Goldbug



THE ENGAGEMENT INDEX

THE ENGAGEMENT INDEX 2025

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The Engage Age is here.

At Goldbug we're serious about engagement.

In all our comms work, it's the golden thread that binds the strategy at the start, the deliverables in the middle and the measurement at the end.

Ultimately, it creates brand advocacy.

But when we started the conversation with each other about what truly makes engaging content, and how we measure it, there was no satisfying answer.

So we decided to find out for ourselves.

The Engagement Index provides the answers - at least some of them - to the blend of ingredients needed to demand attention and light up audiences.

We loved unpacking the insights - understanding more about how humour works in content, the educational impact of great content teaching us new things, how surprising, unexpected content can make us think differently.

But the most striking pattern we found was how the moments with the highest emotional impact were most engaging for audiences, whether that's external or internal.

The findings in this index are to help all comms professionals understand and measure what makes people stop scrolling and start talking.

If your content isn't currently giving you gold, there might be something in here that can help.

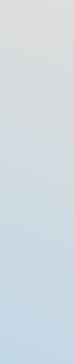
Thanks for taking the time to engage with it.

The Goldbug Partners









PARTNER



ANUDY - PARTNER



The purpose of the Engagement Index is to help communicators measure the engagement 'score' of a piece of content, story or campaign and be able to compare it to the average.

In partnership with research agency Opinium, this index is dedicated to engagement, defining what it means in popular culture.

It's the result of detailed analysis of a sweep of 50 moments over a period of four weeks, across all forms of media. It serves as a barometer of what makes something or a moment 'engaging' – what gets people talking to each other, either online or in person; what makes people tick, makes people care, makes people read, post, create, move and share.

We want the Engagement Index to give brands more freedom to experiment with storytelling to find out what starts that fire in their audience.



THE WINNERS & SINNERS









The result was a table of the most and least engaging moments – as well as the pattern of reasons behind it.

It's also able to give us a benchmark for good engagement.









THE DIAGNOSTICS

WE TESTED

FUNNY

IT'S AMUSING

SURPRISING

IT'S UNEXPECTED

MOVING

IT INSPIRES EMOTION

RELATABLE

IT INSPIRES EMPATHY

TIMELY

IT WAS TOPICAL

SIMPLE

IT WAS EASY TO UNDERSTAND

INFLUENTIAL

IT CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT SOMETHING

EDUCATIONAL

IT TAUGHT ME SOMETHING NEW

The average engagement score from all 50 moments was:

60.6

The average score for the top 10 is:

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66.5

The most engaging moment was:

87.8

The bottom 10 moments averaged at:

51.6

THE TOP 10 IN FULL 87.8 Virgil Van Dijk and Mo Salah surprise six-year-old Isaac who lives with Wolf-Hirschon Syndrome at his school 75.1 Ricky Gervais pays tribute to After Life dog after canine co-star's death 75.1 Storm Eowyn weather warnings 72.7 Wedding groom in tears as daughter leaves him a message before walking down the aisle with her mum 72.4 Steve Sheen's heartbreaking reveals Pauline Quirke from Birds Of A Feather has dementia 71.1 First geriatric polar bear in the highlands receives special care 70.3 Red squirrels in North Yorkshire Traitors finalist Alexander Dragonetti says he's 70.0 "incredibly grateful" after more than £70,000 donated to Mencap 68.1 Ron Croker, the pensioner who fought off Launderette robber with a pair of freshly washed jeans Kate Middleton reveals she is in remission from cancer

THE BOTTOM 10 IN	FULL
Keith Scovell's cake of Claudia Winkleman	49.1
Zara and Sam Thompson split but shock fans by appearing on Micheal McIntyes Big Show	48.8
Linda from The Traitors posing/taking selfie with the big acting billboard in London	47.5
	46.5
Artist Mabel launches track in Soho kitchen house party Mother drags her son out of the queue	46.3
for Bonnie Blue's sex marathon Timothy Chalamet arrives at Bob Dylan movie premier on a Lime Bike	46.2
Trump kiss with Melania fail at inauguration	45.4
Boy band singer Antony Costa shows off his slimline transformation in a new selfie	44.0
Jeff Bezos' fiancée Lauren Sanchez shows off wwunderwear in racy outfit at Trump inauguration	43.7
Tommy Fury fuelling rumours he and Molly-Mae are back together after he's pictured leaving Molly's home	42.0

