

# TRAJECTORY

15 Trends to Watch in 2020

Trajection 2020/1

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SIGNAL

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## Introduction

2020: a fresh start?

Maybe. The UK is finally heading for the exit door of the European Union while the world's attention turns to November and the Democrat challenge to Donald Trump. Gen Z fill out the 18-24 cohort as citizens, consumers and voters while the groundwork is laid for technology infrastructure that could both revolutionise consumers lives and spark a trade war or cyber conflict.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. At home, the UK is at a crossroads but with the chance to remember what full term governments and political stability feels like. As politicians look to settle the narrative the country continues to bicker as cultural issues polarise and divide. The 'them and us' sentiment that characterised the downturn and austerity – a modern blitz spirit that saw consumers adopt a mentality that saw the downtrodden 'us' take on the greed and negligence of a corporate and institutional 'them' – has given way to greater fractiousness and division.

Abroad, the world can welcome 2020 with a sense of cautious optimism. With the first stage of Brexit complete the EU can look to its other challenges – economic, demographic and political – while advanced markets the world over can expect economic growth that surpasses that of recent years. While the global rebalancing of wealth from advanced to emerging markets might slow the major emerging nations consolidate power in other ways – best typified by Beijing's bullish stance over 5G and Western brands' fear that might disrupt commercial interests in Asia.

Beset by these geopolitical and macroeconomic forces and facing a divided, angry, listless public what can brands do? Lean in. Some brands – like Netflix fighting an abortion law in Georgia, or Amazon facing down ICE protesters in New York – will find themselves in moral and political battles they could not have predicted. Others will look to the data to find those debates in which their audience welcomes an authentic corporate voice.

This battle for the future has myriad implications for brands, businesses, organisations and policymakers around the world. In this report we identify 15 key trends it is essential to monitor over the next 12 months.

## The Trends

Area	Trend
POLITICAL	Contest to Consensus
	Political Brands: Evolution
	Brands in the age of Beijing
	Not the Economy (stupid)
ECONOMIC	G20 Recovery
	Emerging Growth Slows
	Consumer Confidence Reinvented
SOCIAL	No End to the Culture War
	Us vs. Us
	Polarised Ethics
	Broadening CSR
TECH	Big Tech Under Pressure
	Don't Believe the Hype
	5G: A Battle for the Future
	The Future Is Here If You Look For It

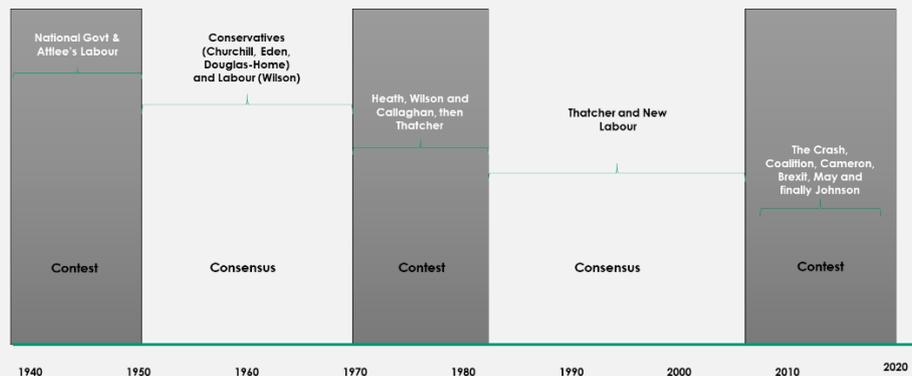
## Politics

### 1. Contest to Consensus

Finally, a majority. Whatever your political views – how you voted, or whether you voted in the December general election – the result suggested a different era for politics. Short term, focus has unsurprisingly been on how we finally have a parliament prepared to nod through a Brexit deal – but long term we could see this parliament the first of many operating with stable majorities.

This is a trend for the decade but will have impacts this year. Gone will be the sight of governments lurching from constitutional crisis to constitutional crisis, of powerless, leaders in name only PMs and the sense that the country could end up in one of several different economic and political scenarios within a few months. We may even optimistically anticipate longer term policymaking and cognisance of the grand challenges the UK faces politically, socially and economically.

True stability will rely on something of a political consensus emerging. Although a distant memory, the postwar history of UK politics suggests this is not fantasy.



Source: *Trajectory*

The first example is the postwar consensus that emerged – not after Labour's victory in 1945 but after the Conservatives took office in the 1950s and did not challenge the principles of Keynesian economics and extension of services. This broke down in the 1970s but a new, neoliberal consensus was first created by Thatcher and then solidified by New Labour, who did not reverse the underlying free market principles.

The last decade has similarly been characterised by contest and battles for the future. Johnson's majority creates the foundation for an end to this contest. The early shots in the Labour leadership contest suggests that the opposition too will move on: witness the relentless focus on Leave voters and left behind heartlands rather than metropolitan liberals and the brief flirtations with a 'rejoin' message that were swiftly abandoned.

Could 2020 be the start of a new year of political stability? If it is, businesses will welcome the consensus, even if they disagree with the policy.

#### Further reading on Signal

- [Has Something Changed? Politics and Society](#)
- [The Values Deciding GE2019](#)

## 2. Political Brands: Evolution

Since 2018 we have been monitoring and highlighting the ways in which brands must – and are – wading into political debates in a way to connect with audiences and drive meaning. This year, that relationship will evolve as brands find themselves not just wading into political debates but in the midst of arguments about government policy.

This evolution takes two forms.

The first involves where businesses choose to locate, or where they do business, and the political context of these regions. A prominent example of this phenomenon – a company facing scrutiny for where it does business on the basis of political policy – comes from Georgia in the United States, a state which offered tax breaks to businesses like Netflix for producing content in the state and contributing to the economy. However, as Georgia signed the controversial 'heartbeat' abortion bill into law last April, Netflix found themselves under significant pressure from around the globe to stop producing films and television in the state should the law come into effect, pledging to help the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) fight the legislation in court in order to protect the rights of their employees...as well as their global image.

The second involves businesses for whom governments, or government agencies, are a client. Again, we must look to the United States to see this process in action, and to criticism faced by Amazon Web Services – [the web-hosting arm of Amazon's business, and one which hosts nearly half of the world's public-cloud infrastructure market](#) – for hosting the web services of government agencies that facilitate immigrant deportations, most notably, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Amazon faced intense scrutiny over the relationship, with the business's own staff [staging internal protests](#), and [citizens staging rallies outside their operations centres across the United States](#). The impacts on AWS and Amazon in this instance were relatively limited – these businesses are perhaps as close to integral to the running of society as we know it as they can get – but for smaller, less robust entities, there are important lessons.

Increasingly, businesses must not only navigate their political positioning, but also the policy of any public bodies that they might consider working with.

### **Further reading on Signal**

- [The End of the People: Trends Presentation](#)
- [Brands in the Place of Trump](#)
- [Hybrid Government: a new challenge for brands](#)

### 3. Brands in the Age of Beijing

Since Donald Trump emerged as a political force in 2016, we have written regularly about an emerging trend that we called 'Brands in the Age of Trump'; a process in which businesses have been forced to take political positions on issues as consumers' political attitudes have become more polarised. With more consumers on the left, more on the right, and the centre vacated, brands that are politically passive risk alienating everyone.

