Think with Google

2021 YEAR IN SEARCH

Look back to move
your marketing forward

Malaysia

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FOREWORD

This year, we accepted that the world as we knew it had been altered. We adapted to the idea of constant flux and recurring disruptions. We began taking slow, steady steps toward moving on and healing.

And in a sea of ceaseless changes, Malaysians kept searching. Every day, Malaysians turn to the search bar to satisfy their curiosities and to deepen their knowledge. Collectively, these searches paint a picture that gives us unique insight into what people really care about.

Understanding consumers is the foundation of every marketer's role. But how do you begin making sense of the billions of searches that happen every year? Our Year in Search report uses search data to identify the top five consumer trends in Malaysia that will help guide your marketing strategy into the next year.

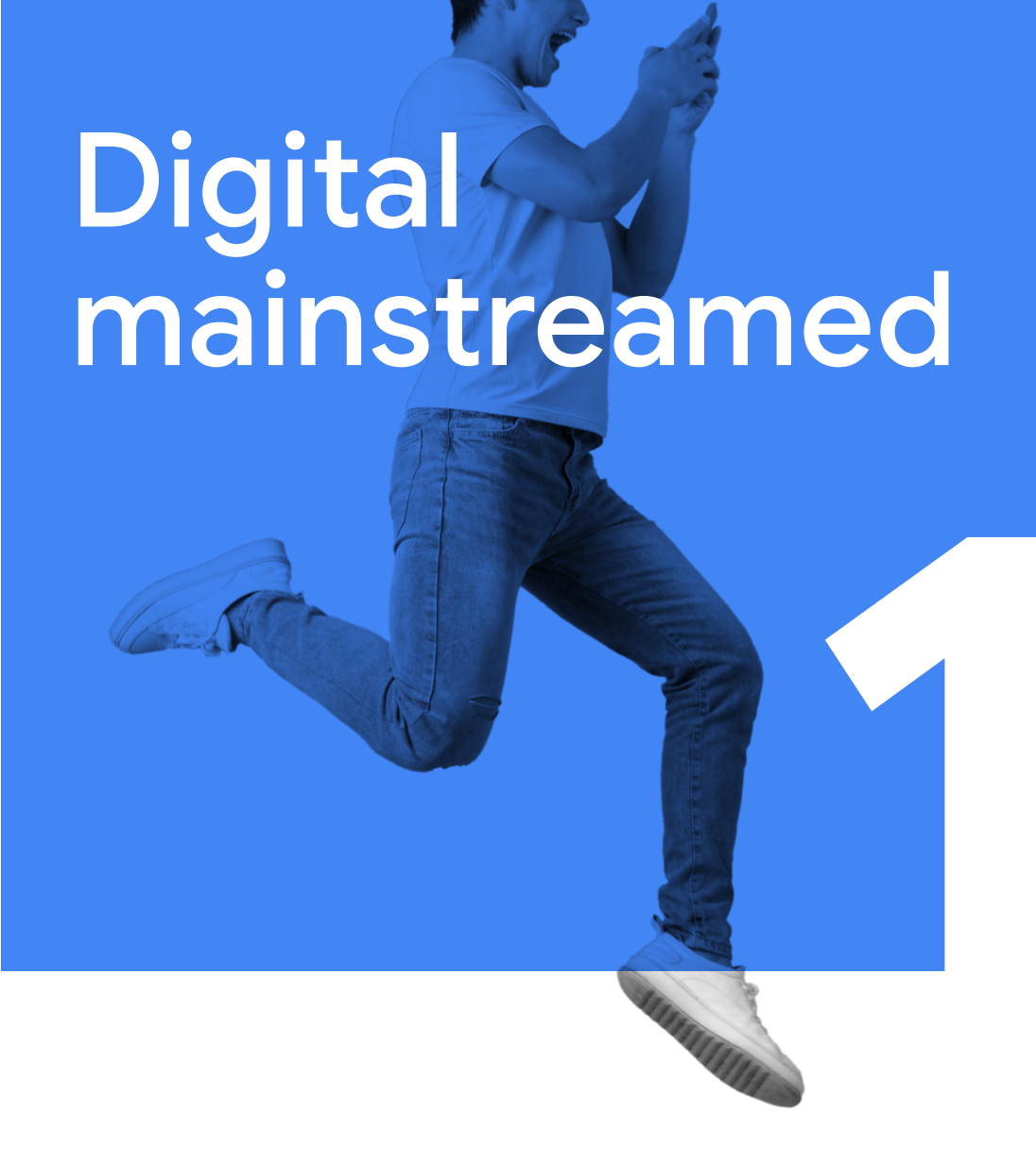
In 2021, digital became mainstream, helping people bridge physical distances. As the ripple effects of the pandemic continue to compound challenges across the world, everything we once knew about our customers and their behaviors must be reexamined. From newfound priorities to increasing expectations of brand accountability, this new consumer climate is uncharted territory.

So, let's learn from 2021 — because we need to look back in order to move forward.

From marketers to marketers.

From us to you.

Raja Narula
Ads Marketing Lead
(SG, MY), Google



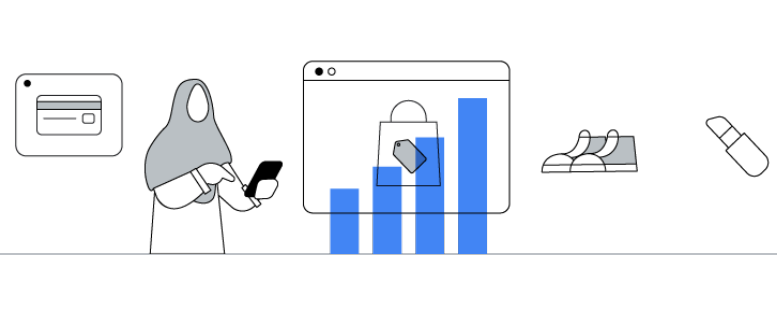
Digital mainstreamed

If 2020 saw millions of consumers migrate online, 2021 showed the staying power of digital. From shopping to services, new users who may have begun their online journeys due to necessity are now proactively deepening their usage. Speed, convenience, and price are just a few of the reasons more consumers are now choosing digital-first lifestyles.

In 2021, Malaysia's digital migration continues with people going online to access services that were disrupted by the Movement Control Order. From the start of the pandemic in 2020, up to the first half of 2021, more than 3 million people in Malaysia became new digital consumers. And rising searches in 2021 paint a picture of how the many newcomers have not only dipped their toes into the online world but also taken the plunge to integrate digital into their lifestyles. Of the new Malaysian users that come online in 2020, 94% are still using digital services in 2021, and 98% intend to continue this trend of digital adoption.

Digital consumption is becoming more permanently ingrained as a way of life. In 2021, more than 65% of consumers in Malaysia bought the majority of items they needed online instead of going in-store. Benefits like time and cost savings, flexible payment options, diversity of product offerings, and delivery services are motivating shoppers to choose digital-first experiences.

The rise in online users and change in consumer behaviors meant that brands had to adapt and digitalize at an astounding scale and pace. This is a watershed moment to rethink the agility of your business model to be readier to respond to future changes that may lie ahead, while still keeping the customer at the center of what you do.



SEARCHES

New users and businesses online

As new users come online, businesses are evolving their digital strategies to meet them there. Growing searches across APAC show businesses seeking to understand more about digital transformation strategies and online inventory management, while new online shoppers are looking to be rewarded for their brand choices.

Search interest related to new user voucher grew by up to 105% in Malaysia, and this includes examples such as foodpanda new user voucher

+105%

Searches by new users looking to bank online has grown by 35%, including search interests in open bank account online

+35%

Malaysians are researching ways to get their products online, with search interest in seller center growing by up to 65%.

+65%

+210%

Search interests related to mysejahtera qr , the Malaysian Government's contact tracing service using QR codes, grew by up to 210%, and this included search interests in mysejahtera qr code generator and **cara buat qr code mysejahtera untuk rumah** (how to make mysejahtera qr code for home). The growth points to how businesses and consumers alike are embracing digital technology to help them stay safe dring the pandemic.

Online-first shopping experiences

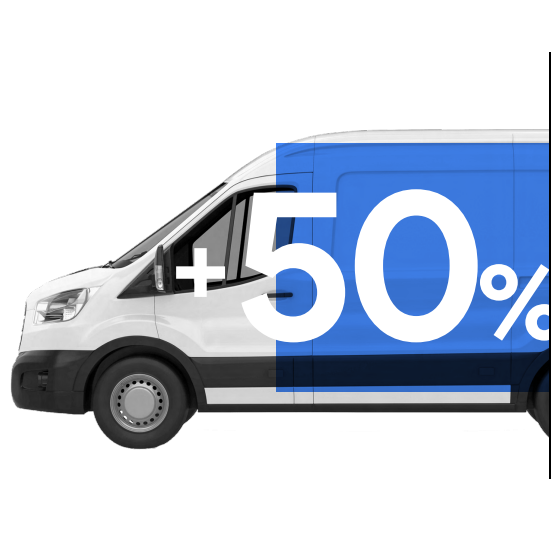
Today, almost half of Malaysian consumers surveyed have adopted online shopping as their primary pruchasing channel. Rising searches show how shoppers are using digital channels as a helpful tool for decision-making, and are reluctant to endure downsides like delivery waiting times and costs.[1]

+15%

With Malaysians continuing to work from home in 2021 and needing to buy office equipment as a result, search interest in best keyboard rose by 15% as they turned to online touchpoints during their research and purchase journey.

+4000%

Malaysian shoppers are looking for free and reliable delivery, with over 4000% growth in search interest in best express tracking

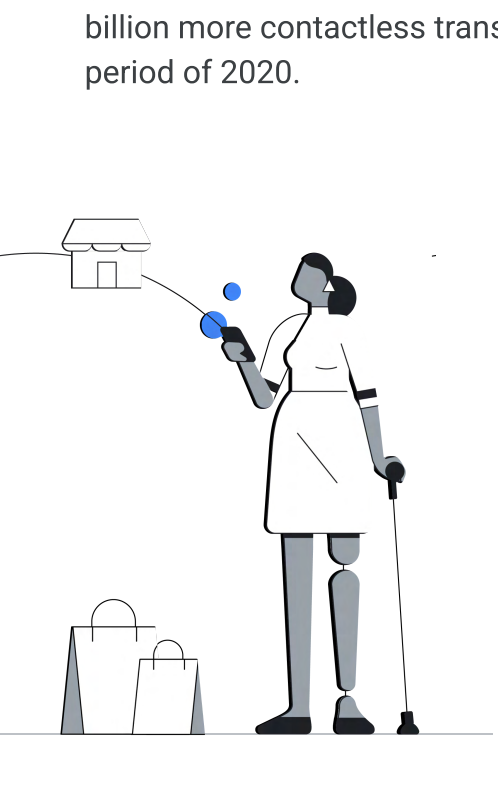


+50%

Search interest in same day delivery in Malaysia has grown by up to 50%, as consumers seek to replicate the instant gratification of in-store shopping that they are used to.

Digital in our day-to-day

People are expanding the use cases for apps and technology in their day-to-day lives, as well as experimenting with new digital services like contactless payments. While digital wallets may have started out as a way to pay safely during the pandemic, their ease and convenience are converting consumers for good. In the first quarter of 2021 alone, Mastercard saw one billion more contactless transactions as compared to the same period of 2020.

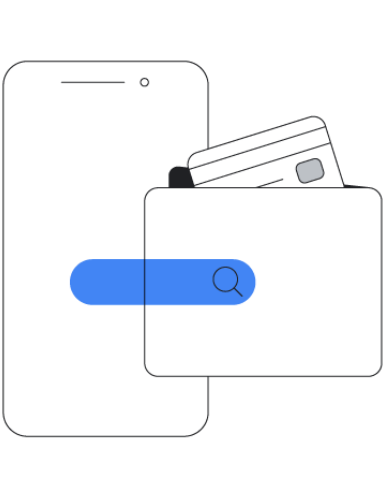


+100%

In Malaysia, search interest in shopee pay has grown by up to 100% as consumers embrace new ways of paying for e-commerce shopping.

+145%

Search interest in e-wallet has grown by up to 145%.



+800%

We see more than 800% growth in searches for online appointments with government departments and agencies, indicating a shift from an in-person to screen-first reality.

Preference for digital formats

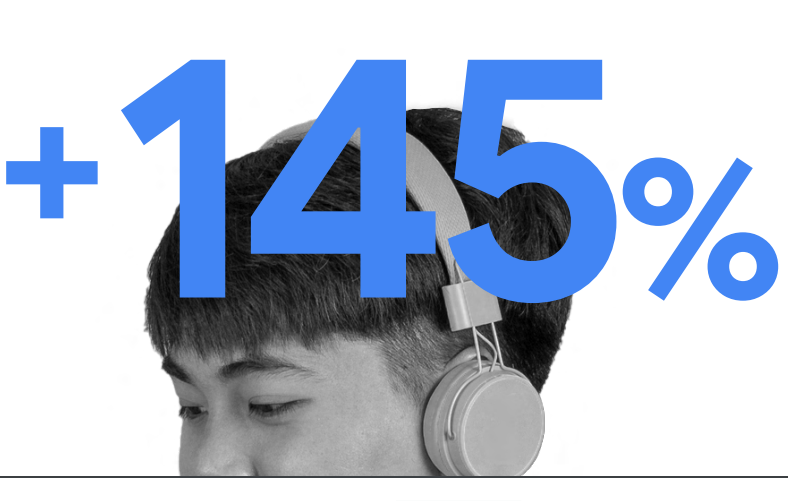
Searches for digital formats continue to gain momentum as Malaysian consumers entertain themselves online. Streaming on connected TV has taken off, live commerce is expanding its reach, and even when people take a break from the screen, they're opting for content like podcasts and audiobooks which they can enjoy on-the-go.

