



*The Third  
Edition of*

# The Changing Face Of Executive Reputation

October 2019



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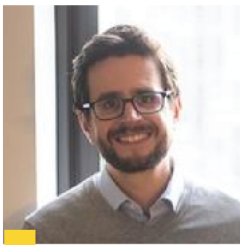
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## Foreward

When we started conducting the Qnary Executive Reputation Research Study Whitepapers three years ago the percentages of professionals that actively managed their online reputations were low. What an incredible contrast to this year's Qnary study which sees higher awareness and action by executives to manage and build a robust digital reputation. The age of talent branding is upon us and companies that are arming their executives and employees to tell parts of the enterprise story resonates with all company stakeholders.

The Qnary team was fortunate, once again, to collaborate on this year's study with the leadership of the BE Center for Global Communications (a shared initiative between Emerson College in Boston and The Blanquerna School of Communications in Barcelona). Last year's collaborative study received the International Public Relations Association's (IPRA) Gold Paper certification and became the new standard for executive reputation research.

This year's edition highlights how far we have come with the awareness, activation, and sophistication of this field and points to where we are headed. Perhaps more than ever our founding mantra rings true. You have a digital reputation and that reputation matters for the success of your business and your career.

# Introduction

The data is in: an active social media presence is vital for business executives. This year's third annual survey by Qnary focused on how and why business executives from various industries and company sizes use social media. Our analysis, which details our findings, confirms a strategic omnichannel social media approach is integral to success. Furthermore, it proves that in addition to establishing and demonstrating industry leadership, personal profiles of business executives are also elemental to companies' sales and overall communications strategy. Within the report we propose ways for executives to use social media in even more effective ways to build successful personal brands and thriving business enterprises.

1. In order to capture the full picture and potential of business executive social media activity, this report is structured around **3 Key Insights**. These Insights explain the crucial role social media—and certain sites—play in business connectivity and industry leadership in today's world. We contextualize this data within the information gleaned from Qnary's 2018 and 2017 reports, titled "The Changing Face of Executive Reputation" and the "Professional Digital Presence Study" respectively. Throughout the presentation of these insights, this year's report articulates the most up-to-date way for senior management to take advantage of each of these trends to drive results and create new business opportunities.

# Survey Respondents Demographic

What description/level best fits your job title?



- Owner/Founder
- C-Suite
- VP/EVP/SVP
- Director
- Manager
- Other

This year's survey draws from a very high-quality pool. Our respondents include over 50% C-suite professionals, 12% Directors, 11% Managers, and 10% Senior Executives/Executive Vice Presidents/Vice Presidents. The industries that drive modern business are strongly represented and well-balanced: 18% come from marketing/communications, 14% from technology, 13% from finance, and 12% from consulting.

## 3 Key Insights at a Glance

- 1 | The need for an active and optimized professional social media presence to illustrate thought leadership has moved from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have for executives in 2019.
- 2 | An omnichannel social media approach is key for establishing a competitive edge and industry leadership.
- 3 | Employee and leaders' social media practices can impact the public face of their organization and when used properly can achieve business success. This sets the stage for the rise of "Talent Branding" as a key business marketing tool.

# Being an Industry Thought Leader Through Social Media Has Moved from Nice-to-Have to Need-to-Have

## Why do you follow business executives on social media?



- 88%: to stay up to date on industry news
- 77%: to network
- 65%: to understand their perspective
- 62%: to stay competitive in the industry
- 49%: to further my career

More than  
**80%**

of executives follow industry thought leaders on social media platforms.

It doesn't seem possible, but the world is even more connected and fast-paced than it was last year. Prominent among these changes are the global business community, and the increasingly interconnected landscape in which it exists. In order to thrive in this climate, business executives must cultivate a prominent yet authentic social media brand.

The need for this is apparent in this year's survey results where over 60% of professionals actively use LinkedIn to post professional content, followed by Twitter with nearly 45% of professionals using the platform to share professional content.

What are professionals looking for when they follow other business leaders? To network and stay competitive within their industry. These findings suggest ways professionals can continue to build their own thought leadership through social media.

## Thought Leadership Is Created—Not Only Showcased—Through Social Media

Our survey results showcase that to become an industry thought leader, one must share content that reveals a unique viewpoint, inspires trust, and relates to an audience. An executive should post content that reflects their and their company's values in relatable language for their intended audience.