In 2019, a new spin on this trend emerged, one which hints at the growing cultural influence of China and illustrates the extent to which we have truly become a global village; '[Brands in the Age of Beijing](#)'.

The trend describes the way in which the attitudes, beliefs or sensibilities of those in China – the world's largest consumer market – come to influence the way in which those outside of China live their lives.

In the UK, the most famous example of Chinese influence affecting the activities of a UK business is that of Mesut Özil's, a professional football player employed by Arsenal, who, in tweeting his support of the Muslim Uighur population in China, managed to raise the ire of the Chinese government. The tweet had significant implications for his employer, with the Chinese state broadcaster removing Arsenal's matches from broadcast schedules, and the club distancing themselves from Özil's politics despite not commenting when another of their players criticised Boris Johnson in the build up to December's General Election.

This was not an isolated incident. A similar controversy took place in October, with a tweet supporting the actions of pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong by the manager of the Houston Rockets, Daryl Morey, resulting in every NBA game being pulled from Chinese television schedules. Months later, the NBA was still frozen out of its largest market outside of the United States.

For global corporations looking to do business with the largest market of consumers on earth, there is a clear message. Do what you can to establish meaning at home – take a political stance, commit to becoming carbon neutral, support a cause – but do not mess with China.

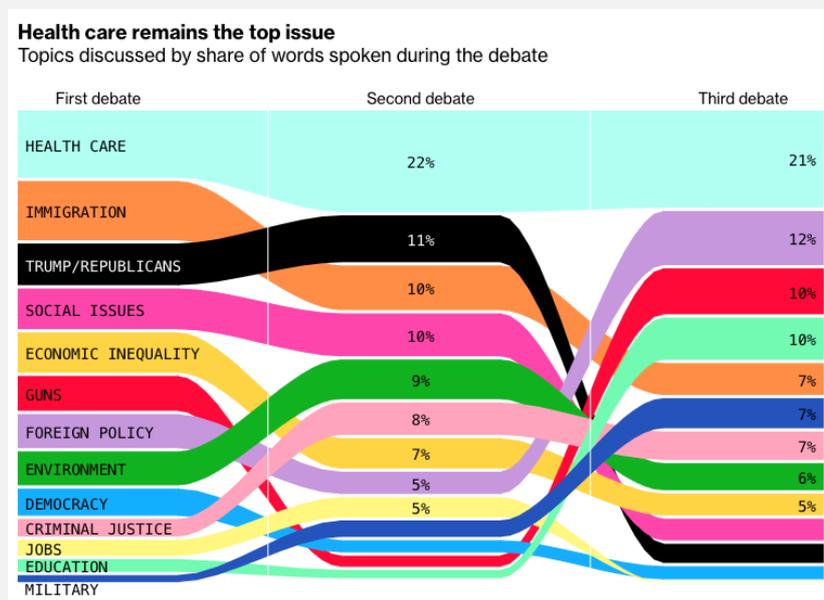
#### **Further reading on Signal**

- [Mesut Ozil, China and Brands in Beijing](#)
- [Geopolitics and consumption in China](#)
- [Is sport a force for good?](#)

#### 4. Not the Economy (stupid)

The recent UK General Election – much like the early exchanges in the Democratic primary debates in the US – were characterised by the curious absence of the economy. A few decades on from the infamous strategic slogan of the 1992 presidential election, are we about to witness an era of politics where debates don't start and end with the financial bottom line?

The deviation here is from a decade in which the economy loomed large over every democratic set-piece as a result of the deepest downturn and slowest recovery in living memory. Trump's particular characteristics and Brexit's cultural divisions emerged as these pressures were starting to ease – meaning that in 2019 the discussion focussed on relationships with the wider world, public service provision and identity. The graphic below, produced by Bloomberg (the news outlet, rather than the Democrat candidate) after the third primary debate shows just how much the field aren't talking about the main issue.



Source: Bloomberg, September 2019

But this will need to change. Trump will have one, very clear throughline in his re-election campaign: the US economy, which is stronger than for a decade or more under his watch. Trump was elected with negative ratings but economic confidence: his first term in office has suggested those who put their faith in him have been rewarded. The Democrat challenger will need a strong economic challenge or will have to rely on other factors continuing to weigh more.

In the UK, with the first stage of Brexit done attention will turn to measuring its success. Economic indicators will be vital KPIs in this assessment but not the only ones. As with the original vote, identity, autonomy and nostalgia will continue to weigh heavily on popular evaluations of Brexit.

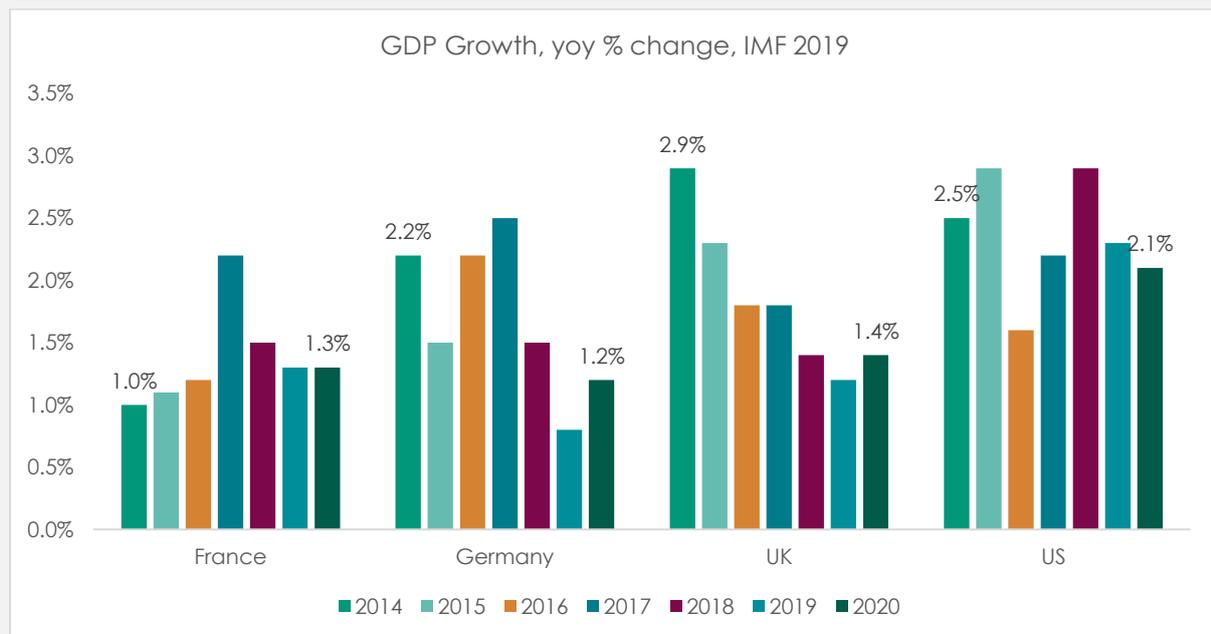
#### Further reading on Signal

- [Trends Breakfast: The US Election 2020](#)
- [GE2019: Why is no one talking about the economy?](#)

## Economics

### 5. G20 Recovery

Whisper it quietly, but there's reason to be optimistic about 2020 – at least in terms of macro-economic indicators. The latest forecasts from the IMF suggest that of the G20 group of major global economies, 13 can expect better growth than in 2019 and only one, Argentina, can expect negative growth. Overall, the average rate of growth among G20 nations is set to be 2.2% this year, up from 1.5% in 2019.