KEY FINDINGS THE BIG SIX





IT'S EMOTIONAL

Emotionally-led content is rocket fuel for engagement. The moments voted most engaging had twice as much hope and love.



PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE

Relatability is vital – with people responding better to content that reflects who they are.



GET OVER LONDON

The way people consume content has very little bearing - if any - on where in Britain they live.



TALK IS POWER

Moments that get spread through word of mouth are engagement gold dust – the highest rated moments generated the most real-life conversations.

50

MAKE THEM THINK

The most impactful moments are also driven by making audiences think differently or teaching them something new.



HAPPY NOT FUNNY

Not one of the most engaging moments were perceived as funny – 'amusement' is in the bottom half of the table when it comes to emotional drivers.





IT'S EMOTIONAL



Look around - worry, stress, economic hardship, geopolitical turmoil and social unease.

They're all on the up.

The mood of the nation is playing a major role in the type of moments we're more compelled to engage with.

Content, stories and campaigns that bring positivity have become the most engaging, according to our index.

Raising the engagement factor is about moving the audience emotionally.

Leading the emotions people felt about the top moments in the Engagement Index were hope, love and happiness.

The moment that followed the pattern of emotional, moving and hopeful content was engaged with eight times more than content that didn't.

Moments in the top flight of the index have twice as much hope and love as the average - and 50% more happiness.



WIN HEARTS WIN MINDS

How emotional can we really be in our Internal Comms? And how do we do it in a way that fits with our brand, our tone and our culture? Do we talk enough about how content can create an emotional connection at work or are the 'feels' sorely underestimated as a serious metric alongside easier to measure rational benefits?

The Engagement Index is telling us that above all else, emotional connections are the number one drivers of engagement with content."

- Lynne

In an era of relentless bad news and negative headlines, it's clear from the top 10, audiences are craving something positive to engage with.

Authentic 'good' with no agenda or personal gain. For brands this provides a chance to showcase the 'good' you're doing, whether that's through social impact or how you're 'giving back' to wider society or the community.

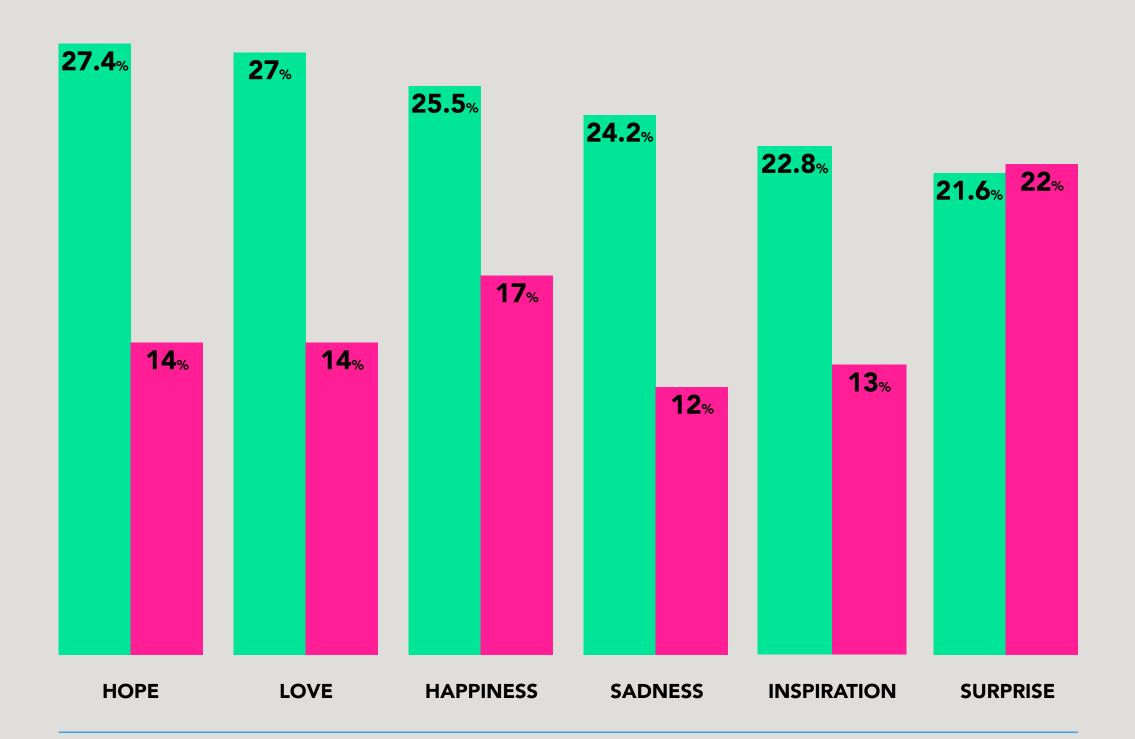
And it's not just audiences; journalists are also seeking out lighter content to contrast balance out the negative news agenda. Audiences need to feel something to engage with it.