Establishing this presence will expand one's network beyond former and current colleagues, and into a larger industry and business network. Our 2018 report explains in detail why people are more likely to follow a professional who takes a stance, demonstrates authenticity, and advocates for employees. This year we build on those discoveries by pinpointing exactly where and how executives can cultivate this reputation.

## Establishing Leadership Through a Personal Brand

The role of social media has expanded drastically for business professionals. First, social media sites were only networking or social platforms. They evolved from this into customizable news aggregators that people used to stay up to date on specific topics or industries. These two purposes have truly blended, as we see people looking to business executives to stay up to date on industry news.

As close to 90% of people surveyed report that they follow leaders in their field in order to stay up to date on industry news and more than 75% of people also say that they follow these same people in order to network, demonstrates how important it is for people at the top of their fields, or looking to establish themselves as a leader in their industry, to maintain a strong and well-crafted social media presence. Social has become an industry news aggregate—and individual accounts are at the center of this trend. One's importance in a field can be solidified through social media. Digital engagement is also paramount here, as people want to network with perceived industry leaders. This means participating in dialogue, interacting with other people's posts, and communicating transparently.

This is how leadership is being “redefined in a connected world” (Brunswick Group, 2019). Offering opinions, insights, and comments on industry happenings through updates and posts will both grow one's following and simultaneously establish one as a leader in their field. Nearly 65% of our sample affirm that they want to understand the perspective of the business executives they follow. It is not enough to simply retweet news or articles, but one must add their personal message in order to communicate most effectively with a following. The most important people in any business sector are creating a following and constantly communicating with that base.

It is no longer enough to be successful in business, or even to hold a C-suite position. Today, in addition to being successful in one's career, one must also demonstrate leadership in opinions and take a stand on critical issues to be considered a leader. Business people must establish personal brands by sharing personalized and engaging content on a variety of social media platforms, most importantly LinkedIn and Twitter.

Only  
**7%** of our  
survey participants  
stated that they  
do *not* follow  
business executives  
on social media.



# An omnichannel social media approach is key to establishing a competitive edge and industry leadership

## Social media platforms can complement each other

The results of our study show that employing an omnichannel social media approach allows more opportunities. Based on the platform usage of our survey respondents, currently LinkedIn and Twitter are the most important for crafting a successful executive presence online. Discovering just how much more executives value these platforms over others is new information. These two platforms allow for the greatest ability to showcase thought leadership, connect with coworkers and a broader network, and make an impact on current and potential employees. The most successful executives leverage both of these sites to reach their audience.

**55%**

of business executives use LinkedIn at least once a week.

## The LinkedIn Imperative

LinkedIn is the most significantly utilized platform by professionals. More than half of our respondents log in to or post on LinkedIn one or more times a week. Simply put, there is nothing that surpasses LinkedIn for professional use.

Over 80% of professionals follow other business professionals on LinkedIn. It is also popular to post professional content on LinkedIn and engage in employee advocacy, but less common. This means that LinkedIn is an ample place for executives, vice presidents, and C-suite members to be heard. Professionals in multiple industries look to hear new perspectives and engage with compelling content. Therefore, this is the most important place to communicate originality in leadership and build a professional audience.

Company leaders and executives need to contribute time and energy on LinkedIn. This is where they and their companies can be most visible in terms of their values, opinions, and status in an industry. This is also the place for forging new professional connections.

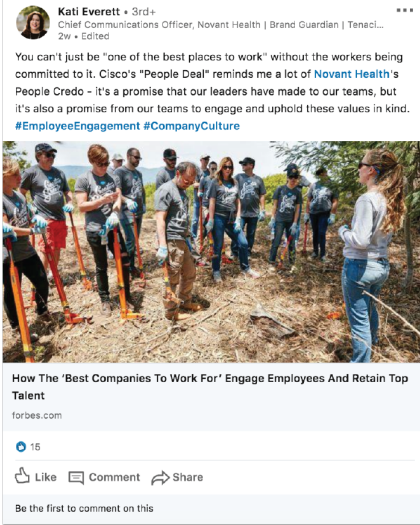
Content on LinkedIn needs to establish one’s opinions in an approachable, engaging way. Posts should occur a few times a week, and offer methods to further the conversation or to connect. As outlined in Key Insight #1, your content should include relevant, up-to-date articles with a personalized opinion. The idea is not to present only the facts, but to recast them from your individual standpoint of authority.