Source: IMF WEO Oct 2019

This time last year economic projections – including ours – were sounding a more cautious note, with talk of inverted bond yield curves, rising debt and stagnant growth. Those risks still remain, but with a more favourable macroeconomic picture it is legitimate to forecast an altogether rosier decade.

#### Further reading on Signal

- [The Wellbeing budget: a new bottom line?](#)
- [Public disengagement from Brexit and the Economy](#)
- [Trends Breakfast: Fragmentation](#)

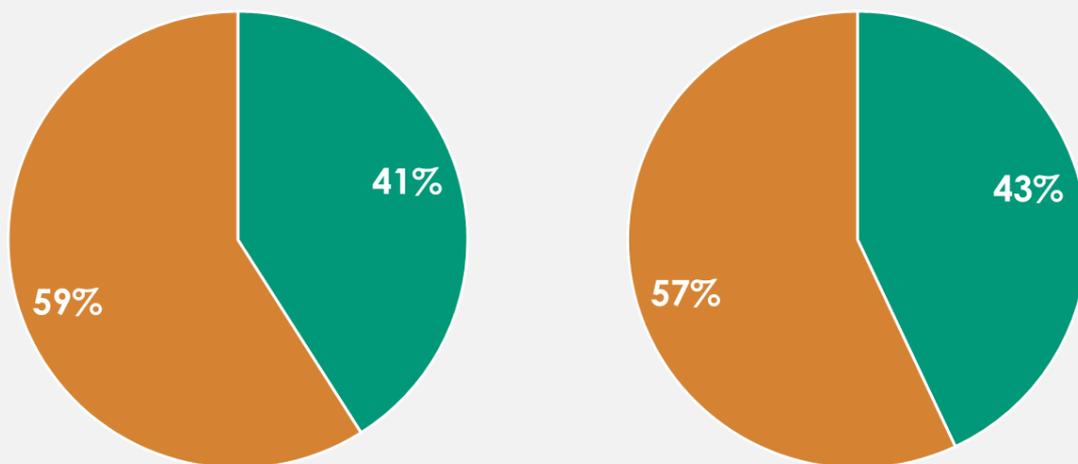
## 6. Emerging Growth Slows

The other side of this global macroeconomic coin is the picture in major emerging markets. For the first 20 years of this century these markets – led by BRIC powerhouses Brazil, Russia, India and China – were the engine room of global growth, enjoying rapid industrialisation and rocketing GDP.

At the turn of the century, advanced economies held 80% of global GDP – a massive imbalance. At the start of the century's third decade, that has slipped to 60%. Hardly equitable, but a significant rebalancing. What's more, while only 14% of growth came from emerging markets in the 1990s 59% of it did in the last decade.

Source of 'extra' global GDP, 2010-2019

Source of 'extra' global GDP, 2019-2023



■ Advanced economies ■ Emerging economies ■ Advanced economies ■ Emerging economies

Source: IMF 2019/Trajectory

This isn't going into reverse but stronger growth from the major advanced markets slows this rebalancing. Over the next few years the proportion of global growth sourced from these markets will edge down as advanced economies solidify their position.

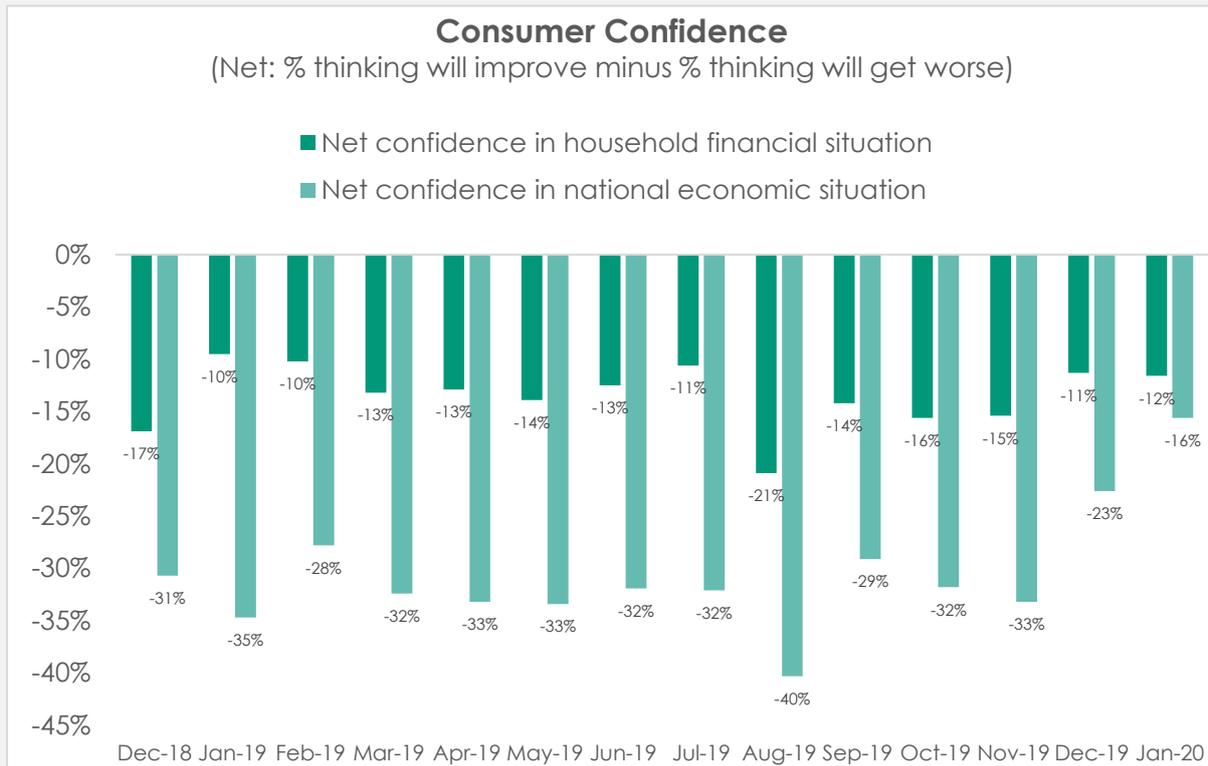
### Further reading on Signal

- [Report: The New Consumer Class](#)
- [The Global Spectrum of Optimism](#)
- [Populism and Values](#)

## 7. Consumer confidence reinvented

In 2020, as in 2019 – and 2018 for that matter – headline consumer confidence tells a very clear story. That story is a downbeat one – consumers have been in a recessionary mood for two years, without the recession.

As a headline indicator, this has its limits. If consumer confidence moves from -20% to -15% does that mean consumers are more positive about the economy, or simply less negative? How does this marginal decrease in pessimism translate into other aspects of consumer sentiment and behaviour? In providing very broad brush strokes it hides a multitude.