YouTube search interest in streaming increased by up to 20% in Malaysia.

+20%

+35%

Search interest in virtual grew 35% as consumers and businesses tap virtual events to elevate and personalize the experience of online engagements.



+145%

YouTube search interest in podcasts grew by more than 145% on average across India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

From COVID-proof to future-proof

While COVID-19 created an urgency for more people and businesses to meet online, searches reveal a rise in digital-preferred behavior. At first, many brands responded to the initial rush online by finding flexibility in existing marketing strategies to solve for pandemic-related challenges. Now, the fast evolving online landscape calls for a more agile business model that is not only COVID-proof, but future-proof as well.

McKinsey

> "What many leaders feared, and the pandemic confirms, is that their companies were organized for …standardization and predictability that's [now] being overwritten by four big trends: a combination of heightened connectivity, lower transaction costs, unprecedented automation, and shifting demographics."

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1 Digital is where the masses are: From a complementary to elementary strategy

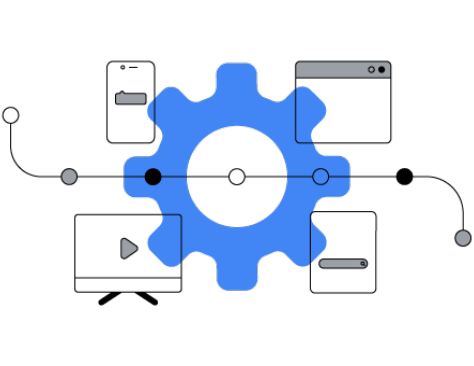
Given the significant shift to online as a preferred channel for so many people in Malaysia, it's clear that digital is where the masses are at. This means that channel strategies that only rely on "above the line" advertising for mass reach are fast becoming outdated. For example, although TV viewership for the Tokyo Olympics hit a record low, advertising budgets did not reflect this shift, and brands still paid as much as ever for commercials. Is your audience and media strategy reflecting the reality of where audiences are today?

1

Before deciding on your digital advertising strategy, check out best practices and tips for audience reach and segmentation strategies.

2

Stay on top of the latest consumer insights and best practices across marketing objectives and shopper moments, and use them to inform your digital strategies.



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2 Bring your storefront to wherever shoppers are

Consumers expect to be able to fulfill their shopping needs whenever they need, and wherever they are. We know purchase decision-making is not linear, there is a complicated web of touchpoints that differs from person to person. And with new innovations like Google Lens, more people are browsing online for inspiration in fresh, unique ways.

Be ready to meet people wherever they are on their shopping journeys and create helpful bridges to take them one step closer to your storefront.

Show up for people searching for what you're selling by featuring your products on free listings in the Shopping tab on Search.

Shorten the path from your ad to your virtual storefront by connecting your product feed to either Video action campaigns to drive customers to your site, or App campaigns to take them to your mobile app.

Search interest in open now near me has grown over 2X globally year over year. To create a seamless online to offline experience for your shoppers, use Local inventory ads to promote your products that are available for in-store or curbside pickup.

When in-store sales took a hit during the pandemic, global healthcare company GSK Malaysia used Google Ads with Shopee to drive more traffic to its official Shopee store online. The brand also implemented Smart Shopping Campaigns, which uses machine learning and automation to simplify campaign optimization across formats. These strategic moves helped it unlock an incremental ROAS of 114% and more online sales, with 75% conversions on Shopee.

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3 No more lines: Integrate and innovate across functions, channels, and formats

Digital is leveling the playing field for businesses. Traditional industry norms such as size of stores and retail legacy matter less in the next normal where 90% of APAC consumers expect retailers to sell their products online, and even those who purchase offline still refer to at least one digital channel during their research journey.

+90%

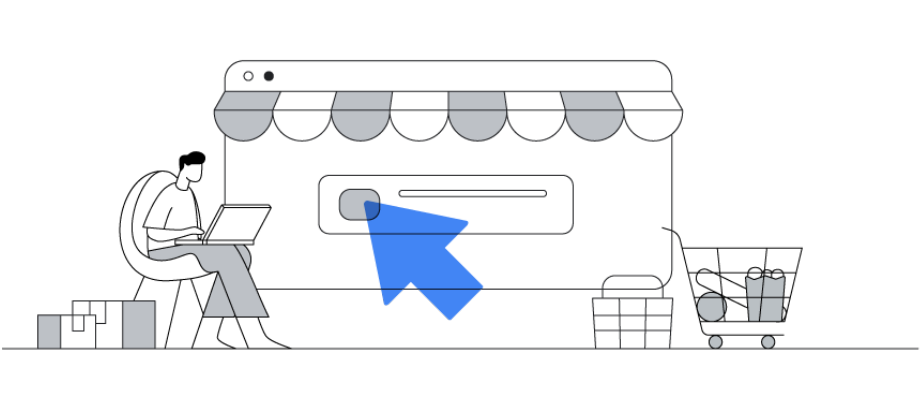
of APAC consumers expect retailers to sell their products online.

This means that every brand has the opportunity to enjoy borderless growth, especially those that focus on seamless online-offline experiences for their customers.

1

Build an agile omnichannel strategy that enables your business to unlock short-term wins and long-term growth.

An omnichannel ecosystem doesn't just entail showing up online. More importantly, it requires an integrated, cross-functional business strategy. Transformation needs to come from within in order for your brand to meet ever-changing consumer needs and drive sustained business growth. This agility, coupled with customer-centricity, is what will open doors to new business opportunities.



The advent of online shopping means you can now connect with customers beyond physical borders, like how Grab Malaysia acquired Jaya Grocer to create a more seamless grocery shopping experience, both online and offline.

2

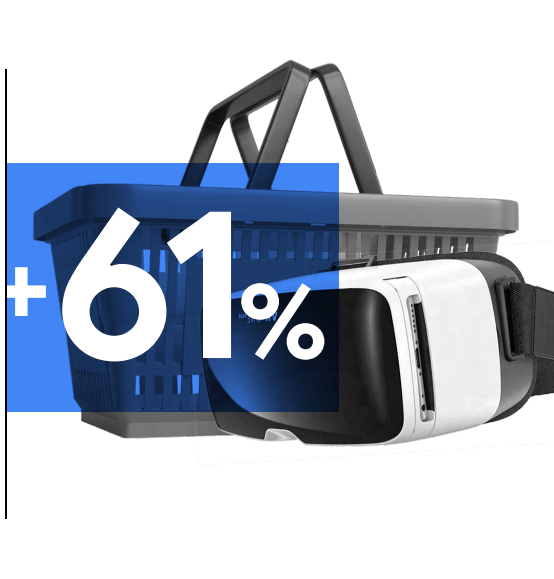
Connect and innovate the shopping experience, both online and in-store.

Simply moving a part of your business online will not satisfy the growing consumer demand for a seamless experience. Offer the best of online and offline shopping so that consumers can engage with your brand effortlessly, at their fingertips or in stores.

Get the last mile delivery right. Time and cost savings are the two benefits people value most in online shopping, while shipping fees and long delivery times are deal breakers.

Tokopedia, an Indonesian technology company specializing in e-commerce, increased its transaction volume by 28% month over month using Shopping ads. These ads feature in-ad product details, which provide users with a seamless experience where they get a good sense of the product before they click on the ad, resulting in more qualified leads.
Leverage immersive technologies to replicate offline shopping experiences online and elevate the in-store shopping experience.

Almost half of consumers surveyed felt that immersive technology like AR, VR, and 3D content helps them feel more connected with products, and 61% say they are more likely to buy from a brand that uses these technologies.



+61%

Live commerce is fast gaining popularity for its immersive, participatory shopping experience, and shoppable video presents opportunities for experimentation. As many creators go live to review products and discuss their shopping hauls, livestreaming is becoming increasingly influential in the consumer's decision making process. You can further expand the reach of a live digital event to relevant audiences with YouTube Masthead, which broadcasts such events at the top of the YouTube homepage.

YouTube's Holiday Stream and Shop hosted livestreams by creators and brands together.

For the livestream launch of its new smartphone OPPO Find X2 Series 5G, OPPO Malaysia used YouTube Masthead to increase awareness of the event with pre-live event creatives. Live and post-live event creatives were also used to maximize the number of viewers. In just a single day, OPPO hit 18 million impressions and reached a total of 6.63 million unique users, leading to 15% lower cost per reach.

Sources:
All Google Search data points included in this report are from Google Trends, Sep 2019 - Aug 2020 vs. Sep 2020 - Aug 2021, unless otherwise indicated.

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[1] SYNC Survey

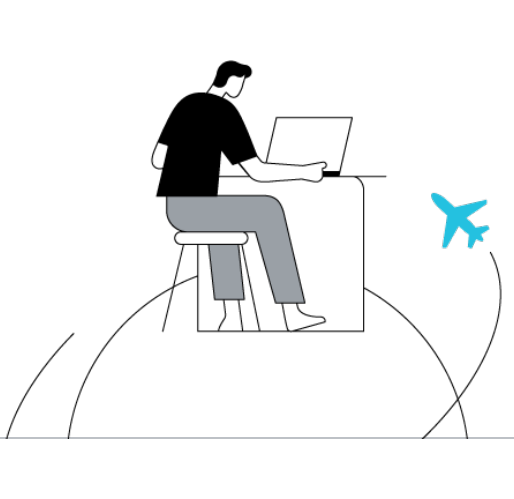
Lives reexamined

Following the sudden disruptions of the pandemic, Malaysians emerged in 2021 with a realization that some changes weren't temporary after all. This prompted a sense of introspection and a reevaluation of their values and lifestyle choices. As a result, Malaysians looked for more comfort and ease in their lives, and shifted their focus to the things that matter most to them.

As Malaysians try to embrace new unknowns in their lives, they're reexamining their lifestyle choices and the comfort of established routines. The pandemic has resulted in significant shifts in consumers' priorities as they focus more on spending time with loved ones and their own physical and emotional wellbeing.

In 2021, two in five Malaysians began exercising more, and 65% of respondents surveyed made healthier changes to their diet.[2] Indeed, holistic wellbeing is predicted to be a key focus for people in 2022.

From small everyday upgrades to major life decisions, searches are showing how people are taking stock of their lives and assessing how closely their choices are aligning with what truly matters to them. Evidence of this shift is seen in the "Great Resignation," a global trend where a significant number of people are leaving their jobs voluntarily. In 2021, 61% of Malaysian workers planned to find new jobs, with younger employees aged 35 and below among those most prepared to move on from their current workplaces.[3] The same study found that Malaysians prioritize better pay, greater recognition, and more career development opportunities.



Such significant, widespread shifts in life priorities among consumers should be studied closely by brands. The changing core values and priorities of people are often a strong indicator of how they will behave as consumers. But it's not just customers that businesses need to care about. Given how many people are reassessing their careers in Malaysia, employee satisfaction and wellbeing should be top priorities for attracting and retaining top talent.

As people spring-clean their lives, there's a window of opportunity for businesses to reconnect and convince. How can you persuade your customers and employees to continue to make your brand a part of their new lives? How will you show the value your brand can bring to their newfound priorities?

SEARCHES

Acceptance of a blended life

Even as restrictions ease, it seems a blended way of living is likely to remain. Signs point to a semi-remote future of work. According to Accenture, APAC is readier than other regions to adopt a hybrid working model. Searches in Malaysia reflect this adaptation to a more flexible future as people begin taking charge of their own time and space, particularly at home.

People are upgrading their homes as they accept a more permanent blended way of work and life. Search interest in (indoor bicycles) grew by 25%, and search interest in (electricity saving) rose by up to 60% as people look for longer-term ways to lessen the toll of stay-at-home life on their electricity bills.

Reevaluation of finances

We see people changing the way they look at their finances. While some looked for ways to put their savings to work through investments, others searched for deals, discounts, and ways to stretch their dollar. Ahead of 2021's holiday season, most shoppers planned to either buy less or hold off on buying gifts until they were on sale, due to COVID-19's impact on their finances.

Searches for deals have grown in Malaysia with search interest in (redeem code) increasing by 310% and search interest in (voucher) rising by 25%.

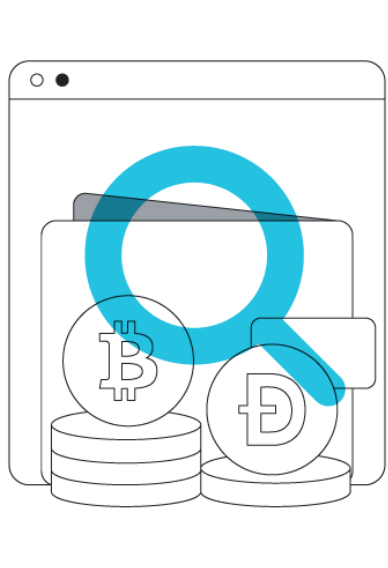
+35%

Search interests in investments have grown, with 35% increase in (how to invest) 15% rise in (what is stock) and 25% growth in (unit trust)

As people look for more economical ways to get around the high costs of owning a car, search interest in (car share) grew by 55%.