## The LinkedIn Imperative

LinkedIn dominance cannot be overstated: only a minuscule number of people (4%) do not use this business platform. Yet there is also a merging of professional and personal social media use in the modern, connected world. The only sites that surpass LinkedIn’s popularity—and very slightly—are Facebook (59%) and Instagram (58%). However, that percentage for Facebook and Instagram is for personal use only. In fact, 0% of respondents use Facebook only for professional purposes.

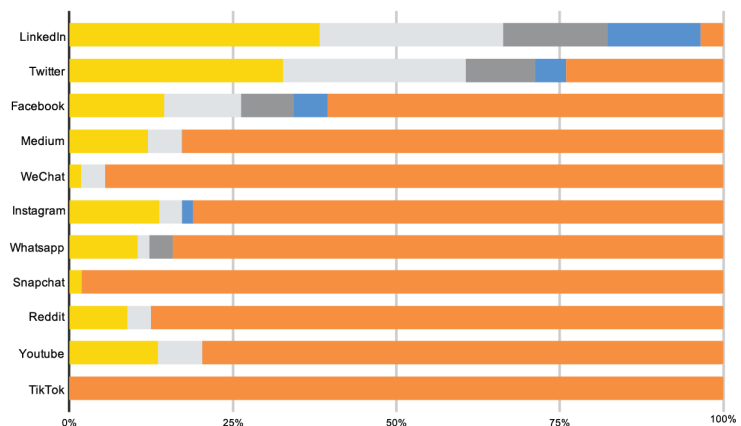
While important as a social media platform, Facebook’s main purpose is as a personal communication site. There is not nearly as much overlap of professional communication as with Twitter. Nearly 60% of executives use Facebook for personal purposes only, but about 20% use it for both personal and professional use. A Facebook communication strategy for business professionals should complement that of LinkedIn and Twitter, but does not require as much investment.

The business opportunity here reflects exactly the hyperconnected and social landscape we live in today. Those who communicate relevant content with the greatest frequency on these platforms are those who will capture the largest professional audience.



### Thinking now about which social media platforms you use professionally, how do you typically use the platform?

- I follow other business professionals on this platform
- I post professional content on this platform
- I use it for employee advocacy
- I use it for sales leads
- I don't follow business executives on this platform



Which social media platforms do you use to research or review the background of other colleagues, executives or industry thought leaders?



¾ of professionals believe an executive's social media presence can help their organization's sales growth.

## LinkedIn Surpasses Google As Primary Search Site to Research or Review Colleagues, Executives, or Industry Thought Leaders

92% of executives use LinkedIn to “research or review the background of other professionals colleagues, executives or industry thought leaders, whereas only 52% use Google for the same function. This shows the importance of a current and optimized LinkedIn profile, as it is the top search site professionals are researching and reviewing other professionals online.

## LinkedIn Leads to Sales

Your personal presence on social media speaks for your professional status, and often even for your company. Therefore, what one posts on LinkedIn can directly impact a company's bottom line. Not to be feared, this is actually a sales opportunity.

More than 30% of respondents look to LinkedIn as a potential site for sales leads. This is not surprising as new media channels continue to transform the business world and its practices. Today, an Executive Vice President may share a Forbes article on LinkedIn that summarizes a pain point she is encountering in her business. She may be followed by a different company's VP who happens to be building a product designed to solve that very problem. The product VP likes and comments on the EVP's share, to which the EVP sends a private reply message. This sparks a one-on-one conversation, which leads to a phone call and eventually a \$75,000 contract. In the past both of these professionals might have had to travel to a conference to meet and exchange this information. Now, they benefit each other by leveraging the web. This is how LinkedIn has evolved into a critical tool for business success.

## The Strategic Use of Twitter

More than half of those surveyed follow professional accounts on Twitter.

Our study shows that executive use of Twitter is almost as profound as that of LinkedIn. The majority of respondents use Twitter most frequently to follow professionals. This creates an unparalleled opportunity for establishing leadership through communication as there are open ears available virtually everywhere and anytime.