Source: Trajectory, *The Optimism Index 2018-2020*

In 2020 we'll be taking a deeper look at consumer confidence, starting with the analysis below, which includes five distinct segments:

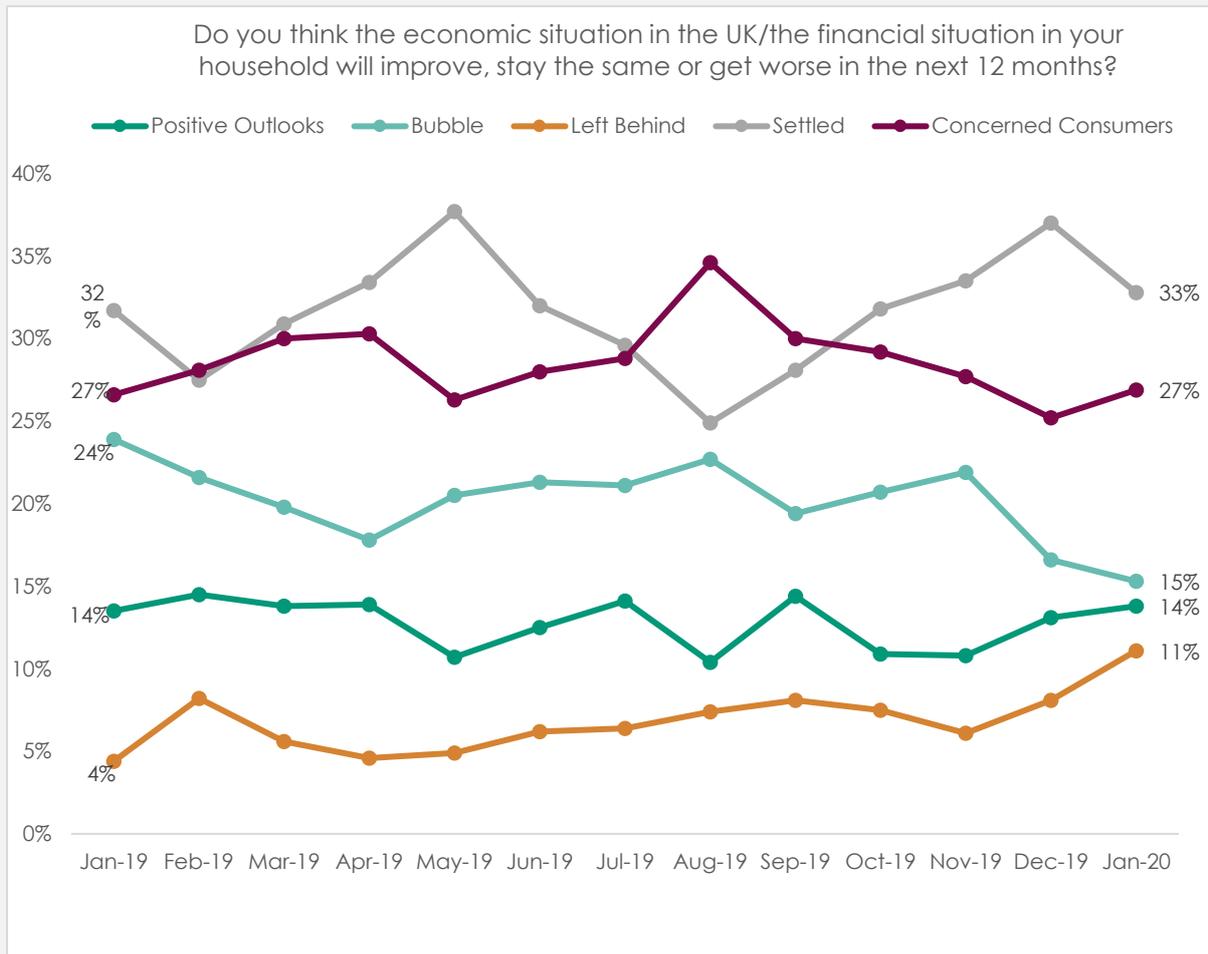
**Positive Outlooks:** those who think both their own finances and the economy will improve in the next year

**The Bubble:** those who expect the economy to get worse, but their own finances to be unaffected

**Settled:** those expecting no change to either their own finances or the economy

**Left Behind:** those who think the economy will improve but don't expect to be better off themselves

**Concerned Consumers:** those who think that both the economy and their own finances will decline



Source: Trajectory, *The Optimism Index 2018-2020*

This new slant on consumer confidence reveals some distinctive differences with the headlines. While the overall figures suggest an uptick for confidence the deeper investigation reveals that the growing groups are the Concerned Consumers and the Left Behinds – which suggests our recessionary mindset may have deeper roots than expected.

#### **Further reading on Signal**

- [The Optimism Index: January 2020](#)
- [Anticipating adversity: consumers braced for Brexit](#)
- [The rise and rise of Discretionary Thrift](#)

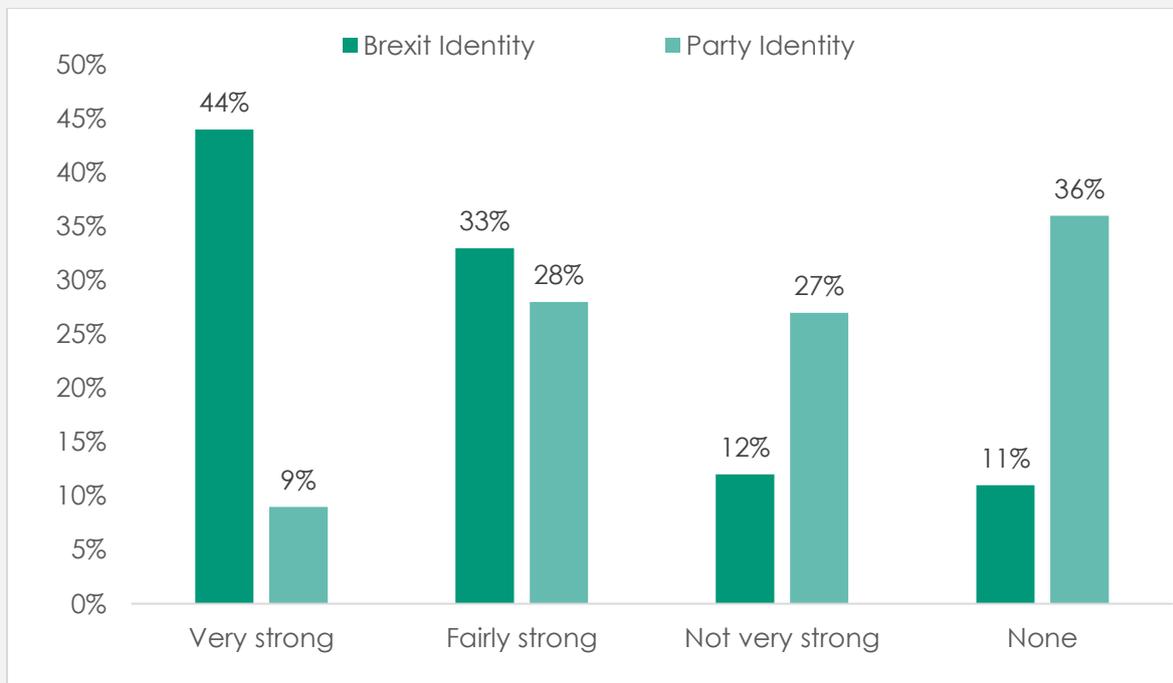
## Social

### 8. No End to the Culture War

The UK's departure from the EU is confirmed: the matter of 'if' is settled, 'how' is quite clear too – the only remaining question is what the UK's future relationship with the EU and wider world will be after December 2020 when the transition period ends.