+150%

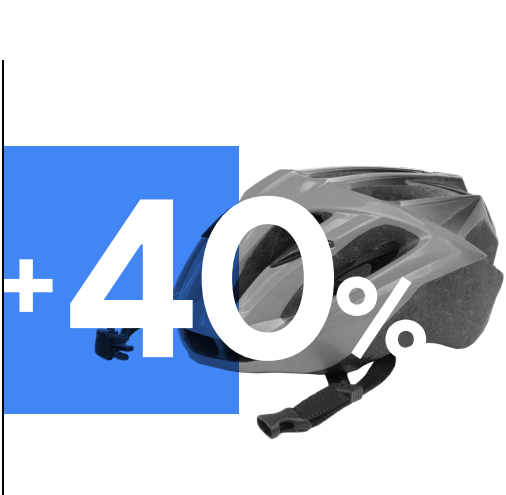
Search interests related to cryptocurrency, including (bitcoin price) and (dogecoin) rose by 150%.



Quality time with loved ones

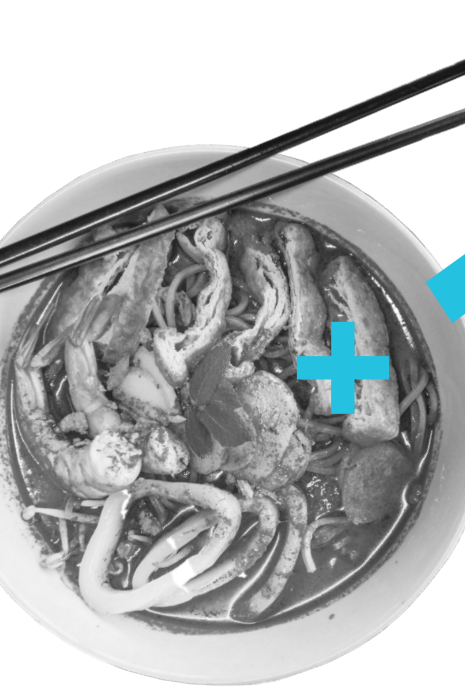
Malaysians have placed more value on spending time with their families, and some even see it as more important than being financially secure or successful. This is echoed in their searches online, with consumers looking for moments of quality time with their loved ones.

Search interests in (relationship with family) grew 40% and (family activity) rose 30%.



Search interest in (vacation) grew by 50%, including search interest in (family travel)

Search interest in (pets) grew more than 40% as people seek to add furry family members to their household.



+110%

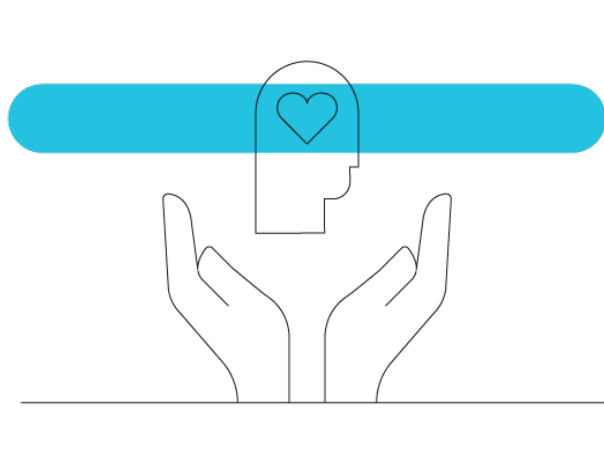
Search interest in (dine in) increased by 110% as pandemic restrictions eased and Malaysians looked to treat themselves and their loved ones to a nice meal out.

Self-care, introspection, and the reevaluation of lifestyle choices

Malaysian consumers today view wellness through a broader lens, valuing physical, emotional, and mental health. As people reevaluate their lifestyle choices, we see introspection and consideration for holistic wellness playing a bigger role in their decision-making processes.

Search interest in (flexible jobs) has grown by more than 25%, and search interests in (how to resign) and (resignation email) increased by up to 20%.

+25%



+115%

Searches related to self-awareness and self-care, including search interests in (mental health journal) (self love) and (self improvement) grew by up to 115%.

+125%

Search interest in (wellness) including (mental wellness) and (meditation music) rose by up to 125%.

As Malaysians seek ways to manage their mental health, search interests related to (mental health), for example, (anxiety simptom) (anxiety symptoms) and (psychologist near me) grew by up to 35%.

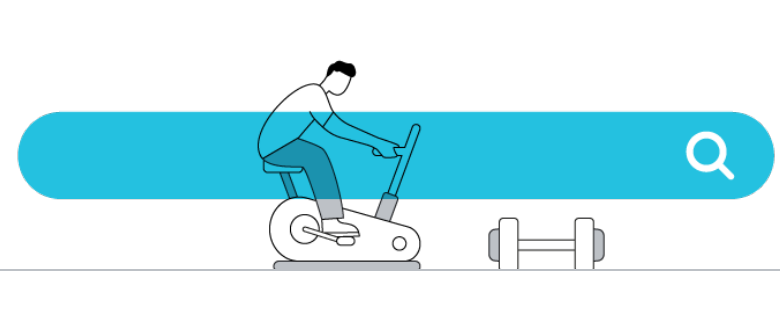
+55%

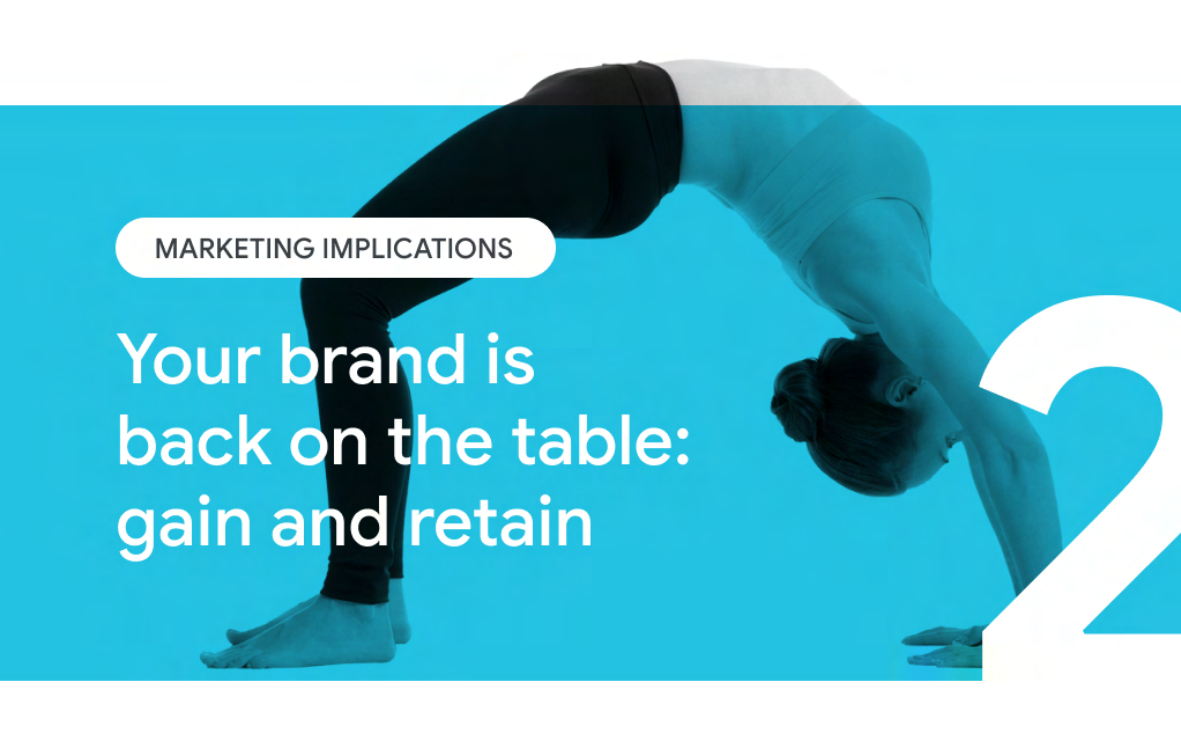
People are prioritizing quality over price, with search interest in (terbaik untuk) (best for) rising by 55% while search interest in (paling murah) (cheapest) declines.

Search interest in (vitamins) grew by up to 30%.

+120%

Search interests related to exercises and home workouts, such as (stationary bicycle) (home gym) and (senaman) (exercise), grew by up to 120%.





MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Your brand is back on the table: gain and retain

From reactive behaviors and short-term solutions, to a greater acceptance of our new blended lives, searches show that people are emerging from the pandemic with updated priorities. As people reevaluate their choices, **brands and businesses should also be updating how they show the value they can offer**, not just externally to their customers, but also internally to their employees.

> **Simon Kahn**
> Vice President, Marketing for Google APAC
>
> "The next decade will be defined by a state of accelerated disruption. In order to enable people in the region to achieve better, more equitable outcomes in the face of increasing disruptions, businesses need to stay curious and cultivate a desire to understand what works and, more importantly, what doesn't to uncover and refine an understanding of users' true needs."

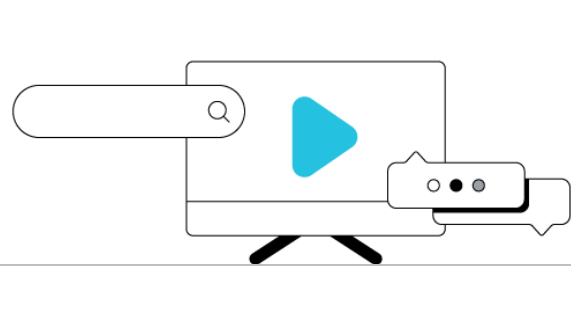
1 Ensure your brand makes the list as consumers reevaluate their options

Today, as shoppers look for the brands that best align with what they need and value, up to 75% are buying from newly discovered brands rather than familiar ones. As consumers look to be empowered and confident about their purchase decisions, Search ranks as a top touchpoint for providing them with relevant and helpful information.

1

Tap into the power of Search and automation to grow your brand's discoverability.

Fifteen percent of queries every day are brand new searches. By broadening your keyword match type to Broad Match with Smart Bidding, you're able to automatically adjust your campaigns to capture the different ways consumers are looking for your products, and act on new opportunities as they arise.



When consumers research, they don't always have a specific product in mind yet. Responsive Search Ads can put your product in the spotlight with personalized ads that are relevant to the shopper. For example, KFC Malaysia managed to boost direct orders by 40% using responsive search ads to create the most relevant combination of ad copies and improve overall ad effectiveness.

Mindvalley, a global education company based in Malaysia, wanted to further optimize its Search campaigns. It used automation tools to increase budget flexibility across different keywords and multiple campaigns, and become more agile and responsive to seasonal changes in consumer demand. It successfully netted a 28% increase in ROI and 2X leads and sales conversions.

2

Create data-driven marketing cycles to keep up with evolving needs.

An adaptable advertising strategy allows you to act on what matters most to consumers in the moment, and adopt a test and learn approach for sustainable optimization.

Rising Retail Categories and Google Trends show you what the world is searching for at both a local and global level.

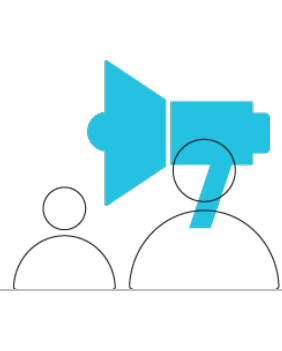
With the new Insights Page in Google Ads, you can forecast and capture demand with insights tailored to your ads business and identify product offering growth opportunities.

An example in the region is how leading online travel agents in Indonesia weathered 2021's uncertainty by catering to evolving consumer needs with new products that went beyond their core travel offerings. The new launches included Traveloka Eats (food vouchers and delivery), Paylater (installment payment program), Tiket Homes (house rental), and Tiket To-do (recreational activities).

2 Use direct-to-consumer strategies to own your brand presence and experiences

Consider owned, direct-to-consumer channels (a brand.com and app property) that can enable you to build a bespoke brand presence and experience, and showcase your brand values and consumer offerings without compromise. They also give you the freedom to experiment and evolve your platforms to make your brand stand out even more.

After implementing app deep linking, Indosat's myIM3 Search ads campaign saw 2X traffic to its app. The campaign also increased conversion rate by up to 2.5X, decreased cost per acquisition by 53%, and increased ROAS by 43%.



3 Don't overlook your internal stakeholders

During times of reevaluation and change, attracting and retaining top talent becomes ever more critical to ensuring sustainable business growth.

1

Prioritize building a diverse and inclusive workforce that will not only help to attract and retain top talent, but also increase innovation and profitability.

2

Recognize the importance of purpose beyond pay.
Nurture your employees as internal stakeholders and representatives of your brand.

To encourage employees to find their unique purpose and build a workplace where people enjoy their work and are engaged, Unilever Sri Lanka ran a series of "Discover Your Purpose" workshops. The sessions combine e-learning with personal connections to challenge personal growth.

Sources:
All Google Search data points included in this report are from Google Trends, Sep 2019 - Aug 2020 vs. Sep 2020 - Aug 2021, unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Herbalife Nutrition, AU, HK, ID, JP, KR, MY, PH, SG, TW, TH, VN, Asia Pacific Health Inertia Survey 2021, n=5,500 consumers 18+, 2021.
[3] Employment Hero, MY, Employee Movement and Retention report, 2021.