Twitter, with its 280-character posts is organized mostly by time (there is an option to see posts in pure chronological order). Its algorithm prioritizes the most recent Tweets from accounts you interact with or due to influence, but nothing beyond a couple of days will appear at the top of your news feed. Twitter is the place to demonstrate your wit, relevance, or sophisticated views on a topic. Due to post length restrictions, and the fact that it is a platform not only reserved for professionals, it can feel more crowded and less focused than LinkedIn. Yet it still remains a vital channel for the professional community, and its posts are often slightly more up to date than LinkedIn.



The number of participants who use Twitter at least once a week for either professional and personal use or just personal use is tied at 29%. This number confirms the importance of Twitter for professional use. Because professional communication is occurring in the same environment as personal communication, business leaders can display their authentic personality in a way that benefits a company or brand. The personal and professional merge when it comes to real-time, fast moving communication platforms. This is a golden opportunity for businesses to assert their values through everyday communication.

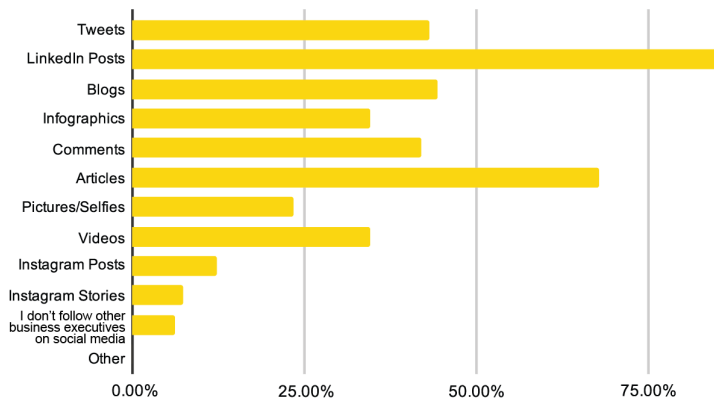
## Not All Content Is Created Equal

17 out of 20 professionals closely follow the posts of business executives on LinkedIn.

Our survey results confirm the crucial role of LinkedIn for business leaders in today's connected world. Sharing content on LinkedIn is the best way to receive engagement. However, you must maintain an active presence, and not simply just have a profile on LinkedIn. An effective social media strategy will include sharing articles, adding insight to topics related to your industry, and contributing meaningful news. This is the way to build a loyal audience.

85% of our respondents view LinkedIn posts from industry leaders they follow, followed by articles (68%) and blogs (44%). Even writing on other platforms such as Medium or being published on industry related sources is not as likely to reach your audience as maintaining an active social media brand on LinkedIn. In addition to being a leader in your field, you must utilize social media to communicate with the audience you seek to build.

**What kind of content do you view from business executives that you follow?**



Twitter is also an important platform for interacting with one's industry. 43% of respondents follow business executives' Tweets. Our numbers prove that Twitter and LinkedIn are the most significant social media platforms for business executives today. Instagram does not really make a dent here, as less than 15% of people view business executives' Instagram posts or stories. LinkedIn and Twitter offer unparalleled opportunity to both create and communicate leadership in any given field.

**“At present,  
social media is  
the most important  
employer branding  
channel for the  
organizations.”**

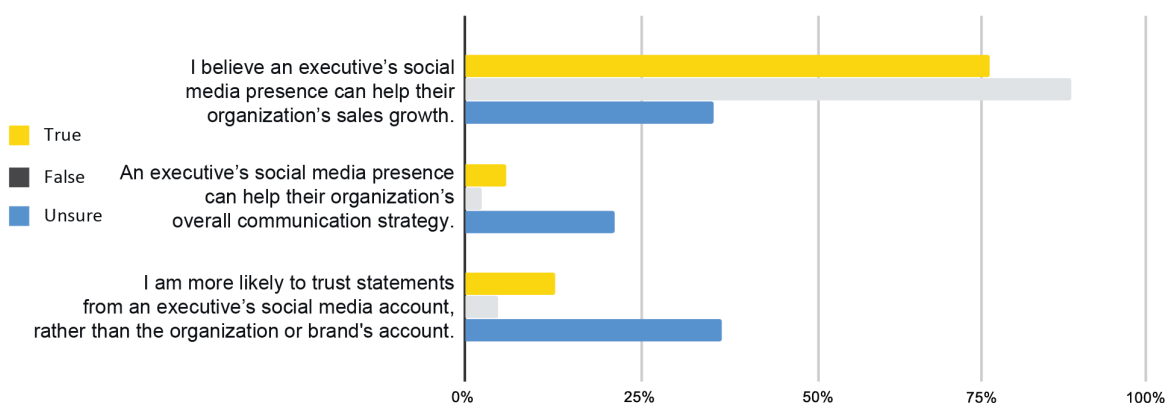
**Jodi Ordioni, Business2Community,  
5 Employer Branding Trends to Watch Out in 2020)**