There is hope – [encapsulated in this tweet by pundit Matthew Goodwin](#) – that this draws a line under a remarkably fractious and divisive period. Politically, he may be right, but socially there is no prospect of an end to the culture war fuelled by the Brexit divide.

The chart below illustrates why. Strength of feeling over Brexit goes deeper than opinions or attitudes – it is at the heart of our identities. 77% of us have a strong attachment to either Remain or Leave, dwarfing the 37% who feel that way about a political party.



Source: *What UK Thinks*, John Curtice, 2018

By way of evidence, witness the litany of news moments generated in the first few weeks of 2020 – well after the question of Brexit was settled:

- [Laurence Fox saying he is bored of discussions of racism](#)
- [Sajid Javid setting out the government's priorities for negotiations](#)
- [The campaign for Big Ben to Bong on Brexit day](#)
- [Labour deputy leadership candidates refusing to sign antisemitism pledge](#)
- [Durham Miner's president suggesting Tory MPs should avoid the gala if they don't want to get beaten up](#)
- [Counter terrorism police labelling environment protesters as terrorists](#)
- [Terry Gilliam 'slamming' MeToo](#)

These examples have varying connections to Brexit – some have no direct link at all – but all are examples of deep cultural divide that the EU referendum revealed and entrenched. It is not going away.

### **Further reading on Signal**

- [The British Archipelago: Fragmentation and the Culture Wars](#)
- [Trends Breakfast: The Quantum Generation](#)
- [Polls and Polarisation](#)

## **9. Us vs. Us**

This year, the long standing trend 'Them and Us' will weaken as 'Us vs. Us' takes its place.

Them and Us has its roots in the downturn – as consumers were hit by financial pressures that had many causes: politicians, institutions and businesses in and out of the financial sector attracted consumer ire. This was reinforced by a slew of institutional scandals (between the MPs expenses scandal in 2009 and the VW emissions cover-up in 2014 virtually every institution and economy sector was affected) and an accelerating decline of deference. In qualitative research at the time UK consumers described bargain hunting behaviours that were motivated by more than just finances: consumers were enjoying 'getting something back' from those that had wronged them – energy companies, banks, supermarkets and anyone else taking their money.

This oppositional attitude arguable peaked in 2018. In December that year O2 lost network coverage for a day. They offered compensation to those affected, but in a gesture of seasonal goodwill they asked their customers where that compensation should go: donate it all to charity or reimburse each individual customer credit of around 90p. The majority of customers voted for the 90p compensation, rather than charity – if everyone had voted for charity, the donation would have been more than £1m. If a business had displayed that level of self-interest they would have been crucified.

In 2019, as Brexit started to look less likely and the culture war intensified, the Them and Us dichotomy was replaced with a new divide: Us vs. Us. Rather than use online or offline forums to challenge institutions and politicians we are increasingly using them to challenge each other. For one example, [witness the junior lawyer suspended from Leigh Day](#) when, after asking a question of Tory candidates on a public debate, he was doxxed, revealing a sarcastic joke about Hitler.

As another example, witness [this video](#) of a woman haranguing Boris Johnson as he does a walkabout in Doncaster. A citizen confronting a senior politician is an established pastime; unique about this encounter is that other citizens start heckling the woman while she harangues Johnson.

### **Further reading on Signal**

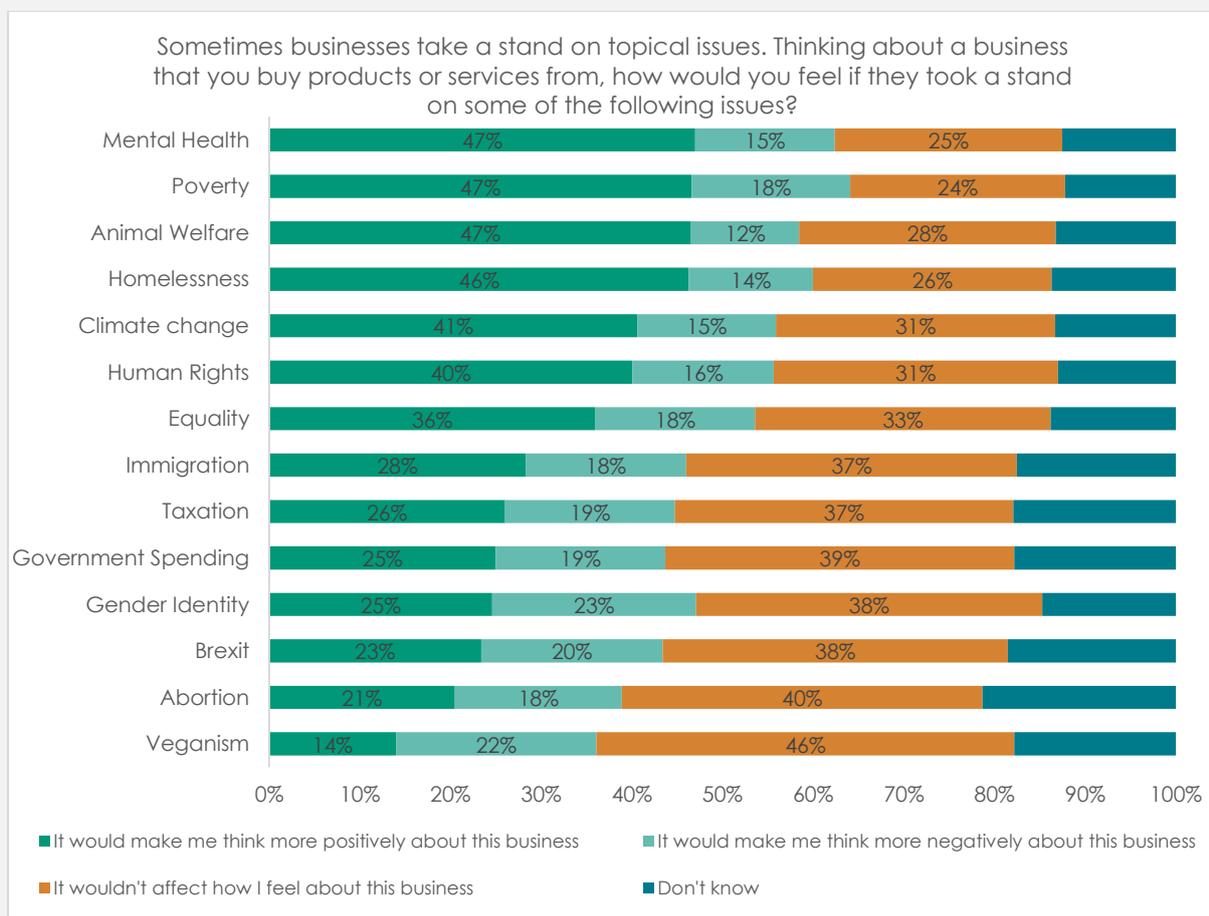
- [Private Vice and Public Scrutiny](#)
- [Trends Breakfast: Truth and Lies](#)

## 10. Polarised ethics

How do brands deal with consumers polarising so sharply in an ever more politically charged environment. To put it bluntly, they need to pick a side. In previous years, some brands have played this field adroitly; think Nike's Colin Kaepernick ad, or Gillette's reinvention in the post #MeToo era.