For brands, this isn't just about vanity metrics. It provides a huge opportunity. Driving engagement through emotion provides an opportunity for brands that ladders right back to the bottom line. People need to feel an emotional connection with a brand before they buy into it as a regular customer. So creating campaigns and content that are underpinned by emotion will win hearts as well as minds."

- Lara



TOTES EMOSH



TOP 10 MOMENTS

ALL 50 MOMENTS

THE EMOTIONAL DRIVERS OF THE TOP 10 MOMENTS vs. THE OVERALL 50 MOMENTS

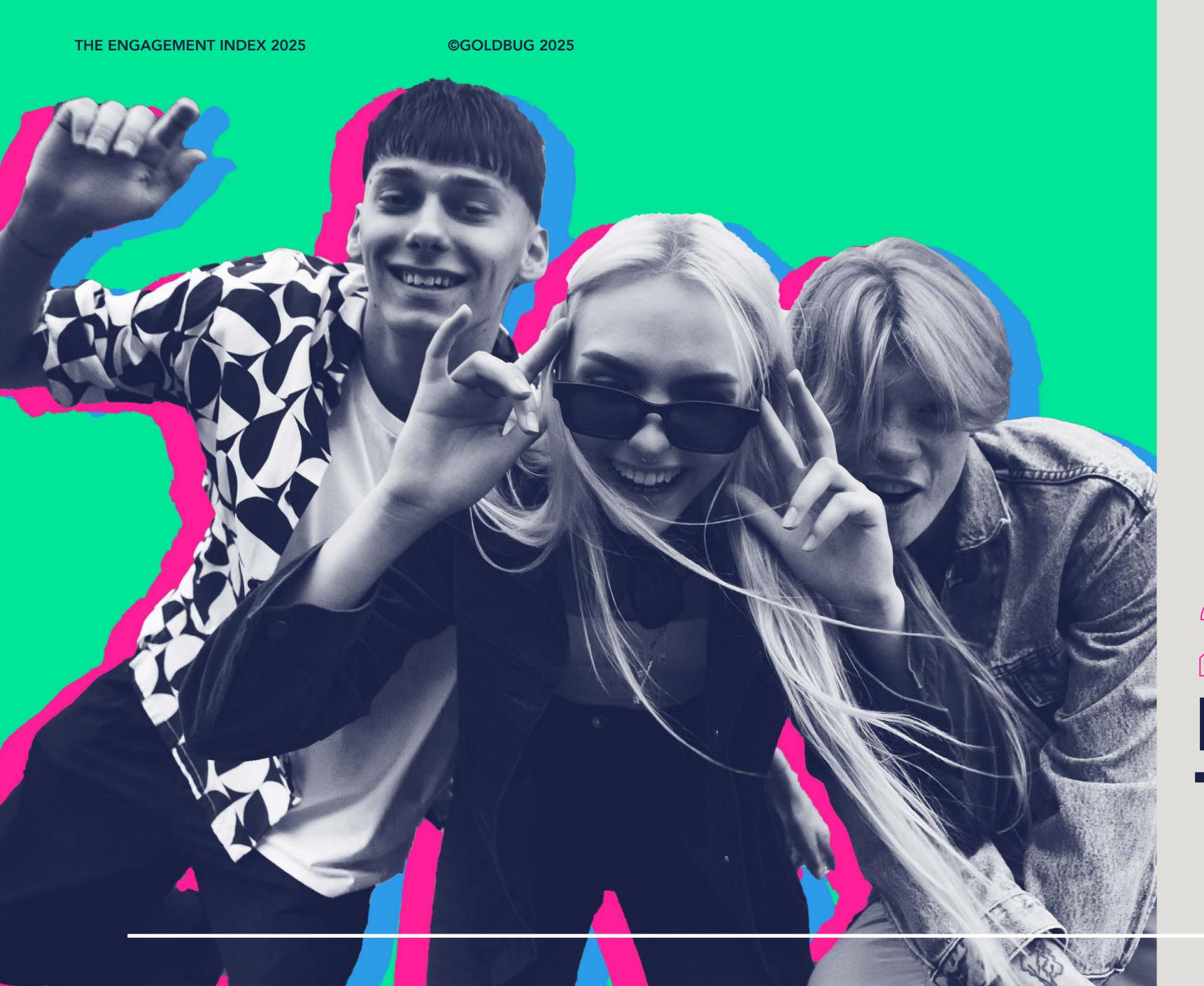
Let's face it, the world is in a tense state at the moment. But hope, it seems, does spring eternal. People are craving it more than ever. It's the antidote to the onslaught.

Our research suggests the most hopeful stories come from situations that seem at first to have limited hope. But like the best story arcs, they come through in the end. We leave feeling that there is some good in the world and that, in turn, perhaps fuels a feeling that some of the bigger global issues can eventually be resolved.

People are seeking solace in smaller moments of hope, love and happiness, which remind us that not everything has gone to hell in a handcart."

- Jason





PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE

3 %

Nearly three quarters of people described the highest scoring moment as relatable.

WS.

This compares to less than a third for the bottom moment.

PUT PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE

The top moments are less about political scandal or celebrity gossip and more about real-life stories. Things that affect people; moments people can identify with.

Six out of the index's top moments were in the top 10 for relatability.



Nearly seven in 10 people found the top 10 relatable.



This compares to less than a half across all 50 moments.

We're always people talking to people

– it's a universal truth of employee
engagement. Getting the balance right
on emotional vs. rational content is
an important element in heading for
advocacy.

We can see from the results of the index that feelings, over everything, are where it's at. Putting people in the middle of your content is a massive part of that. Leading with emotional messaging can feel at odds with a lot of the rational messaging we're often handling in the internal mix, such as financial results, strategic priorities and of course anything that leans into re-org's or redundancies. But should it stop us from considering the engagement factors needed in the tough messaging?

We know that employees can be influenced more by their peers than their leaders, which can in turn build more trust in the workplace than the CEO.

The Engagement Index talks to many emotional elements that really matter when we need to engage our employee audiences with more formal messaging."

- Lynne

Employees can be influenced more by their peers than their leaders

We already know that people are more likely to buy from a brand recommended by a person speaking in the media who they can relate to.

From royalty to rubbish, all of the most engaging moments in our top 10 had one thing in common - they were all about people. Even moments like a red weather warning, or piles of rubbish in the street weren't just about wind speeds and bad smells. They were really about the impact these events on people.