# The Rise of Talent Branding - Employee and Executive Social Media Is Bound to Your Organization's Success

## Employee Social Media Communicates Your Organization's Value

An executive's social media presence extends far beyond establishing industry leadership, and actually can impact a whole organization or company. Due to its personal nature and inherent opportunity for transparency, an employee's social media communicates the values of the company they work for. Whether they know it or not, employee posts and Tweets speak for an organization. In fact, talent attraction and retention are directly impacted by employee social media. Employer branding is an important concept that is shaping the future business landscape.

This is where talent branding comes in, which is the: "highly social, totally public version of an employer brand that incorporates talent thinks, feels, and shares about your company as a place to work." (LinkedIn, Employer Branding Playbook). In the coming decade, we will see more companies devote resources to researching employee communication on social media. This will help organizations understand and then target the messaging being communicated about their company through their employees' social media accounts. This public communication will greatly impact each company's future talent pool, especially as the younger generations who grew up with social media become a dominant workforce demographic.



**56%** of executives believe it is likely to definite that an active professional presence on social media motivates or inspires their team and colleagues.

The potential effects of social media for an organization are well understood by executives. A strong majority of our respondents are confident that executive presence on social media directly impacts their organization's communication strategies. A staggering 93% state that the social media of the executive leadership team improves their company communication strategy. This group is also confident in the revenue opportunity of employee social media, as four in five believe that sales can be bolstered through executive's social media. Talent branding encourages companies to take advantage of executives who are active on social media, especially considering that most are confident that their social media presence can directly benefit the company on multiple levels.

The next five to ten years will see changes in employer branding. Communication strategies for this part of a business, of which social media is a core component, will be aimed at creating the most authentic and engaging brand. This includes Tweets, LinkedIn posts, and written articles or blogs that comment on the most up to date news in any given industry with originality and a unique perspective. Grabbing the attention of high-quality professionals will become more common through this sort of social media presence, not only from the company but also from its senior executives. A well-crafted social media brand for business professionals will pay dividends well into a company's future.

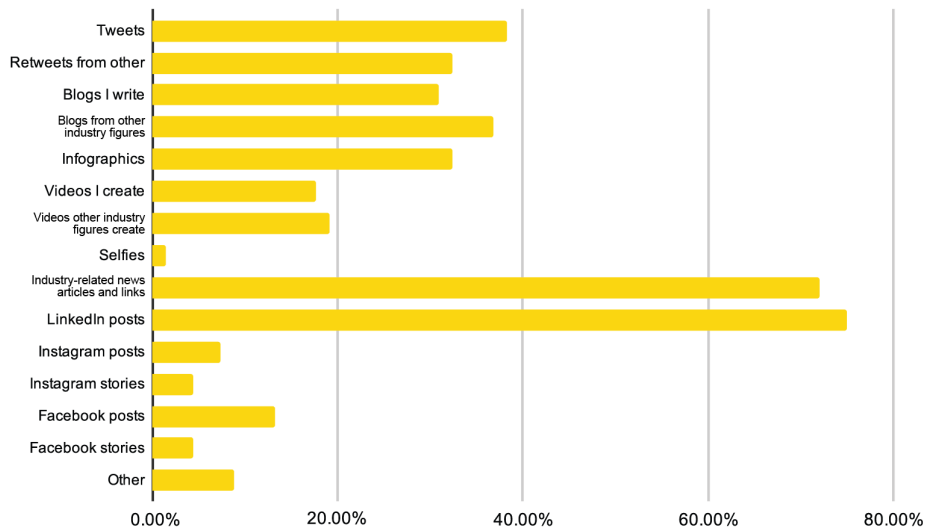
## Optimize Your Brand in Multiple Ways with Social Sharing

Most business professionals are already using social media for purposes that will benefit their companies and their careers. 69% use it to network, 66% to build their industry reputation, and 56% to inspire and motivate their team. Our 2017 whitepaper, the Professional Digital Presence Study, demonstrated the importance of an active social media presence for one's own career and for one's company. As predicted, this multi-purpose use has only grown.