The success of these campaigns is twofold. First, they communicate meaning with a generation of consumers that are more politically engaged than previous cohorts. For this generation, politics is part of meaning now: for brands to be meaningful they need to be political. Secondly, they polarise. Nike's campaign attracted as much opprobrium as support and the sight of people burning their Nike gear in protest was fantastic news for Nike.

Not all campaigns are right for every brand. Nike has a fit with athletics and a history of supporting activist athletes. Pepsi, on the other hand, has no authenticity when it takes on social injustice. But how do brands pick a side?



Source: Trajectory, *The Optimism Index* Dec 2019

The data above explores how consumers would feel if a business they buy from was to take a stand on a variety of socio-political issues. It clearly demonstrates that there are four issues (Mental Health, Poverty, Animal Welfare and Homelessness) in which consumers would most welcome a corporate voice. On the other hand, there are a handful of issues – Brexit, Veganism, Gender Identity – in which more than a fifth of consumers would actively reject a corporate voice.

But the most welcome issues are not necessarily the most polarising – or the ones which are of most value to a brand. Brands must pick issues which are both important to their audience but also polarising: lean into the controversy. A fashion campaign that takes a pro-gender diversity slant will be controversial but it will cut through further than an animal welfare one. But tread carefully: these are fast-moving times and authenticity is everything.

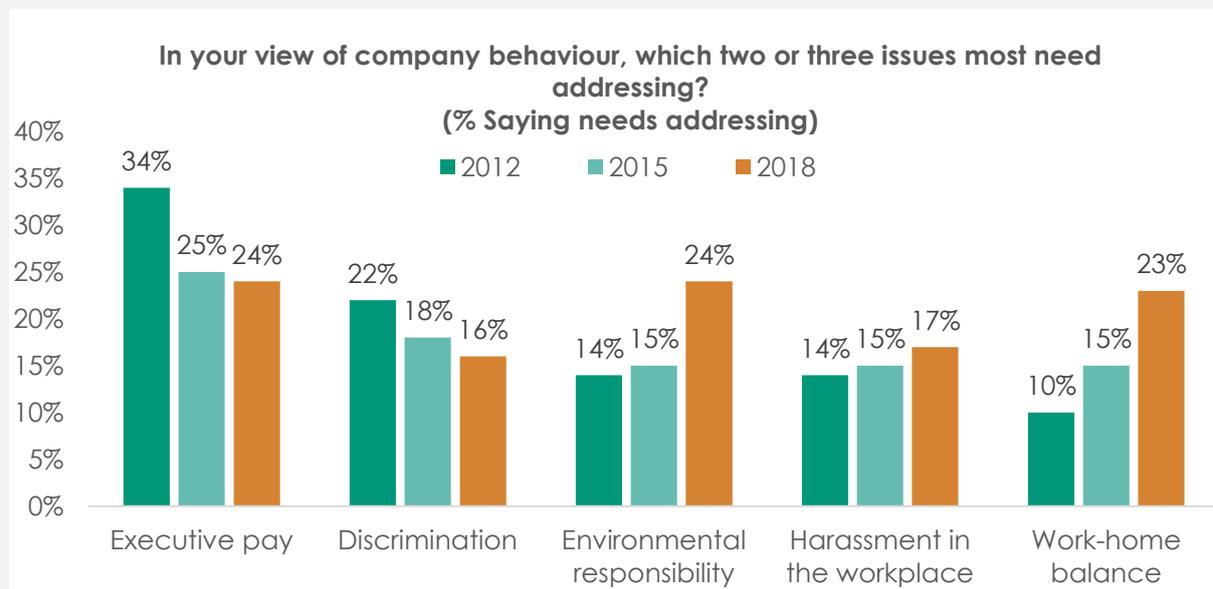
***Further reading on Signal***

- [Report: Political Polarisation and the new rule for brands](#)
- [Brands in the age of Trump: anti-politics?](#)
- [Campaign Magazine: learning the political lesson](#)
- [Gillette play by the new rules](#)

## 11. A Broadening of Corporate Social Responsibility

In the midst of the culture war that is currently raging in Western society, a treacherous environment for businesses has emerged when it comes to corporate social responsibility (CSR). It's never been easier to get 'cancelled' and there's never been so many things to be cancelled for.

As with so many present socioeconomic phenomenon, the roots of the current context of CSR lie in the build-up to, and aftermath of, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Pre-recession, businesses might do ethics on the side, and that ethical focus was likely to be concerned with environmental or 'green' issues. As the effects of the recession took hold – and as the **New Morality** (a form of financially legitimised and defined selfishness) emerged – ethical concerns such as the environment, or of human rights issues like child labour took a backseat as consumers began to focus on the people perceived to have created the mess, with issues like boardroom practice, tax avoidance and supply chain issues increasingly under the microscope.



Source: IBE Attitudes of the British Public to Business Ethics 2018

In the years since, ethical concerns have broadened again, and as groups like Extinction Rebellion, and individuals like Greta Thunberg, have drawn attention to the climate crisis, and as powerful social movements like #MeToo address long-standing social ills, new lines of acceptability are being drawn.

Cross them at your peril.

### Further reading on Signal

- [Complex Diversity: can corporates ever be totally sensitive](#)
- [Fashion: put it all on me](#)
- [Environmental Issues: An opportunity to consolidate relationships with younger consumers](#)

## Technology

### 12. Big Tech Under Pressure

The big tech story for 2020 is likely to be 'Big Tech' itself (a catch-all term for the big five tech companies of Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Google, while sometimes including businesses like Netflix, Uber, Twitter and Spotify).

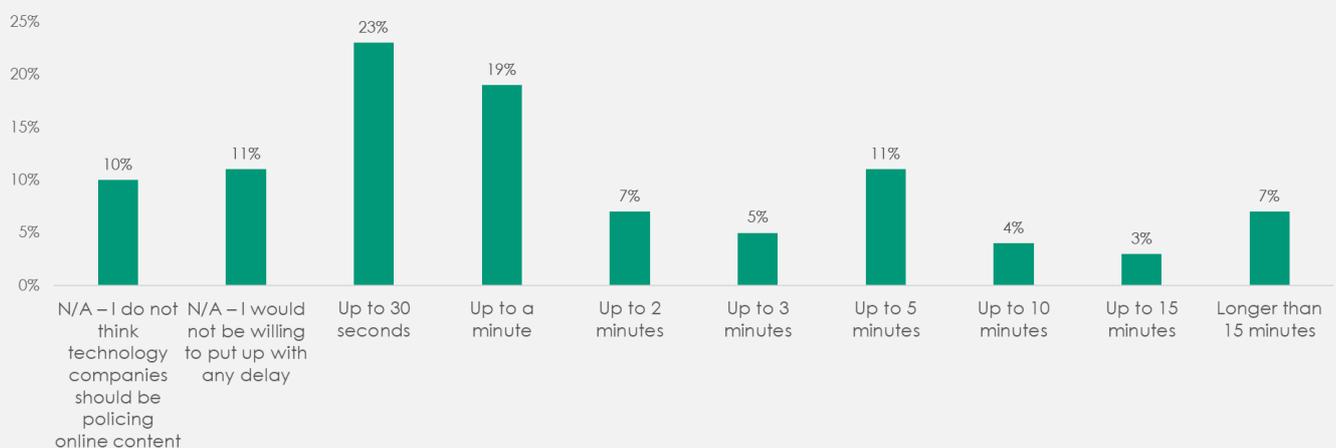
These businesses, and the technologies that they create and distribute, have irreversibly shaped our lives, changing how we perform friendship, how we communicate, how we shop, how we travel and how we entertain ourselves. They have also drastically changed our understanding of concepts like 'fact', of 'privacy' and of 'trust', and as they have done so, they have increasingly drawn scrutiny from politicians, legislators and regulators.

