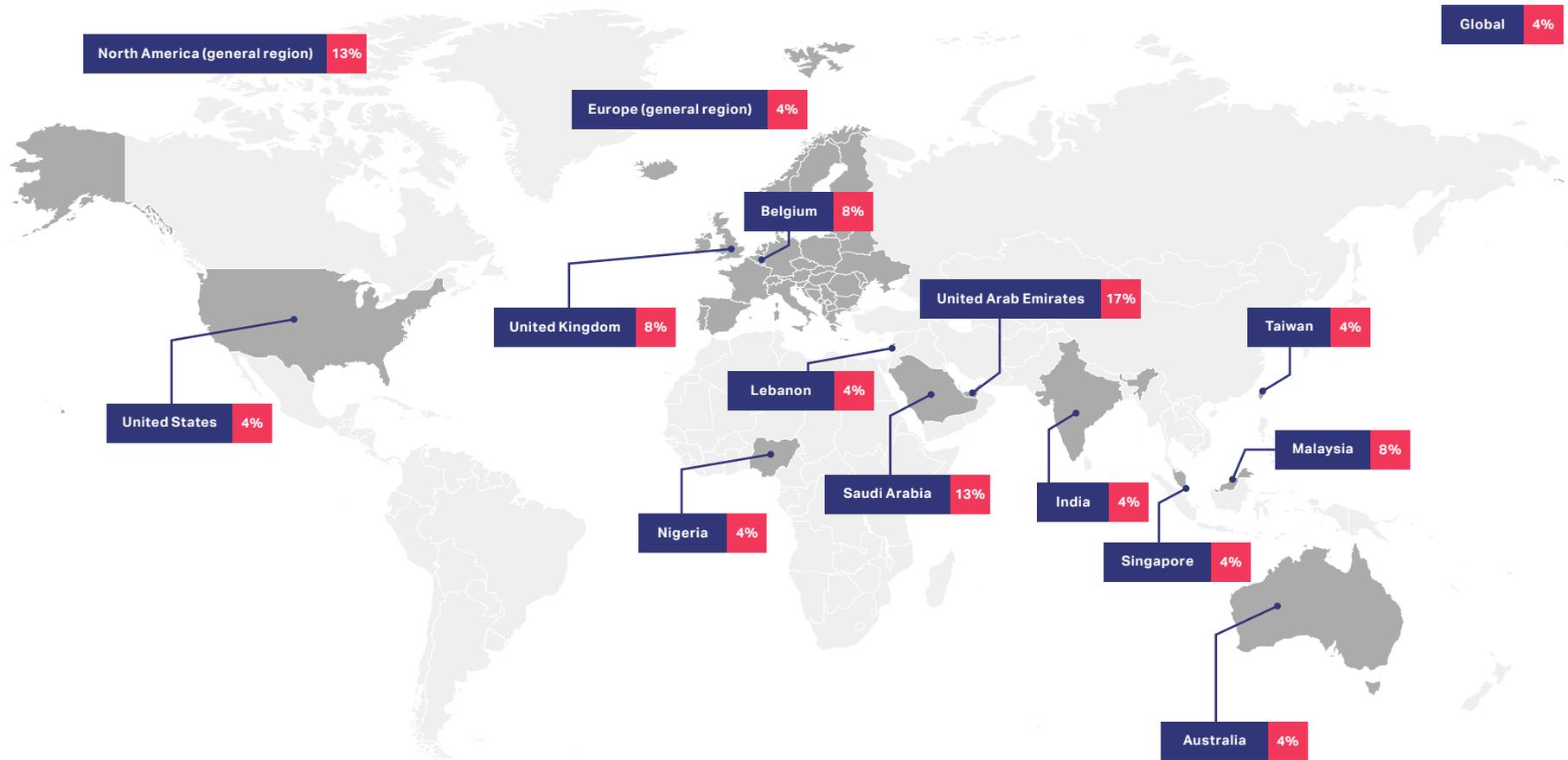
Chapter three:

Data

- ✔ **Where the shortlisted case studies came from**
- ✔ **Campaign objectives**
- ✔ **Creative strategy**
- ✔ **Media used**
- ✔ **Hard and soft metrics**

UAE contributes most to shortlist

Where the shortlisted case studies came from



More from WARC

Our Awards

WARC runs four annual case study competitions:

- 🕒 The WARC Media Awards
- 🕒 The WARC Awards
- 🕒 The WARC Prize for Asian Strategy
- 🕒 The WARC Prize for MENA Strategy

More about all of WARC's Award schemes can be found [here](#).

Case Finder

You can find all WARC case studies, including those cited in this report, by searching our unrivalled database, which is organised by campaign objective, country, industry sector, audience, media channels, budget and campaign duration. **Find a case.**

About WARC

Warc.com is an online service offering advertising best practice, evidence and insights from the world's leading brands. WARC helps clients grow their businesses by using proven approaches to maximise advertising effectiveness.

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