For brands, this provides a huge opportunity for people-led content. Start showcasing your customers and employees as case studies to provide authentic brand advocates who can talk externally about how your product, service or initiative had an impact on them, to drive engagement."

- Lara



GET OVER LONDON



The way people consume and engage with content has very little bearing - if any - on where in Britain they live, the index shows.

Brits, wherever they are, picked the same reasons for engaging with the same moments that we scrutinised.

However, picking the top 10, there were some differences – 78% in London and the South East engaged in some way with the top 10 versus 69% in the rest of the UK.

65% of Londoners engaged with the top content via social media versus 51% of people in the rest of the UK. 30% of Londoners chose to read up more about the subject versus 24% of people outside the capital.



DID COVID SPELL THE END OF THE NORTH

While brands and comms teams increasingly worry about being too London-minded with their output, it is important they do not overcompensate, because the divide in attitudes and preferences between London and the rest of the UK is dwindling.

This makes sense if you consider the mass London exodus to other big cities or out of town places within commuting distance that happened during and after the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Who's to say people respond differently to content in cities like Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Birmingham than they would in London? The divides between the capital and other areas are closing and the Engagement Index shows the same drivers towards engagement wherever you are in the country."

- Sav

As two native Geordies living and working in London for over 20 years, Lynne and I have both witnessed some of the ridiculous "Grim up North" assumptions made about who audiences are and what they'll respond to best. Or simply not put much value on the opinion of audiences beyond the M25. We've seen first-hand a lot of London-centric 'safe bet' media thinking.

Unsurprisingly though, the Engagement Index tells us what we've always known - if content is compelling, people will engage with it whether



they're from London, Nottingham,
Newcastle, or Glasgow. And it's not
just that. There are rich audience
insights to be tapped into. If you're
a brand with regional offices, contact
centres or field-based teams, get to
know them better. They will tell you
how in tune your business really is with
its people.

There's also huge engagement value to be had in putting a regional slant on your comms. Let your people know they're valued with content aimed directly at them - local faces, places and language. Make it genuine and watch it stick. And for external comms, people-centric case studies are hugely effective - but audiences need to see and read about someone they can relate to, not just someone from 'that there London."

- Jason



TALK IS POWER

ALL TALK MORE ACTION

44% — 49%

The most engaging moments in our index were 44% more likely to be passed on through word of mouth than the moments voted least engaging.

True engagement is about creating something that people feel compelled to talk to each other about.

Regardless of whether you're aged 25 or 55, the Engagement Index reveals how 'likes' and 'shares' on social media alone do not equal better engagement.

49% of the top 10 most engaging moments formed parts of daily conversations with friends, family or work colleagues.

This compares to just 34% of the bottom 10 moments.