Professionals are aware of the importance of maintaining an active presence on LinkedIn. The largest number of respondents share LinkedIn posts, followed closely by those who use LinkedIn to share industry-related news articles and links. The next most common category of social sharing is Tweets, followed by industry Retweets.



**What types of professional content do you share on social media?**



As we discussed in Key Insight #1, most people follow executives to stay abreast of industry news. The undisputed popularity of LinkedIn is where this activity happens. Even if people write a blog article themselves, they are almost twice as likely to post on LinkedIn as they are to share their own written content. They are even more likely to Tweet than they are to share their own work. It is not enough to write about your industry or expertise, but you must also frequently be sharing articles, stories, and ideas on social media platforms in order to present a commanding online presence.

LinkedIn’s dominance in the professional community not only applies for the sharing aspect of social media. This site is also the go-to for research into the background of other professional colleagues, executives, or industry thought leaders. Almost every single executive (93%) relies on LinkedIn to provide background information, whereas a traditional Google search is only used by 51%. You simply must have LinkedIn to be discovered through a professional network. Maintaining an up-to-date and informative profile on LinkedIn is more important than trying to improve the quality or quantity of one’s Google search results. Here again we see the same popularity order of social media sites, with Twitter (31%) behind LinkedIn, Facebook just making an appearance (22%), YouTube with marginal representation (13%), and Instagram a distant last (7%).

**69%** of professionals have not received social media training from their company.

These numbers, which echo Key Insight #2, affirm our 2017 and 2018 reports in proving the centrality of LinkedIn and Twitter to online business reputation management. Although Snapchat is extremely popular with younger generations, and Instagram and Facebook are common for those age groups and social purposes as well, these platforms' importance for business use pales in comparison to LinkedIn and Twitter. The business world appreciates the professional focus of LinkedIn, and the loyalty to this platform only has and will continue to grow. Twitter's emphasis on written content and the most up-to-date information registers with the professional community as well. And again, it is not enough to simply have profiles on these channels. You must craft an authentic, cohesive, and relevant personal brand in order to be an industry leader.

## Organizations Must Keep Expanding This Potential

Organizations expect executives to serve as active ambassadors for companies on social media. However, more than three out of five executives have not received adequate guidance on how to use these tools from the companies they work for. This is a major missed opportunity. Employees need to know how to effectively represent their company online, forge new connections related to their field, and build a reputation as an industry leader. If this is an unlikely series of events for companies, executives still need to maintain a superlative social media presence to be seen as a leader in their field. In fact, nearly half (49%) of executives feel that sharing news related to or advocating for their company on social media makes them feel more engaged with the company.

Over 60% of executives are expected by their organizations to share company news on social media. This is a logical expectation as social media activity on behalf of executives is linked to greater employee retention, quality of new hires, and internal employee loyalty to a company. However, not every business professional is a trained public communicator, so they may need external assistance in crafting this quality brand.

# Conclusion: Social Media's Dominance Will Only Increase

Seven out of ten executives believe that employees should be encouraged to act as advocates for their company.

In the past three years, Qnary's studies have revealed that the importance of social media for professional purposes continues to grow from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have. In addition to providing a platform to share and view news, social media offers an unprecedented avenue to create a publicly-facing profile. You must communicate with a broader audience in an authentic and engaging way. Frequent use of social media, and a diversified approach to platforms that prioritizes LinkedIn and Twitter, promotes your expertise in your field. Furthermore, social media offers the most direct and popular tools for you to promote your company. In fact, the future success of companies depends upon their talent's use of these platforms.

There is a clear business imperative for individuals and companies to develop a clear social media strategy related to the organizations and fields they are in. The successful companies and professionals of the future will leverage social media to work for them, helping them to elevate their careers and increase their sales. The only question is, are you doing enough?

## Research Methodology

The research was carried out online by Qnary. All surveys were conducted between August 7, 2019 and September 5, 2019. The sample comprised of people aged 18-65 years old.

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