

WHAT'S NEXT?

UK Data

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TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATIONS AND THE RACE TO RECOVERY

What's in store for brands? Increased demand, higher expectations, and a craving for innovative simplicity.

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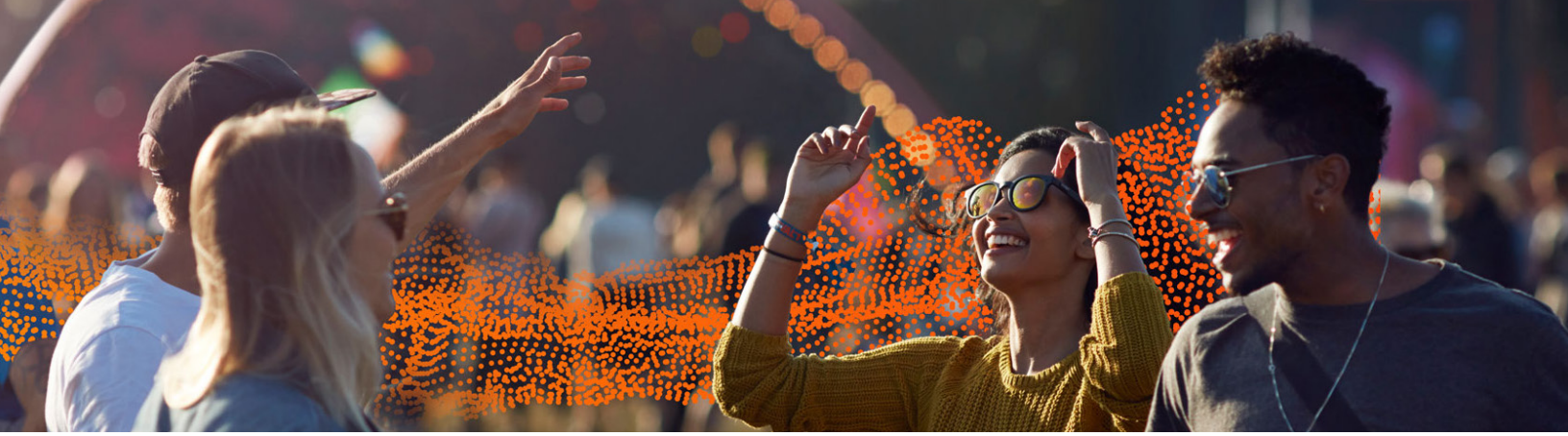
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As the UK opens up, **reliance on technology** remains stronger than ever

As the summer winds-down and governments across the UK are loosening restrictions in waves, Brits are returning to restaurants, sporting events and gatherings, and technology brands are feeling the whiplash. Tech innovation came to our rescue when we were at our most vulnerable – we worked remotely, shepherded our children through virtual learning and connected with friends and family on video calls. Now that the recovery is here, what role does technology play?

Our needs during recovery will be **dramatically different**.

WE partnered with YouGov to understand what Brits want and expect from tech-fuelled innovation in this crucial moment. What did we find? Surprisingly, **Brits don't want** to disconnect, even after a year of living virtually. Now that tech has gained their trust, **their expectations are higher than ever** and **they want digital innovation to guide them** in our new world.

4%

Just 4% are looking to disconnect.

However, this rises to 8% amongst Millennials (aged 25-34)

52%

The majority (52%) still want to use tech but just **balance their time away from it**

51%

Over half (51%) say their **expectations of technology increased** as a result of using more of it during the pandemic

72%

72% expect companies to **continue to use technology to innovate** during the recovery phase

The **recovery** mindset

The pandemic has shaped a positive relationship with tech in the UK.

Going into COVID, headlines warned of a backlash against tech companies' influence on our lives and level of access to our data. A year and a half later, the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Although Brits still have concerns over how companies are using their personal data and keeping them safe, the pandemic illustrated the importance of technology during crises.



50%

of Brits were surprised by how tech improved their lives during the pandemic in unexpected ways – despite already high expectations

68%

Over two thirds (68%) of Brits said the pandemic demonstrated how tech can help us through difficult circumstances

Brits intend to stay connected – at least for now

Though virtual meeting fatigue is real, our increased reliance on technology won't change as the country opens back up.

89% of Brits say they plan to use technology during the recovery phase as much as or more than they did during the pandemic.

Only 4% of Brits say they are “ready to disconnect.”



Expectations are higher than ever

The pandemic increased our already lofty expectations of brands. Companies must realise the pressure they're now under in the recovery phase: Tech-lead innovation helped us through our most vulnerable time – a let-down now will hurt more than ever. Brit's expectations, if not met, could launch a new and different kind of “techlash.”