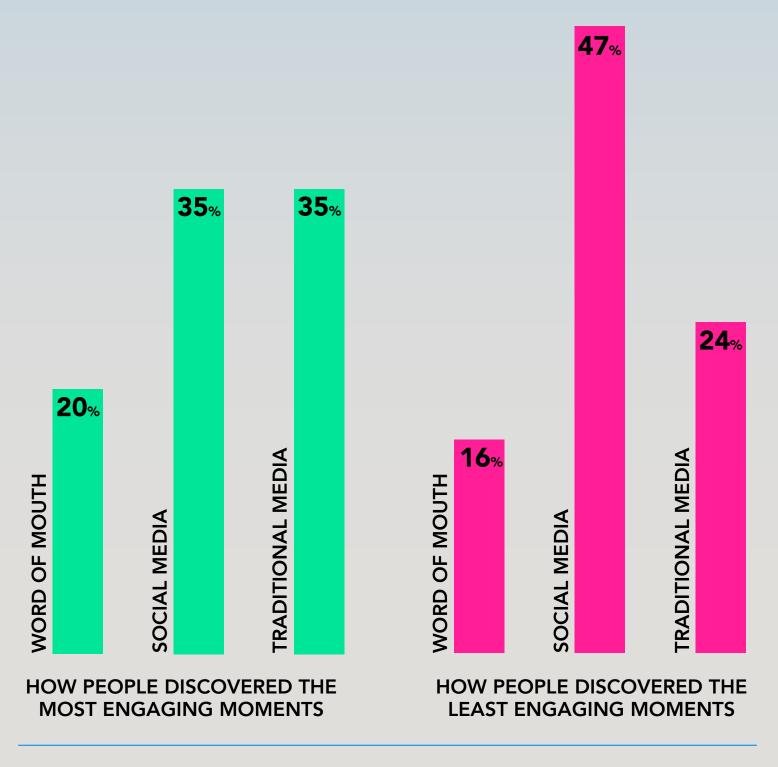


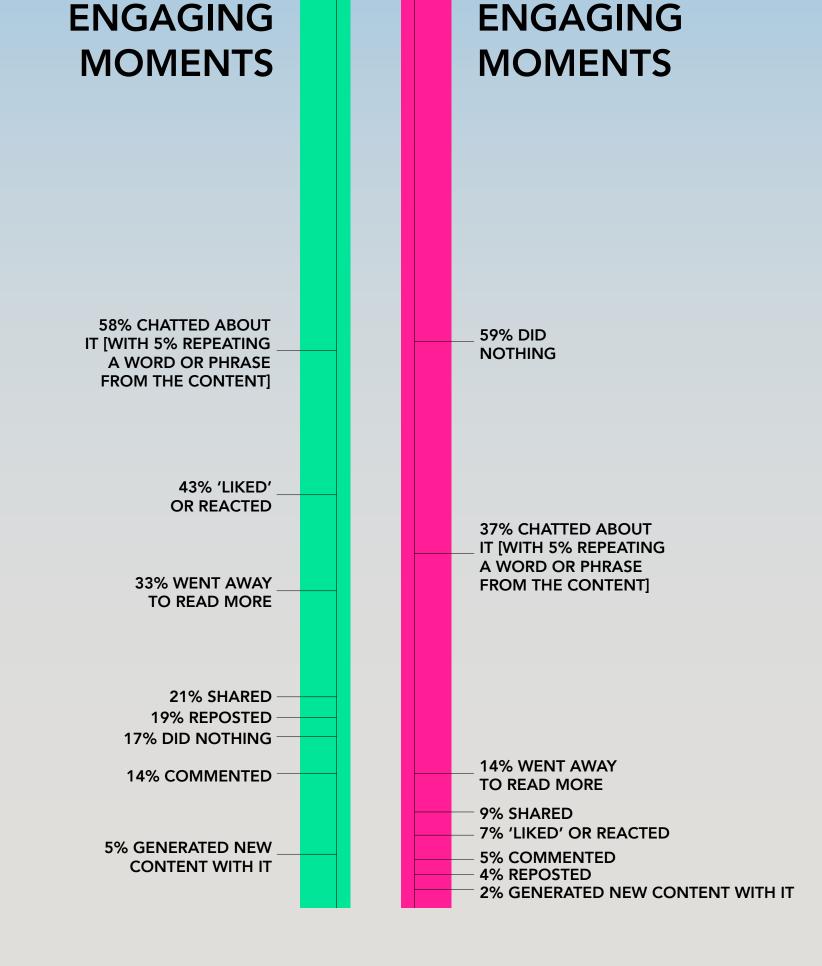
TALKING SOCIAL

Looking at how people first find out about a moment, the ones that deliver the most impact have a healthy ratio of discovery.

20% of people found out about the top 10 moments through word of mouth, 35% through social and 35% through traditional media.

The least engaging moments were more heavily weighted to social media - primarily discovered via social (47%) versus 16% word of mouth and 24% traditional media.





10 MOST

10 LEAST

HOW PEOPLE DISCOVERED THE CONTENT MOMENTS

WHAT PEOPLE DID WITH THE CONTENT MOMENTS



THE ROLE OF

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The main source of 60% of the most engaging moments was traditional media – proving it still packs a punch, even with younger generations.