Bridging distances

The pandemic kept countless people physically apart, and consumers quickly found ways to adapt. But in 2021, we saw the sense of separation deepen. As a result, Malaysian consumers moved beyond finding brief moments of connection to finding new ways to express themselves and nurture deeper, more ongoing relationships, both online and offline.

As more COVID-19 variants emerge, it's clear that the pandemic isn't quite over yet. COVID-19 is still a top concern for people, and consumers in APAC remain wary of being in close physical contact with others. While most of Malaysia's adult population has been fully vaccinated, Malaysians are still substantially more worried about COVID-19 than the global national average.[4]

But fears of resuming in-person activities haven't overridden basic human needs for personal connection and belonging. Rising searches indicate that Malaysians will continue to find new ways to connect, and they are increasingly open to using digital means to do so, even as the country lifts movement restrictions and reopens its borders.

One example is how people have started to adapt the way they express their affection. In lieu of physical touch or time spent together, people are searching for gifts they can send their loved ones, and inspiration for the right words to wish them a happy birthday or anniversary. An October 2021 survey found that one in two APAC consumers are still choosing to meet their loved ones virtually instead of in person, and searches for online group activities like escape rooms, races, and concerts are seeing consistent growth.

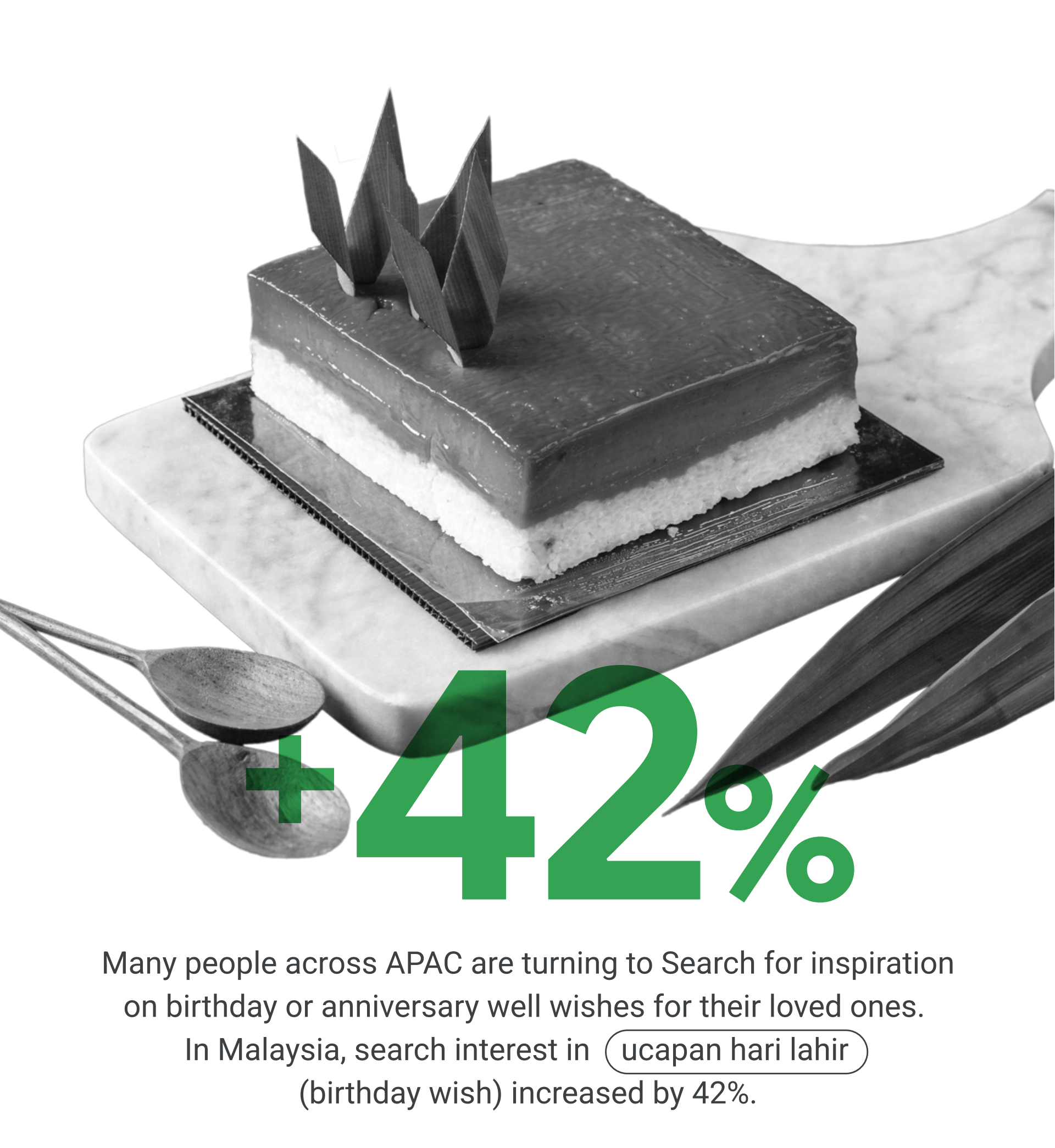
As the world grows more dependent on digital technology to form meaningful human connections, brands need to move on from thinking of digital platforms as purely functional channels or just an online front end. Instead, consider how you can get longer-term value out of connecting meaningfully with your customers online.

In marketing, we often say the medium is the message. But that doesn't mean that a channel should do all the hard work for you. How are you ensuring you're reaching the human behind every channel strategy? More importantly, what can you do as a brand to help facilitate better, deeper, more meaningful relationships for your consumers?

SEARCHES

Online expressions of affection

Love languages are keeping up with the changing times, with people searching for ways to show affection without in-person interactions. Gift-giving has become particularly trendy in APAC, where more than half the online population has bought a gift for someone online, higher than any other region in the world.



+42%

Many people across APAC are turning to Search for inspiration on birthday or anniversary well wishes for their loved ones. In Malaysia, search interest in ucapan hari lahir (birthday wish) increased by 42%.

Gifting has become an important expression of connection during the lockdown in Malaysia. Search interest in hadiah untuk (gift for) and gift box saw an increase of 30% and 100% respectively.

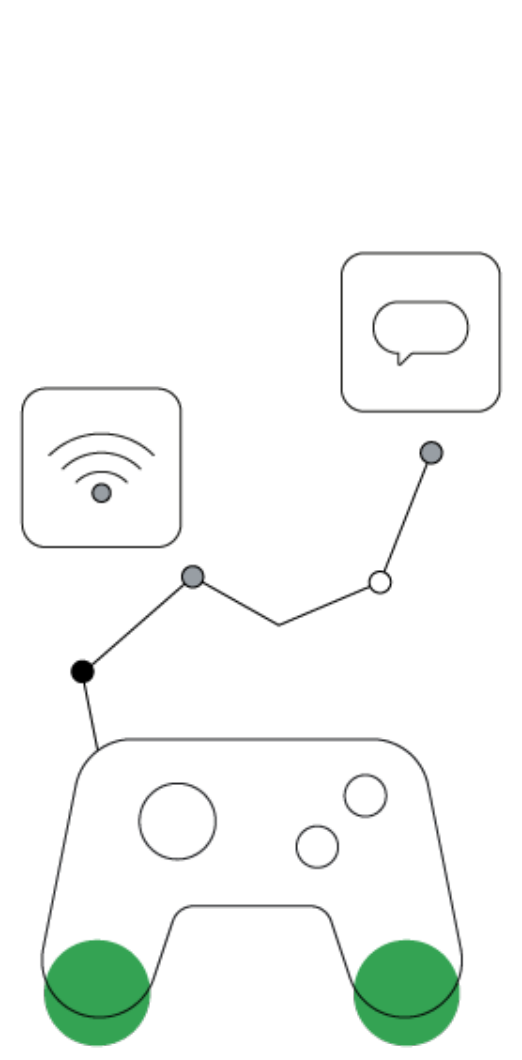
+30%

Digital for personal connection

Technology is enabling people to connect in innovative ways, sparking interest in virtual versions of activities such as group meals, escape rooms, and concerts. Even holiday gatherings are going digital, with many Malaysians celebrating Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, and Deepavali with their loved ones via online video calls.

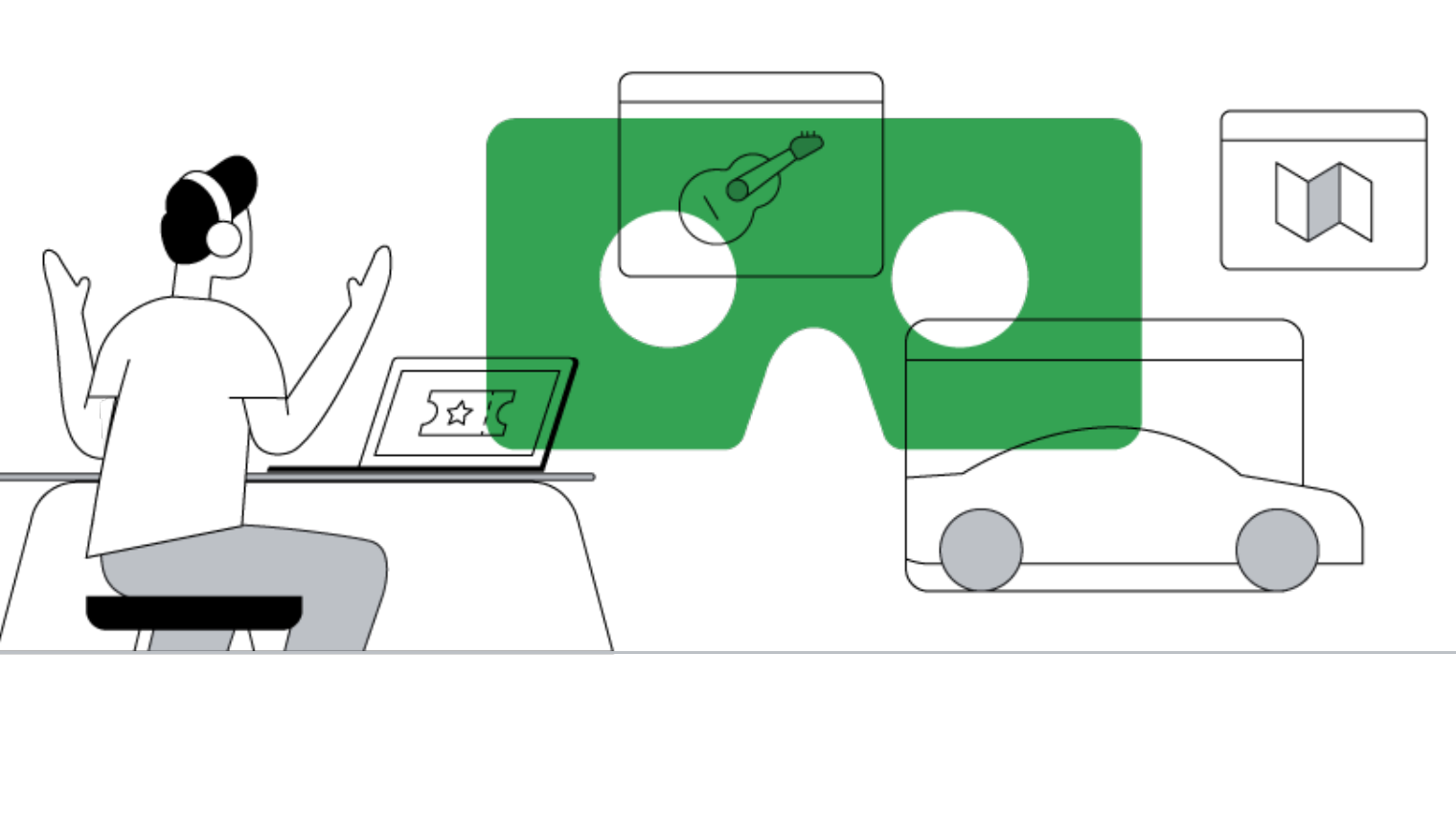
+135%

Malaysians are using digital solutions to find more engaging ways to spend time with one another, especially during periods of lockdowns. Search interest in games to play with friends online saw a spike of 135%.



+520%

People searching for the online or virtual equivalent of offline experiences, such as virtual race in Malaysia, virtual concert in Singapore, virtual tour in the Philippines, virtual escape rooms in Australia, and オンライン コンサート (online concert) in Japan, grew by up to 520%.



MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The emotional value of digital

Faced with physical distancing caused by the pandemic, people have adapted how they express themselves and increased their reliance on digital for building personal connections. As a result, brands that merely use digital as a functional channel are missing out on an opportunity to build and nurture deeper relationships with their customers, where both sides stand to gain and grow through emotional connection.