In the UK and Europe, the best example of large-scale tech regulation in recent years has been the implementation of GDPR in May 2018, but in 2020, the conversation is likely to grow, as technology and its regulation becomes an important issue in the United States Presidential Election. [Senator Elizabeth Warren sounded the starting gun on the debate on the break up of Big Tech in March 2019](#) and while she has [fallen behind Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden in primary polling](#), both Sanders and Biden have been highly critical of Big Tech. Sanders is aligned with Warren on the issue, though it is not a flagship policy of his campaign, while Biden has said he is open to, but has stopped short of calling for a break up of Big Tech.

Increasingly, we understand politics, campaigns and elections through the technologies administered by Big Tech. As political candidates in the most widely observed election on earth begin to attack to the very way in which information is disseminated, a conversation about the role of Big Tech, and its regulation, will emerge as the world watches. As politicians debate whether or not Big Tech should be regulated, whether their citizenry wants greater oversight, and whether they'd be willing to accept poorer, or slower services is another story.

Thinking about regulation, technology and Britain's economy, which of the following comes closest to your view?...

How much of a delay would you be willing to put up with between pressing "send" or "post" and your message or post being sent?



Source: Demos/Opinium, 2017; Public Views on Technology/Futures

While 35% of British adults believe that protecting society from harmful content compared to just 23% who believe that freedom of speech should be prioritised, the tolerance of any kind of delay to the sending of a message or the posting of a tweet or Facebook status is staggeringly low. 10% of Brits are opposed entirely to the policing of content while for 53% of the country, a delay of up to a minute would be considered unacceptable.

As the regulation of technology and the businesses that profit from it become prominent political issues, views about regulation are likely to become more polarised and deeply entrenched. This issue will become big in 2020, but it will be around for years to come.

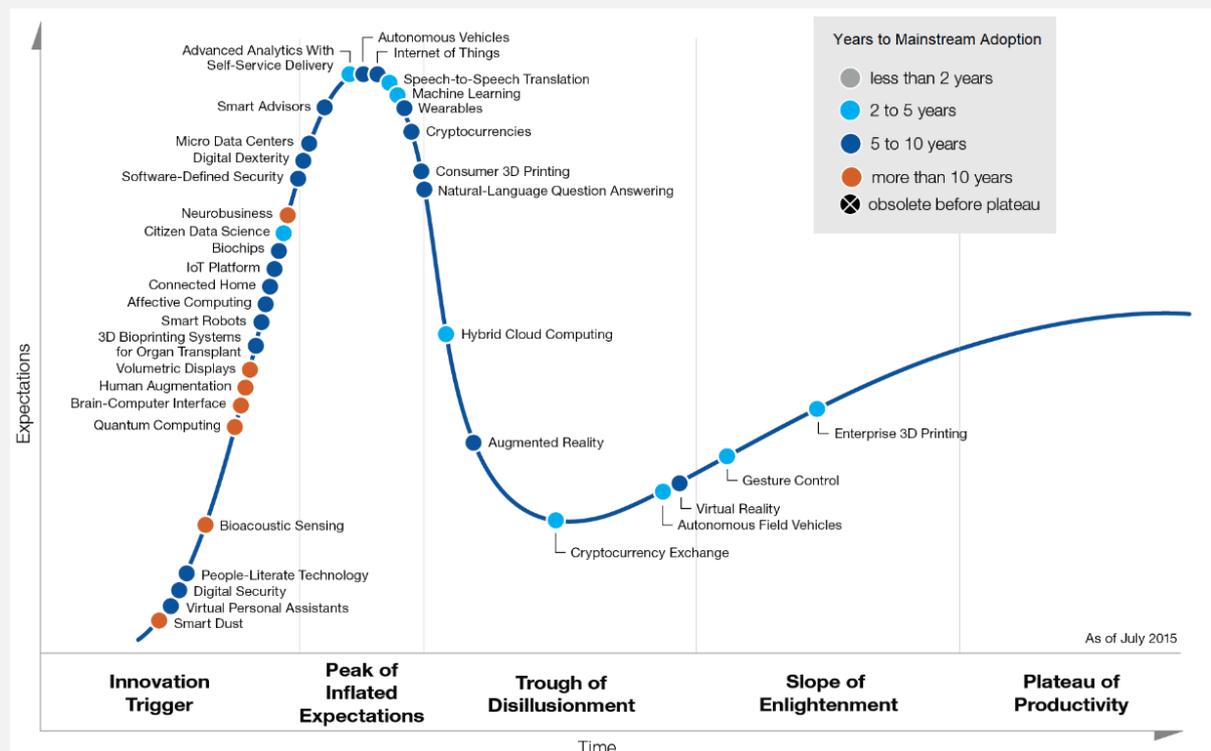
#### ***Further reading on Signal***

- [Breaking up the Tech Giants: Politicians take an interest](#)
- [Transparency: Data and what you do with it](#)
- [Social media and the search for a scapegoat](#)
- [Bearing FAANGS: Amazon's sales and touch times in 2019](#)
- [Trends Breakfast: Is Big Tech about to get smaller?](#)

### 13. Don't Believe the Hype

[As we rounded out 2019 with our November Trends Breakfast](#), we looked, in part, at the nature of prediction, and explored predictions from our past, about our present. One area that we focussed on was the nature of the prediction of technological development, a practice that is perhaps best described in one word, 'hype'.