51%

Over half (51%) of Brits say their **expectations of technology increased** as a result of using more of it during the pandemic

61%

expect all companies regardless of industry to **use technology to better meet their needs** after the pandemic

74%

of people in Northern Ireland **expect companies to make their lives easier** with smart tech solutions

72%

expect companies to **continue to use technology to innovate** as we move through the recovery phase

What we want from tech right now

As we leave our homes and rejoin the world, we want technology that plugs seamlessly into our lives and shapes them for the better.

Top five parts of pandemic life Brits want to keep:



More focus on **home-centred activities**



Shopping online with **in-store or carpark click and collect**



Spending **more time outside** during the workday



Working from **anywhere**



Fewer days **commuting**

Many white-collar workers enjoyed the flexibility of remote work during the pandemic but remember: The work-from-anywhere revolution isn't a possibility for everyone.

Only **23%** of Brits agree that the increase in remote work has caused them to reconsider where they live and work. However, this rises to **33%** amongst those aged 35-44 and 40% amongst Millennials (aged 25-34).

Those in London are most likely to say remote working has made them reconsider where they live and work (**28%**). Meanwhile, those in the Southwest of England are the least likely (**17%**).

After more than a year of pandemic stress, Brits want technology to help lighten their mental burden. As we recover, Brits will only entertain solutions that simplify their lives and don't add to their cognitive load. But these expectations can be hard to meet – the competition between platforms and ecosystems is heating up and forcing many smaller players to choose sides and join walled gardens, often to the frustration of their customers.

How do brands meet these evolving needs and deliver innovations that simplify our lives as we re-enter the world? According to our recent research paper "[Rethinking the Purpose and Meaning of Leadership](#)," **69%** of surveyed leaders globally believe learning from their employees, customers and communities is critical in the coming year, and that begins with listening to employees, like Microsoft did before sharing guidance on hybrid work.



CASE STUDY: MICROSOFT OFFERS GUIDANCE FOR NAVIGATING THE RETURN TO WORK

One of the biggest transitions in the recovery phase will be the re-imagining of physical office spaces. Employers must react to new expectations from employees and determine the right rhythm of how and where employees work in this new world. Towards that end, Microsoft recently published a playbook sharing some of what it has learned to date from conversations with customers, partners, and employees, including data, research, and best practices designed to help organisations navigate the evolving work norms.

Microsoft shared this information in the context of its own hybrid return-to-work strategy across multiple channels — including a [post](#) on CEO Satya Nadella's LinkedIn and a [public playbook](#) featuring a message from Chief People Officer Kathleen Hogan — to educate customers on the Microsoft tools available to them. The announcement also outlined how the company's employee experience cloud, Microsoft Viva, and Return to Workplace solution, can benefit companies evolving their return-to-work strategies. It's a great example of a forward-looking narrative that will help the company's customers navigate the recovery phase.

Technology is at the heart of the recovery – and that’s an opportunity

How important is technology to the UK’s pandemic recovery? Very. This may be the most important historical moment for tech since Internet usage exploded in the early 2000s.

In fact, **43%** of Brits say technology is the most important tool we have as we navigate a reimagined world.



Brands have a tremendous opportunity to take the lead during the recovery by listening to what their audience wants and using technology to deliver it.

Nearly half (48%) of Brits want to hear **how companies are making their lives better in a reimagined world.**

Nearly a third (29%) of Brits see **for-profit organisations likely to lead major societal change.** That’s more than charities or governments.

As we leave our homes and rejoin the world, we want **technology that plugs seamlessly into our lives** and shapes them for the better.

70% of Brits want innovation that eases their mental stress, simplifies their lives and helps them adjust to our ever-changing world.

They want their technology to make their lives easier and better, but the relationship with tech is still complicated.

54% say the pandemic has made them worried about privacy and cybercrime.

62% think technology companies need to be more regulated by government

The pandemic has swung opinion about technology away from techlash and questioning the industry’s ethics back to viewing technology as an indispensable part of daily life. Harnessing this goodwill is a huge opportunity for every brand with a technology story to tell.

Guiding principles for communicating in the race to recovery

01

Help guide the way forward.

Your stakeholders are looking for help navigating a post-pandemic world. Don't tell them what you did during the pandemic, let them know how you are leading the way through recovery now.

02

Find the intersections between your story and what the world needs.

They won't be the same as they were during the pandemic. Ongoing, thoughtful listening to your audiences is key to understanding where your story is most needed now.

03

Resist the urge to return to pre-pandemic communication strategies.

The world has changed. Brits appreciated the way companies used technology to help them through the pandemic. Lean into that emotional connection and demonstrate how your brand is helping through the recovery phase.

04

Remember that the pendulum can (and will) swing back.

Innovating and addressing fears around privacy and security will be a balancing act. This must be part of the narrative for any brand using technology to deliver products and services.

05

Plan for the next phase.

The euphoria of easing COVID restrictions won't last forever. Create an advance team to reimagine future communications motions.

WE | Brands in ***Motion***

The world,
your brand
and your stories
are in motion.

WE helps you find
your Momentum.

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