Harvard Business Review
An Emotional Connection Matters More Than Customer Satisfaction

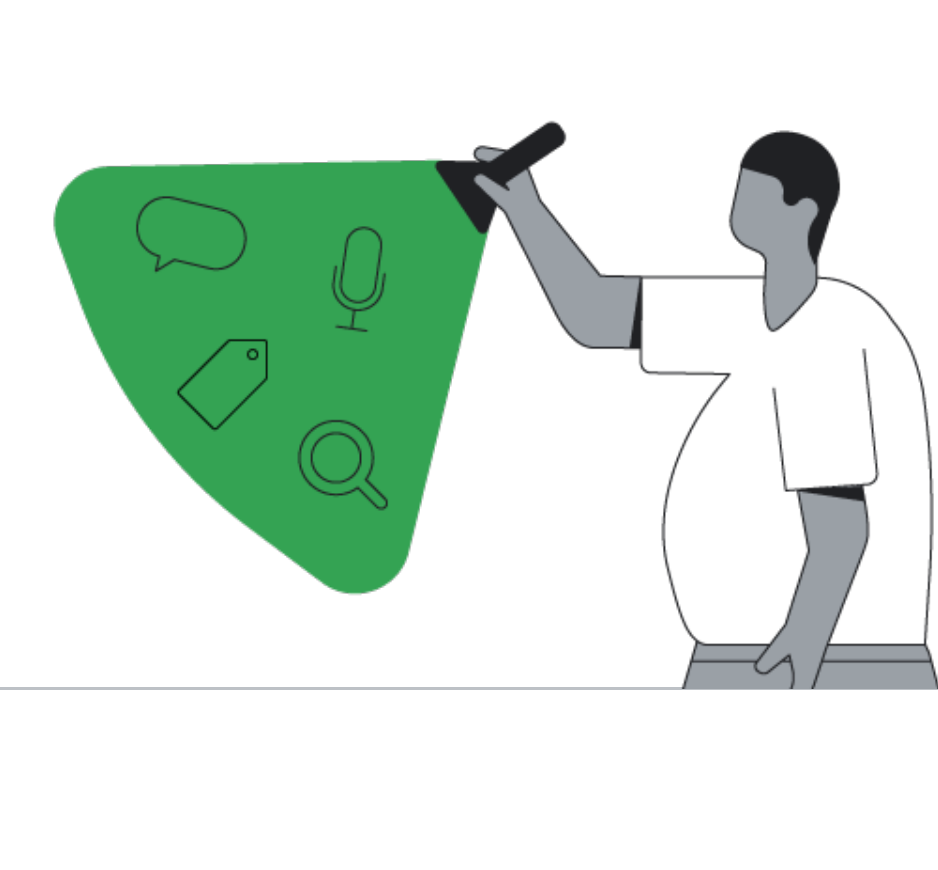
> "Emotionally connected customers buy more of your products and services, visit you more often, exhibit less price sensitivity, pay more attention to your communications, follow your advice, and recommend you more — everything you hope their experience with you will cause them to do."

---

1 Build customer love and loyalty by consistently delivering at each touchpoint

Research shows how the consumer's path to purchase is driven by emotions. At each and every touchpoint, shoppers want to feel reassured and empowered, and will reward brands that help them navigate the "messy middle."

Leverage the emotional power of digital to provide timely, accurate, and relevant information across your organic and paid communication channels.



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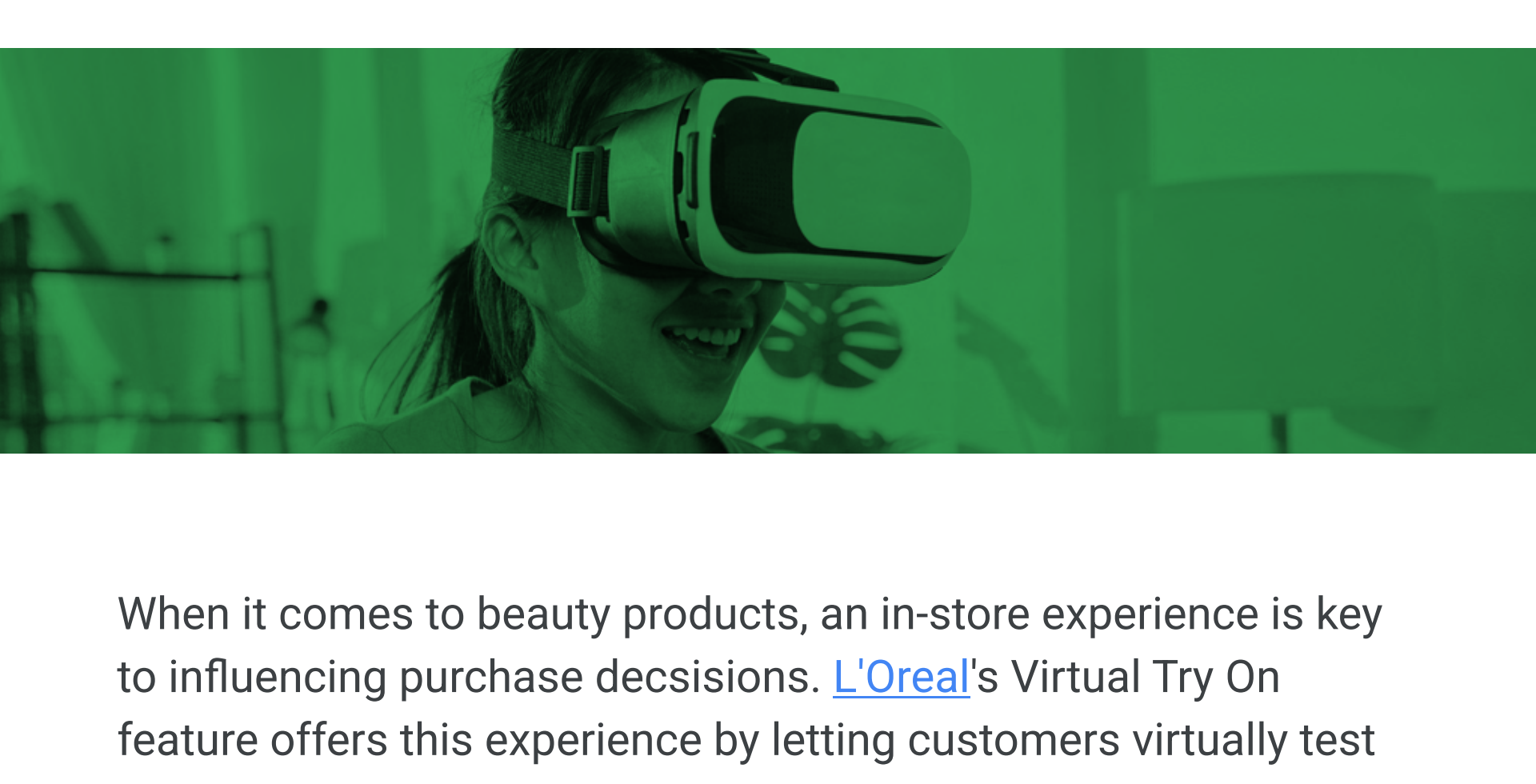
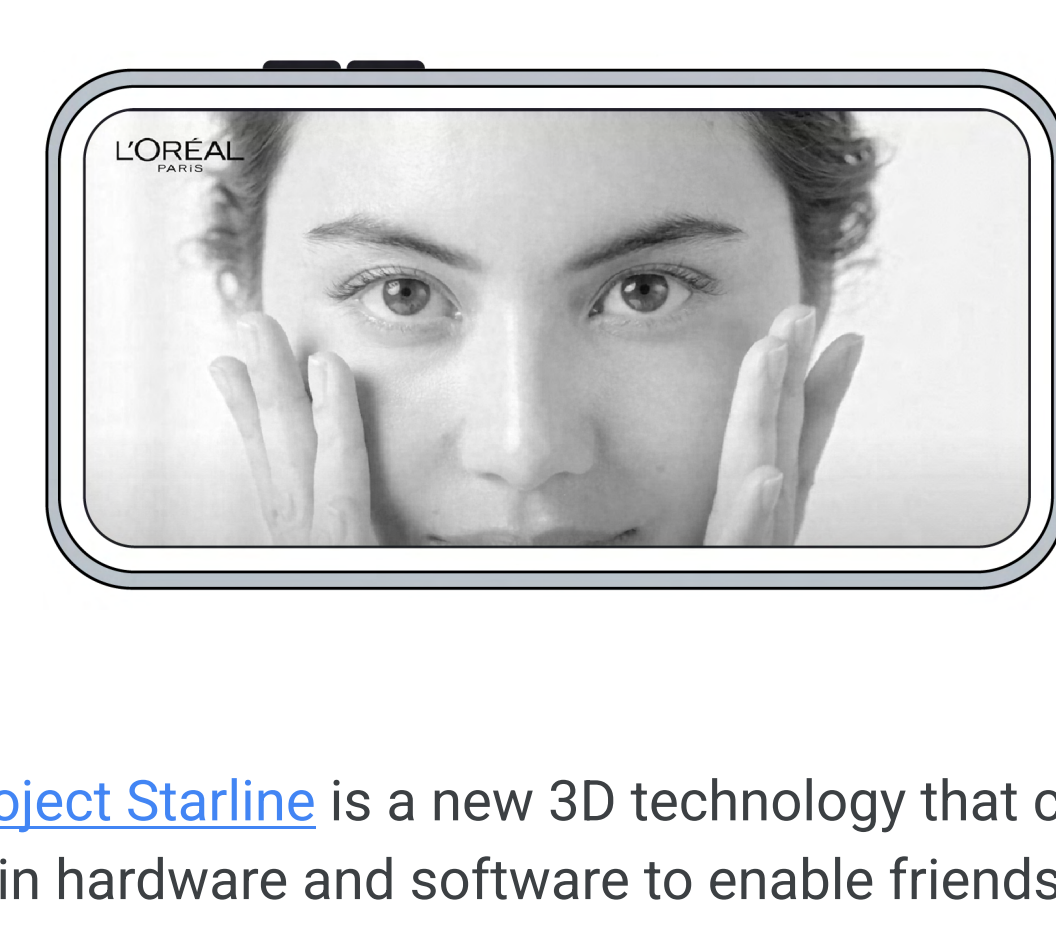
2 Tap into the value of virtual to augment real world experiences

Not everyone prefers in-person experiences, especially during a pandemic. Consider the value of virtual channels as a means of complementing or augmenting physical experiences, allowing the freedom of choice between online or offline events.

In October 2021, Taiping Zoo and Night Safari made virtual tours of its premises available via its MyZooTaiping web application, inviting people all over the world to visit the zoo.



When it comes to beauty products, an in-store experience is key to influencing purchase decisions. L'Oreal's Virtual Try On feature offers this experience by letting customers virtually test out the brand's makeup products.



Google Project Starline is a new 3D technology that combines advances in hardware and software to enable friends, families, and coworkers to feel like they're together even when they're apart.

---

3 Invest in ad creatives that can connect and inspire

Your advertising efforts can be a key lever to build emotional connection and simultaneously drive campaign performance. In fact, creative is the dominant ROI driver across all media platforms, and especially so on digital.

To bring your brand and products to life, ensure your ads showcase how your brand can help people in their everyday life in an authentic way. Explore creative best practices to unlock better performance across Google Ads solutions.

Sources:

4. Ipsos, MY, What Worries Malaysia, June 1, 2021.

Truth seekers

With online misinformation and data breaches on the rise, Malaysian consumers are more skeptical than ever. Wary of being misled and savvier about their choices, they're also more proactive about finding trustworthy sources, using Search to fact-check claims, scrutinize brand values, and ensure authenticity from the brands they choose to engage with.

In 2021, the pandemic further exposed the dangerous consequences of misinformation, spurring governments across the region to enact "fake news" laws. At the same time, the public has become more aware of the spread of false information, with close to 8 in 10 Malaysians reporting that they receive fake news on social media platforms.[5] Consumers, especially Gen Zers, are now more conscious about the mix of both facts and misinformation that can be found online. People are not only savvier about what they see on the internet, but also willing to proactively seek out accurate information on their own terms.

Searches reflect these growing anxieties, with consumers looking for ways to guard against the increasing pervasiveness of fraud and scams. As data breaches reached an all-time high in 2021, searches related to privacy also continued to rise alongside people's growing concerns about their digital safety.

Truth-seeking behaviors are becoming a consumer habit as shoppers spend more effort to ensure their choices align with their value systems. Rising searches for sustainable practices and ethical shopping reflect how consumers have a lower tolerance for being misled, and are holding brands closely accountable for any claims that they make.

Consumers today want brands to be transparent at every step of their value chain, including sourcing, production, and corporate sustainability policies. In Malaysia, 55% of consumers say that when considering a purchase, they value transparency and traceability of the product's origin.[6] Shoppers across all age groups will conduct extensive research prior to making their purchases, expecting brands to be proactive in earning and keeping their trust.

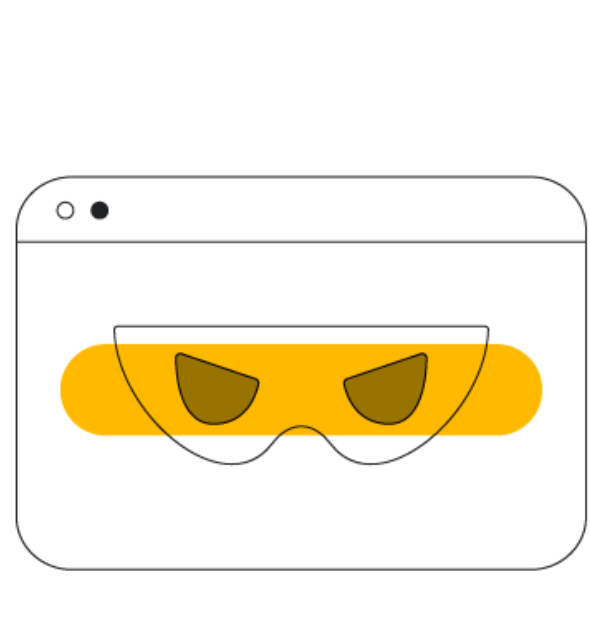
This means that for brands, getting ahead of transparency, focusing on authenticity, and ensuring two-way continuous communication with their customers has become more important than ever.