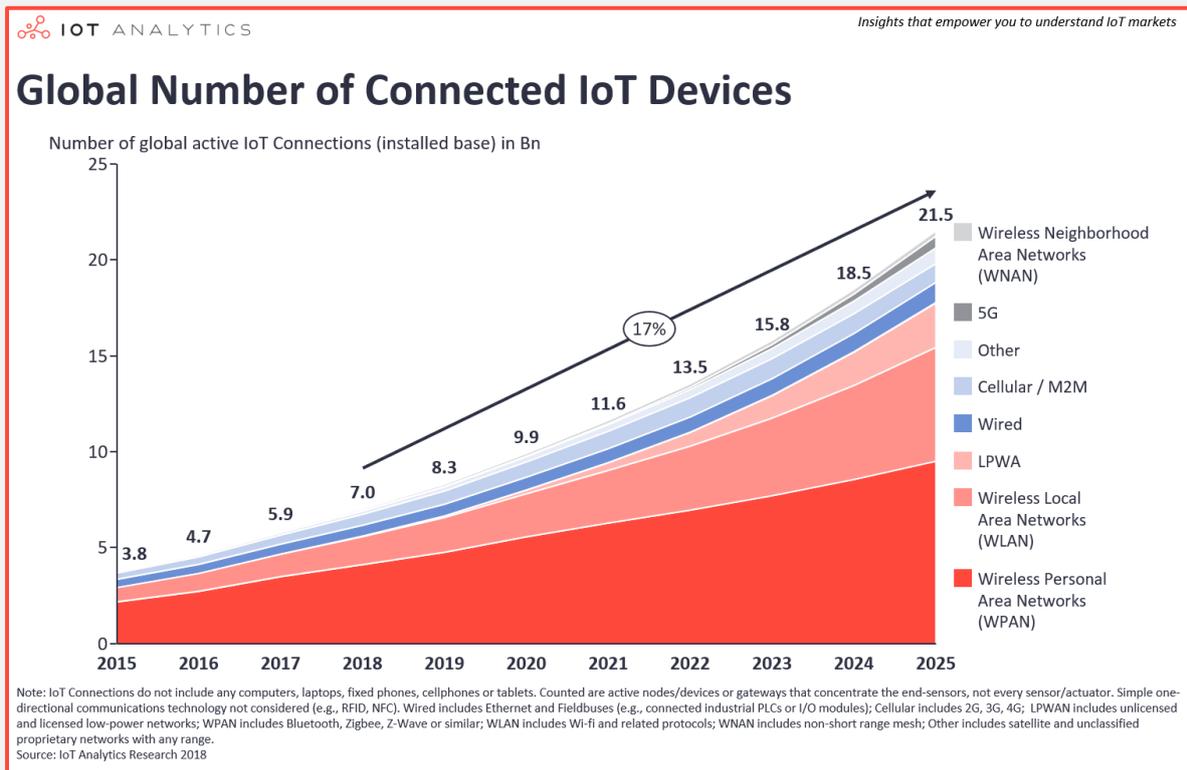
#### Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technology, 2015



The Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging technologies is a framework for understanding technological development, produced by surveying tech executives on their perspectives on emerging technologies. Back in 2015, the tech executives surveyed by Gartner thought that within 5-10 years – so between 2020 and 2025 – above 20% of the target market for each innovation would be using technologies like Consumer 3D printing, Cryptocurrencies, Biochips and 3D Bioprinting for organ transplants.

Suffice to say, these predictions have turned out to be wildly optimistic; the development, and the speed of development, of technology is incredibly difficult to predict, and while its in our nature to be the optimistic about technological developments, they often take far longer to reach mainstream adoption than even the most knowledgeable people in the world on technology anticipate.

This year, you'll be hearing a lot about 5G, and the role that it is set to play in the emergence of 'smart' technologies; Smart Homes, Smart Cities, and automated vehicles. The reality is that while the rollout of 5G is set to begin this year, it's likely to be years, perhaps even a decade, before coverage and adoption reach the level that allow for its most transformative impacts to flourish.



Research by IoT analytics, however, shows that by 2025, the proportion of the IoT set to be supported by 5G technology will be miniscule, with much of the brunt borne by familiar forms of connectivity like WPAN and WLAN. The latest Gartner Hype Cycle puts 5G at two to five years away from mainstream productivity. Don't believe the hype.

### Further reading on Signal

- [Talking About Technology: We fear the worst](#)
- [Finance: Digitalisation, dematerialisation and decentralisation](#)

## 14. 5G – A Battle for the Future

Just because 5G isn't going to reach mainstream adoption in 2020 doesn't mean that it is not an incredibly important issue in the year ahead; we just wouldn't base a short-term business strategy on assumptions of significant consumer adoption in the next 5 years. Deloitte anticipate that in the UK in 2020 there will be up to 3 million shipments of 5G handsets – [a tiny proportion of the 80 million mobile cellular subscriptions held by people in the UK](#) – but to think of 5G in terms of how we currently use mobile phones is to vastly underestimate its potential.

5G will be a foundational technology in the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, with its incredibly low latency crucial to the development of technologies that require faster-than-human responses to stimulus like virtual reality and automated vehicles, and its incredible capacity for data transfer vital to the analysis of data that underpins artificial intelligence and automation.

But this is a long game.

As explained in the previous section, even by 2025, 5G will be carrying a tiny proportion of all device connections, but beyond this time the technology will provide the foundation for Smart Cities, for any form of autonomous mobility, and for the algorithm-driven artificial intelligence that will drive these developments. As a result, the technology will be crucial in nation-states' long-term strategies.

The battle for 5G supremacy is not a battle for having the most handsets sold in 2020, or for consumer adoption by 2025, it is a battle to influence the way the world works in the age of automation. China lead the way in this regard, largely through the activities of Huawei, and the United States – the nation that has given us defining applications of the internet since its inception – find themselves in the unfamiliar position of being behind the 8-ball on technology. Rather than take a back seat to China, the United States have sought to leverage their strategic alliances across the globe in order to create a rival 'sphere of influence'.

The stakes of this battle for the future are incredibly high, and while weekly headlines about Huawei, China and the United States continue to emerge, in 2020 this is an issue of long-term geopolitical strategy among superpowers, rather than a technology on the verge of mass-adoption.

### **Further reading on Signal**

- [Report: The Future of 5G](#)
- [A Glimpse of Cyberdependency](#)

## 15. The Future is Here...If you look for it.

Just because we're hesitant to believe the hype of extremely optimistic forecasts doesn't mean that we're not excited about the way in which technology is being applied in the present and in the immediate future. Over the last year in our client research we've come across a number of innovative technological solutions to problems that sound futuristic but are in fact transforming industries in the here and now.

Technologies do not need to reach mainstream adoption in order to transform entire industries, and the case of additive manufacturing in the hearing aid industry presents a powerful lesson in the adoption of pioneering technologies. Additive manufacturing – the most common form of which is known as 3D printing – remains a relatively small industry, a technology that was much-hyped, but has failed to keep up with overly-optimistic predictions. Additive manufacturing has a long list of pros and cons – but when you can find a product that can take advantage of the benefits, without suffering from the drawbacks, it can be transformative. [From first being implemented in the hearing aid industry, it took just 500 days before the entire industry had implemented 3D printing in production. None of the businesses that stuck to traditional manufacturing survived.](#)

The craziest thing about this anecdote? [It happened in the mid-2000s.](#)

At present, it feels like 5G, artificial intelligence or robotics have not yet reached their potential, but the truth of the matter is that they don't have to for some businesses to thrive by adopting them; for some tasks, and in some industries, the technology has reached a level where it can save money, increase efficiency, and boost profits. When this threshold is reached, implementation is inevitable.

Applying 5G in acute spaces such as [warehouses](#) or ports, creates futuristic 'zones' in which incredibly advanced technologies can be adopted, where humans can be replaced by algorithms and robots, and where business models can be transformed.

When it comes to technologies like 5G, AI or robotics, it could be 10 years or more before they begin to realise their potential as far as society is concerned, but they could help your business realise its potential today.

### **Further reading on Signal**

- [A Reason to be Cheerful: When technology works](#)
- [Trends Breakfast: Back to the Future](#)

# TRAJECTORY

At Trajectory, we strive for a world in which the future is better understood, better planned and less feared. To do this, we use a research-led, data driven approach to produce insights that can help your business to anticipate change.

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