SEARCHES

Fact-checking, fighting fraud, and protecting privacy

Searches show consumers increasingly concerned about misinformation and privacy, especially compared to pre-COVID times. In 2021, 87% of APAC consumers say it is now more important to find a trusted source of information, compared with before the pandemic.

In Malaysia, search interests related to fact-checking and fake news has risen, with conspiracy seeing 5% growth and online lies increasing by 50%.



+25%

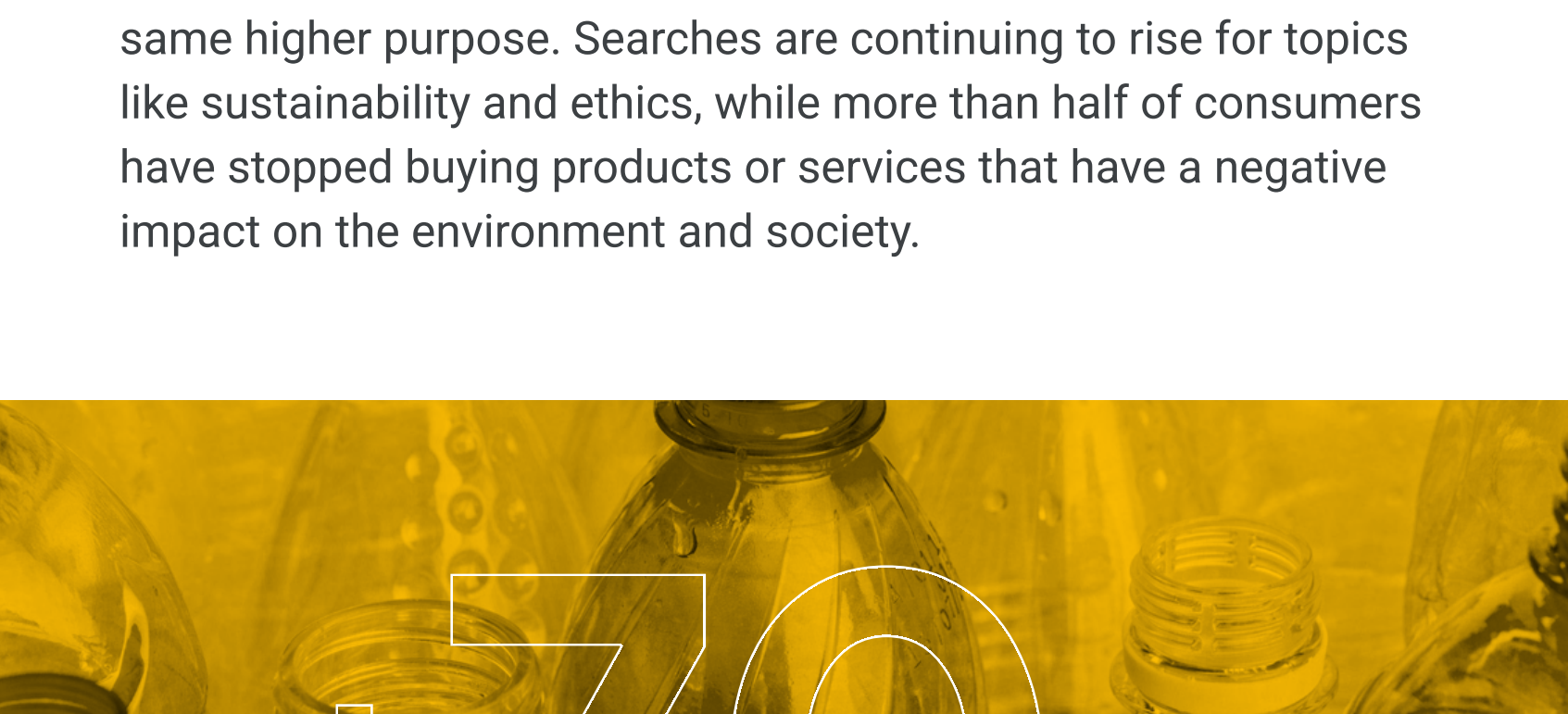
Searches about frauds and scams have grown by up to 25%.

+40%

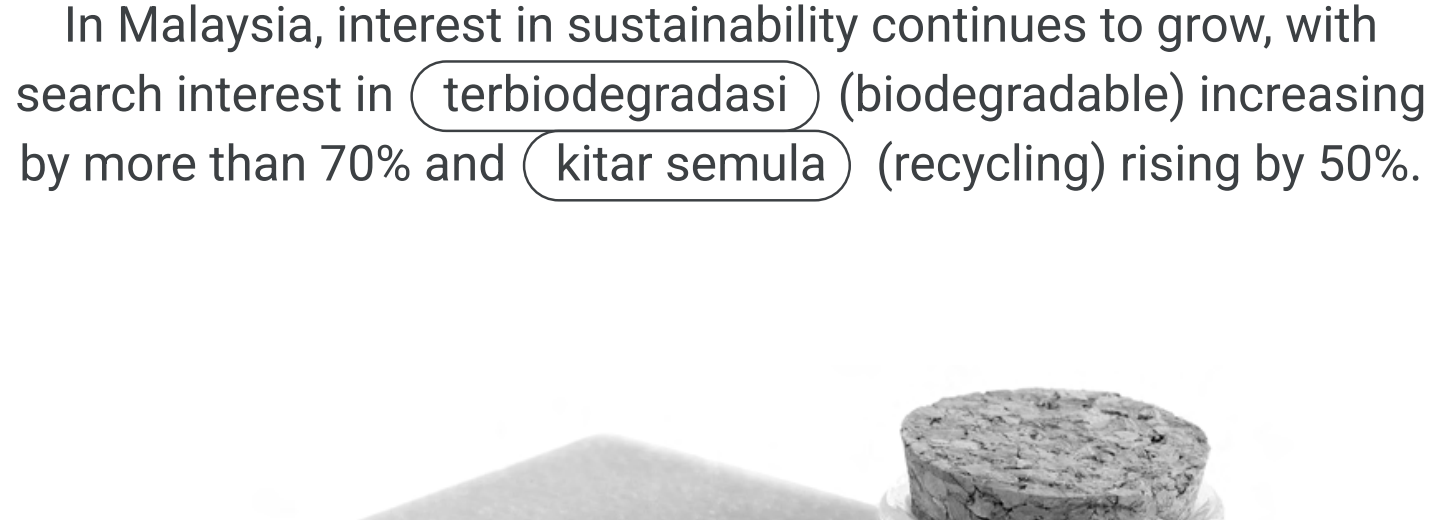
Search interest in Privasi (privacy) grew by more than 40%.

Savvier value systems

As consumers grow more entrenched in their belief systems, they're making sure that the brands they choose also share the same higher purpose. Searches are continuing to rise for topics like sustainability and ethics, while more than half of consumers have stopped buying products or services that have a negative impact on the environment and society.



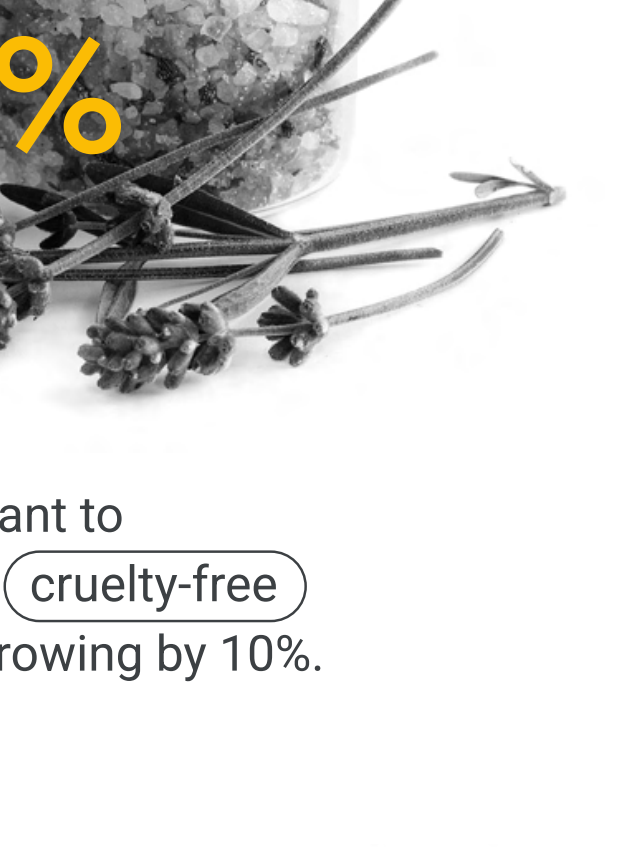
In Malaysia, interest in sustainability continues to grow, with search interest in terbiodegradasi (biodegradable) increasing by more than 70% and kitar semula (recycling) rising by 50%.



Ethical practices are increasingly important to consumers too, with search interests in cruelty-free growing by up to 75% and fairtrade growing by 10%.

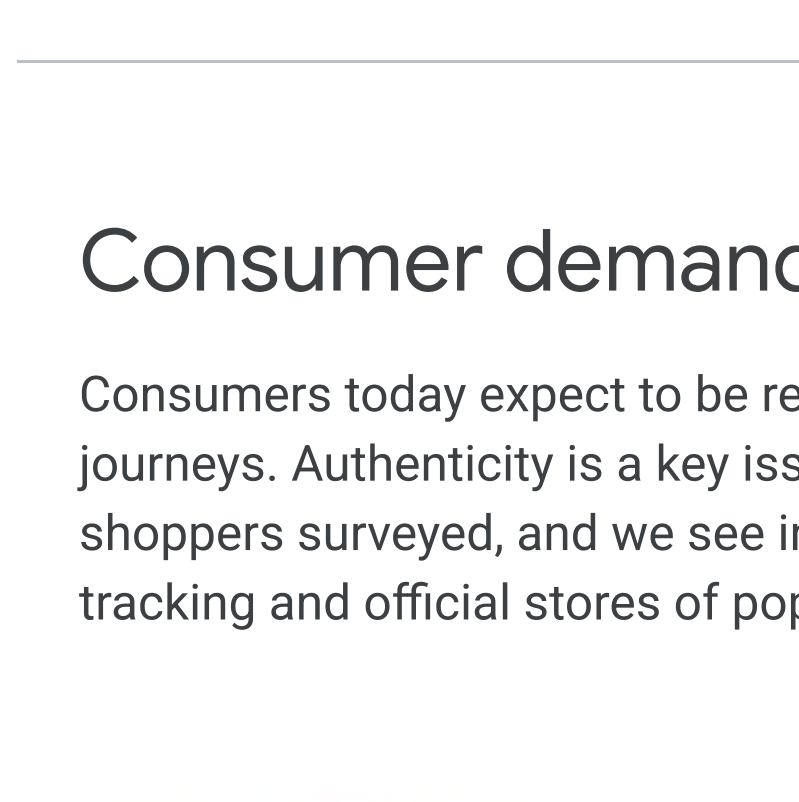
+30%

Search interests in electric bikes and electric cars grew by 30% and 10% respectively.



Consumer demands for reassurance

Consumers today expect to be reassured along their shopping journeys. Authenticity is a key issue on marketplaces for 31% of shoppers surveyed, and we see increasing searches for delivery tracking and official stores of popular brands.



Malaysia has the highest concentration of searches for delivery tracking in the world, with search interest in package tracking growing by 20%.

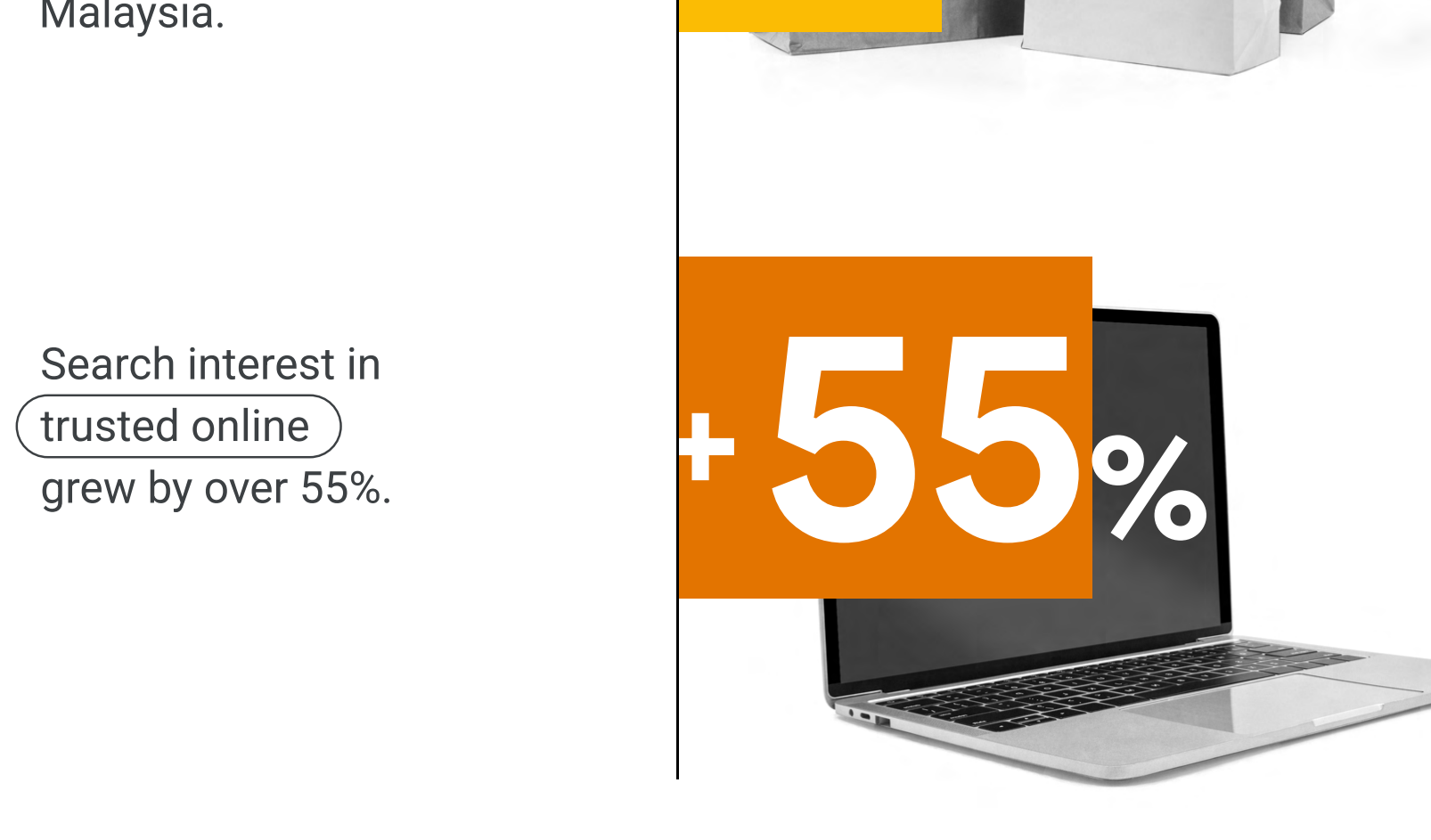
+20%

Along with rising demand for authenticity, there has been up to 35% growth in customers searching for a brand's official store in Malaysia.

Search interest in trusted online grew by over 55%.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Trust as brand equity



Rising misinformation and record-breaking data breaches have put consumers on high alert, sharpening their values and lowering their tolerance for anything misleading. As a result, trust is now a brand's most important asset. Customers expect proactive transparency and authenticity at a minimum.

> **Edelman**
> Trust, the new brand equity
>
> "Brands need to be for the people, and guided by the people. Why? Because brand trust ranks higher than brand love."

1 Act intentionally and respectfully to protect people's privacy and earn trust

When users have clear choice and control over their data, they're happy to share it with businesses they trust. Today, more than half of Malaysians say that their trust in a brand is greatly impacted by whether it protects their personal data.[7] It's time to consider how you can prioritize your users' privacy concerns to earn their trust.

1

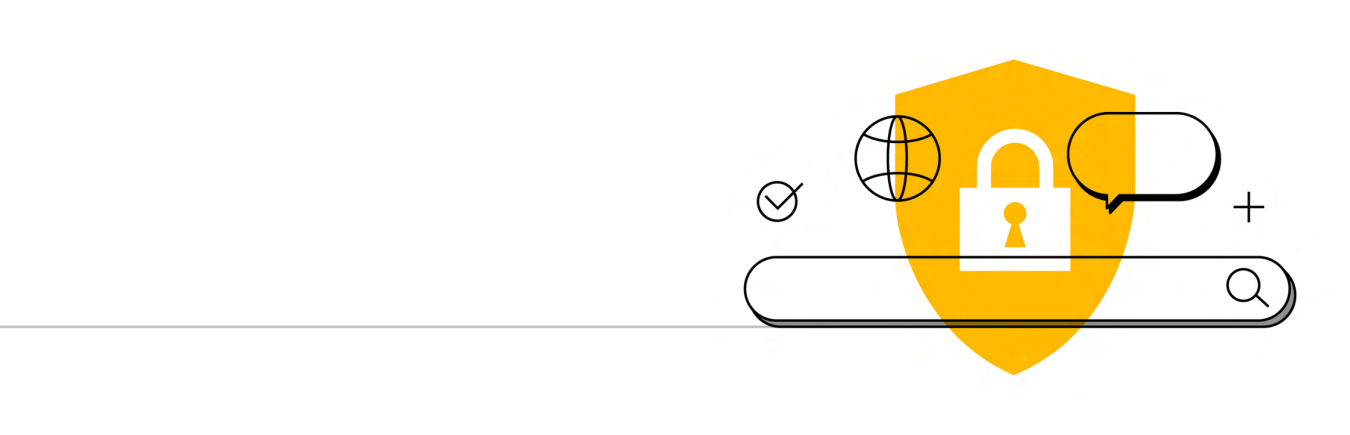
Use first-party data responsibly and effectively to find the right balance between privacy and the personalized interactions that consumers prefer.
Check out our marketer's playbook for privacy to deliver performance in a privacy-safe way and learn what industry leaders across APAC think about the region's key data privacy trends and how to create a privacy-first ecosystem.

2

Prepare your digital ads ecosystem for a future without third-party cookies.
Explore privacy-preserving strategies that fuel continued business growth by allowing companies to reach people with relevant ads and measure results without needing to track people across the web.

3

Educate and empower your customers to protect themselves against misinformation, scams, and fakes.
With 68% of online shoppers in Southeast Asia rating "guarantee of product authenticity" as very important, consider ways you can offer them this needed reassurance.

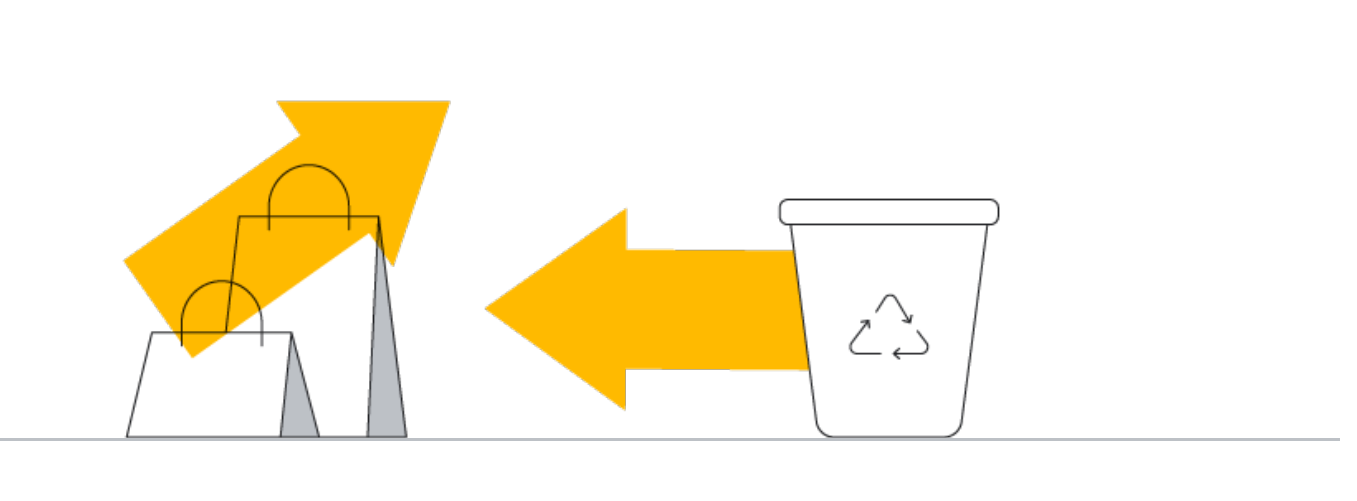


In 2021, Google launched the About This Result feature, which provides details about a website before users visit it, including whether the source is trusted and whether a user's connection to the site is secure. Google's Fact Check Explorer also helps counter falsehoods and reduce misinformation online.

2 Hold your whole business accountable and get ahead of the conversion

When it comes to building trust, brands cannot afford to cut corners. As consumers feel increasingly empowered to hold brands accountable to their claims, earning and keeping trust requires consistent, authentic, and proactive communication.

Consider the full implications of your company values on every part of your value chain.
Expand the definition of what it means to be sustainable by considering the carbon footprint of your digital actions. Through Google Cloud Carbon Footprint, you can take action to evaluate and reduce the footprint of your carbon workloads.



Fugeelah, a Malaysian social enterprise, embraced upcycling by releasing a collection of limited edition bags which were made from leftover fabrics that would otherwise have ended up in a landfill.

Sources:
All Google Search data points included in this report are from Google Trends, Sep 2019 - Aug 2020 vs. Sep 2020 - Aug 2021, unless otherwise indicated.

5. UCSI Poll Research Centre, MY, June 2021.
6. PwC, MY, Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, Dec 2021.
7. PwC, MY, Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, Dec 2021.

Growing inequalities

While everyone's way of life has undoubtedly shifted this past year, the pandemic didn't affect everyone the same way. It not only exposed existing inequalities, but accelerated them. People are turning to the internet for help: whether they're existing internet users with fresh financial woes, or newcomers with more basic needs, consumers are searching for ways to overcome the challenges they face.

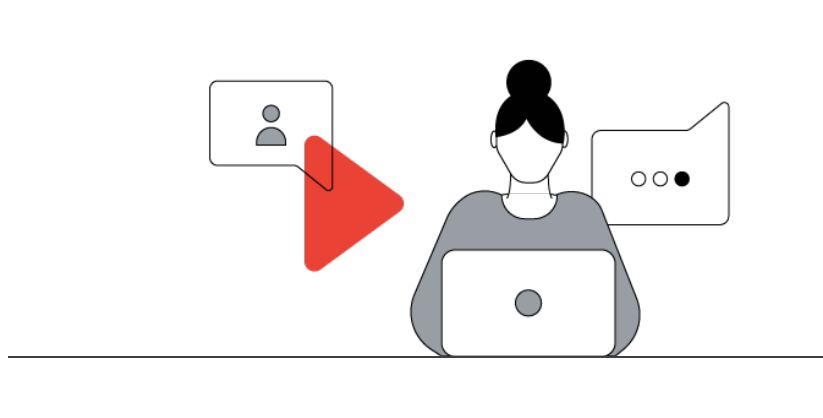
Dubbed the "inequality virus," the pandemic has exposed many societal fractures along the lines of wealth, race, and gender. While many of these inequalities existed before COVID-19, the pandemic has played a role in exacerbating them, and the most vulnerable in society have been disproportionately hit.

Lower income households experienced a higher concentration of job losses while their children missed twice as many days in a school year compared with those from high income families. One in four Malaysian households from low-income groups experienced food shortages, with those in East Malaysia being hit twice as hard.

To overcome these inequalities, people are searching online for solutions to help themselves and their communities. Their searches range from unemployment benefits and "buy now pay later" financing options to topics on discrimination and women's rights, reflecting their growing interest in social issues.

The world's growing reliance on technology means it's crucial to equip the less privileged with access to digital solutions. Factors like unstable internet access, technical illiteracy, and language barriers can prevent people from accessing opportunities online, and exacerbate the inequity they already experience.

Indeed, rising searches for local translations, line speed tests, and free internet services reflect a growing section of society struggling to keep up. During the pandemic, millions of migrants across Malaysia had to return to their homes in rural areas. The lack of quality internet infrastructure in those areas meant that these workers and their families didn't have access to the high-speed internet of urban centers, losing out on job and learning opportunities. Malaysia's digital gender gap is also widening, with the proportion of female internet users decreasing over the years.[8]



People recognize that these societal inequalities cannot be solved by governments and nonprofits alone. The expectation is now also on brands to help drive meaningful change. Perceived to be more ethical and competent, businesses are uniquely positioned to boost customer loyalty and trust by driving social change. Consumers will embrace brands who not only reflect diversity in their campaigns, but take action to create equity in societies as well.

SEARCHES

Finding familiarity through local language

Searches show the anxiety that consumers face when transacting in a foreign language. In fact, up to 40% of consumers won't consider making a purchase unless they can access information in their local language. With more new users coming online from non-metropolitan areas, the demand for local translations is continuing to grow.

+155%

Across multiple countries in APAC, we see up to 155% growth in searches for translations and assistance in comprehending words that are not in users' mother tongue. The highest growth this year came from India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, with searches like english to malayalam in tagalog in malay and dịch tiếng anh thành tiếng việt (translate English to Vietnamese).

Access to stable and affordable internet

As more needs are being fulfilled online, people are increasingly focused on ensuring that they have reliable and affordable internet access.

POWER
INTERNET
WLAN
1
2
3
4
LAN

+60%

This year, we have seen continued momentum in searches testing internet speed and connectivity as more people come online. Search interest in internet speed check or line speed test grew by up to 60% in Malaysia, India, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan.

+30%

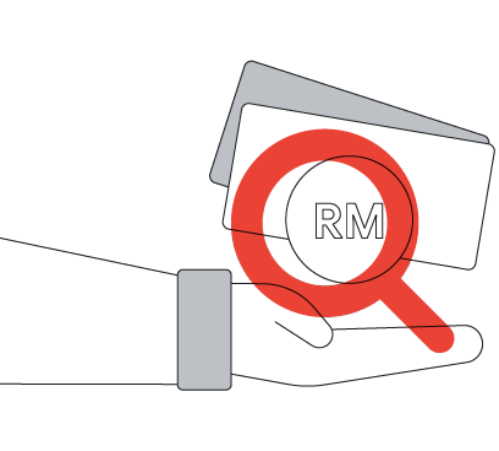
In Malaysia, search interests in wifi booster and improve internet speed grew by 30%.

The need for financial support

As Malaysia experiences high unemployment rates, consumers are searching for different ways to alleviate economic concerns. Whether it's a business grant or a cash loan, people in Malaysia are looking for financial support to tide them over in an uncertain year.

+80%

Rising economic pressures and unemployment have forced many Malaysians to look for financial assistance, with search interest in stimulus growing by 80%.



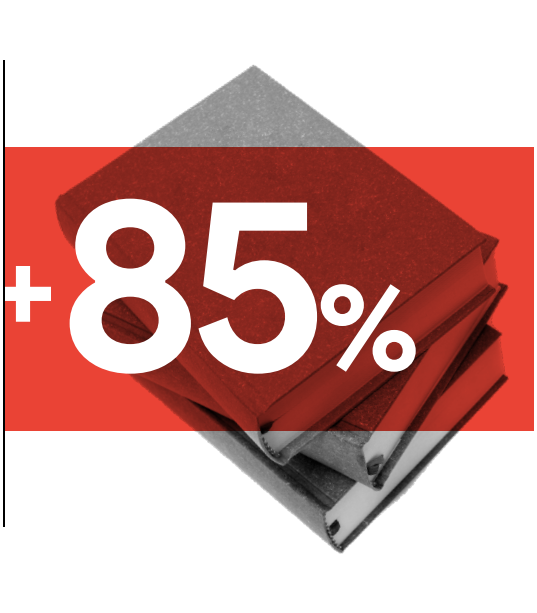
+35%

Search interest in pinjaman (loans) increased by 35%.

+225%

Australia, Singapore, and India have the highest concentration of searches in the world for bnpl (buy now, pay later). In Singapore and Malaysia, search interest in pay later increased by up to 225%.

To maintain their livelihoods, Malaysians are also eager to learn new skills. Search interest in for beginners or study skills have increased by 10%.



+85%

Social inequalities

The general APAC region, including Malaysia, is still lagging behind the global average when it comes to the importance of equal rights, but people are starting to become more curious about inclusion and equity. Continuing from 2020, searches reveal this nascent stage of exploration and awareness growing in Malaysia.

+10%

The pandemic has made Malaysians more aware of the challenges their communities face, and inspired them to extend help in this tough time. Search interest related to sumbangan (donation) increased by 10%, alongside growing interest in national campaigns like KitaJagaKita (We take care of each other) and Kempen Bendera Putih (White Flag Campaign).

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

From reflecting society to changing it

Creating real change is not just about ensuring diversity and inclusion, it is about taking action towards ensuring equity as well. While the pandemic has impacted everyone's lives, not everyone has been affected in the same way, and rising searches reflect the need for help. Now, reaching customers takes more than simply reflecting society. Brands are also expected to take actions to shape it.

Edelman

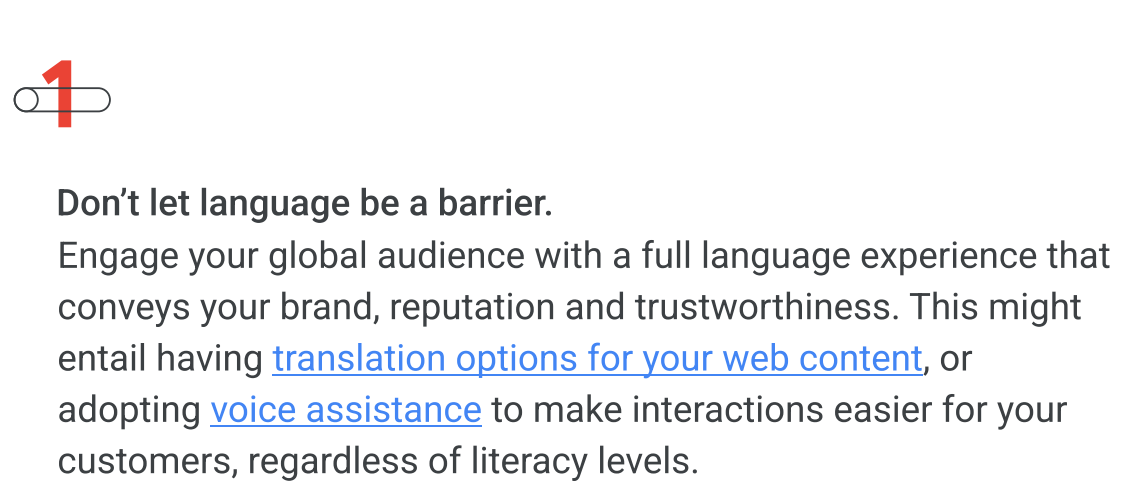
> "With four converging global crises over the last year - Covid-19, economic insecurity, financial/health inequities and systemic racism - brands that take a stand get a giant boost in trust. This evolved role for brands offers a new opportunity for brand marketers and real risk if they fail to recognize consumers' call for brand action."

---

1 Cater to consumers' basic needs to enable them to participate and engage

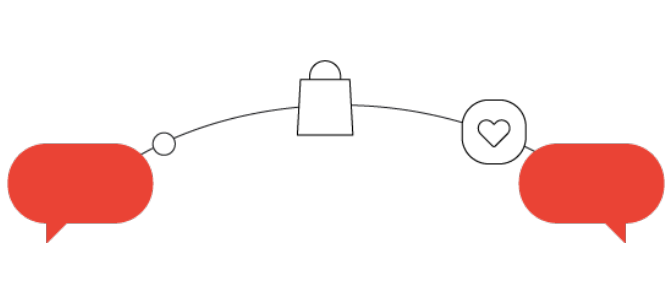
1

Don't let language be a barrier.
Engage your global audience with a full language experience that conveys your brand, reputation and trustworthiness. This might entail having translation options for your web content, or adopting voice assistance to make interactions easier for your customers, regardless of literacy levels.



In 2020, Starbucks opened a store in South Korea that focused on inclusive design, such as contactless speech-to-text voice recognition at the till, a braille menu, and digital signage to help consumers keep track of their orders. Staff members also received customized training and a basic course in Korean Sign Language.

Google's Multitask Unified Model (MUM) has the potential to break down language barriers by transferring knowledge across languages. MUM can learn from sources in a foreign language and use those insights to find the most relevant results in your preferred language.



Google Meet has launched live translated captions to help video calls be more global and inclusive. This equalizes information sharing, learning, and collaboration.

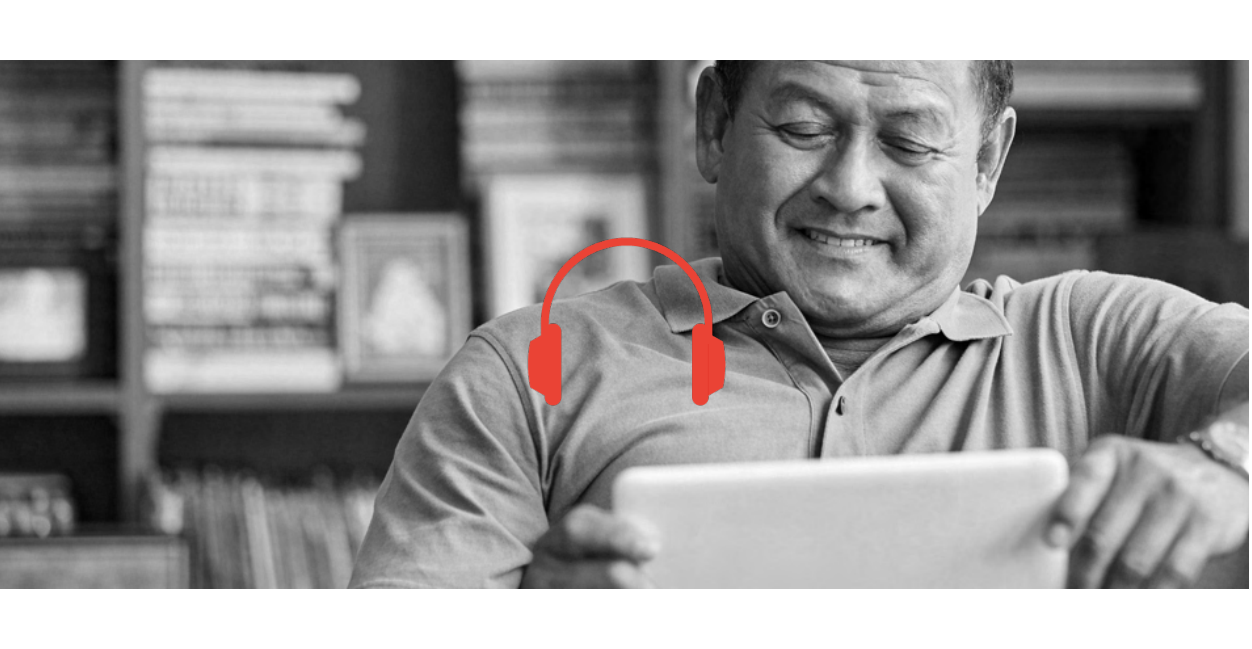
2

Help close technical, financial, and accessibility gaps.

Keep in mind that your quest for operational efficiency and digital transformation isn't leaving some of your customers behind. Not all users will have the same level of digitally savvy, especially as more new users come online.

In fact, many new internet users still struggle with basic tasks, especially the elderly. Among the 11.3% of Malaysians who are non-internet users, 51.8% were reported to be aged 60 and above, with many claiming they were "too old to learn."[9]

Look at your engagement metrics as indications of how your online platforms or services are used. By paying attention to potential drop-off points, you can get insights on how to improve not least the onboarding experience for customers, but also create ongoing learning moments.



Wagely is a financial wellness app that aims to reduce financial stress for low- and middle-income employees in Indonesia by providing access to earned wages before payday.

In 2021, Grab started a grassroots strategy to realize financial inclusion in Indonesia by empowering sellers and the unbanked with access to financial products and services.

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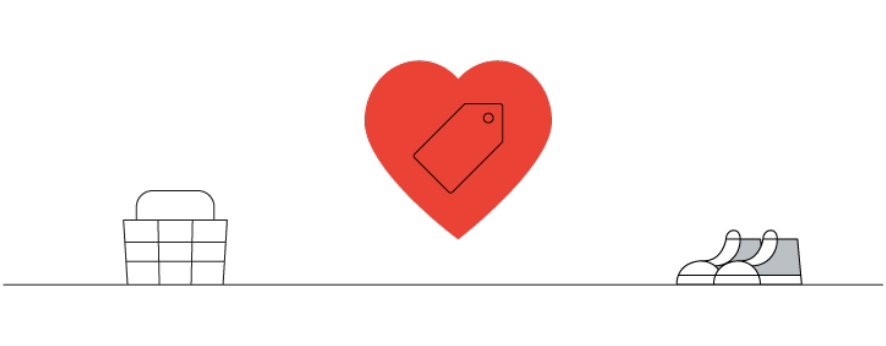
2 Take a bigger stand

Consumers are drawn to brands that focus on the "we" over the "me." While 63% of consumers surveyed were more attracted to "brands that focus on making the world a better place," only 37% said they preferred "brands that focus on making me a better person." The same survey found that 86% of respondents expect brands to act beyond their product or business, suggesting that people are increasingly looking for brands that focus on contributing to society and the rest of the world.

1

Stand for something bigger than profits.
It's time to redefine success in business and build for a more inclusive and sustainable economy. Brands need to speak up and act beyond their traditional business boundaries, for both consumers and employees.

For example, when Malaysia was hit by a disastrous flood in late 2021, prompting desperate victims to steal food from local mart Mydin Mart, the chain's Managing Director issued a statement granting permission to those who had stolen for the sake of survival.[10]



Honda, the Japan-based automaker, is creating an in-shoe navigation system designed to help people with blindness or low vision. This is an extension of their usual products, but in line with their vision statement to bring joy by expanding life's potential, advancing mobility, and improving people's daily lives.

2

Build inclusive marketing strategies that benefit people and your bottom line.
Consumers are 4.5X more likely to buy from a brand if it addresses human rights, and 3.5X more likely if it takes on economic inequality. As marketers, we are in a unique position to drive authentic and meaningful change, and it starts with the teams we build and the stories we tell. Get inspired by tips for inclusive marketing best practices.

more likely to buy if a brand addresses human rights

4.5x

Singapore-based digital telco Circles.Life has unveiled a data plan that enables customers to choose who to include in their family plan, and it acknowledges various kinds of non-traditional families, including single-parent and divorced families.

In April 2021, Kao announced it would stop using the words "whitening," "lightening," and "bihaku" (beautiful white) in its product marketing.

Sources:Sources:
All Google Search data points included in this report are from Google Trends, Sep 2019 - Aug 2020 vs. Sep 2020 - Aug 2021, unless otherwise indicated.

[8] Khazanah Research Institute, "An inclusive and future-proof digital society is key to Malaysia's digital transformation," June 2021.
[9] Malaysian Communications And Multimedia Commission, Internet Users Survey, 2020.
[10] www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/12/756615/mydin-boss-take-if-its-survival-nsttv