	GEN Z		MILLENNIALS		GEN X	
	Heard about it on social media	Heard about it through traditional media	Heard about it on social media	Heard about it through traditional media	Heard about it on social media	Heard about it through traditional media
The red weather warning story	41%	28%	28%	42%	13%	71%
The triumph through adversity story	43%	33%	27 %	51%	22%	62%
The feelgood sports story	49%	5%	71%	10%	54%	18%





Wolfgang Riepl was the editor of the biggest-selling newspaper in Nuremberg, Germany in 1913 when he devised a hypothesis that still stands today.

Riepl's Law - as it's now known - is based on new media never entirely replacing existing modes of media and their patterns of usage.

For example, people feared for books when magazines were launched, and they feared for radio when TV came along. The same happened with vinyl records and CDs. And print titles in the digital revolution.

Yet all of these mediums still exist thanks to Riepl's Law.

Word of mouth, according to the Engagement Index, is alive and kicking.

You could argue the age of social media and instant messaging is just the latest instance of the law in action. People still want to chat (as in actually talk using our mouths)."

- Sav

Shhh! Don't tell anyone, but word of mouth is alive and kicking.



It's fascinating to put some science behind litmus tests on storytelling that journalists like me were taught to carry out the moment we stepped into a newsroom."

- Sav

Would this be something you'd talk to your friends about in the pub?

Could you call your gran and explain what's happening and she'd get it straight away?

Has it got legs (as in, it will it run and run)? Is it a talker?

To lift your piece of content or activity out of its original home – whether that's social content, a news page or internal comms channel – and into the engagementsphere, word of mouth is an essential ingredient.

And the only way to truly know about the talkability factor of a campaign is to sound out and test out. Use colleagues, friends, parents, children, people in the street.

Find out from them: Does it spark debate? Does it ignite opinion? Does it change perception or trigger behaviour change? Does it create emotion?





5 MAKE THEM THINK

TEACH THEM SOMETHING NEW

The amount of engagement a moment has is linked to how much the audience is influenced and compelled into action.

Our index provides evidence that the most impactful moments are also driven by Making You Think Differently and Teaching You Something New.

Moments least likely to educate (14%) or change minds (19%) got dramatically lower scores.

It implies the deeper or more thoughtful a moment, the more engaging it is for the audience.

However, this is not enough on its own. Without the emotional drivers, the moments do not achieve scores in the higher end of the index.



Teach you something new?

TOP 10	/5
TOP 10	74
TOP 10	73
	67
	64
	61
	60
TOP 10	60
TOP 10	59
TOP 10	57
	14
	TOP 10 TOP 10 TOP 10

Did the following make you think differently or change your mind about something?

LIVERPOOL	TOP 10	73
POLAR BEARS	TOP 10	73
LOLA YOUNG		67
HARLEM SHAKE IKEA		55
LONDON TEEN HIKES ON UNDERGRO	UND	59
RON CORAKER	TOP 10	54
DRAGONETTI	TOP 10	52
MABEL		54
APPLE - SEVERANCE LAUNCH		54
DRUG CLINIC GLASGOW		50
TRUMP KISS		19



The Engagement Index talks about how great content can teach us something new. It's a brilliant insight to take into your Internal Comms strategy and content planning work.

How can we get our audience to feel curious? Would this help you think differently about challenges you're trying to solve? (Yes). Would a shift in your comms thinking from "tell me something" to "teach me something" have a big impact in how your audience feels? (Absolutely).

Great content can enlighten us, opening our eyes and challenging longheld beliefs. So, think about detractors in your audience - that marginal group often viewed as 'impossible to engage'. A new content direction or style can be a brilliant circuit breaker when you're trying to help an audience move their thinking."

- Lynne

There's an old saying in the news world coined by newspaper magnate Alfred Harmsworth: "When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news."

In a nutshell the most engaging moments tell audiences something they don't know or don't expect to hear, For example, are white van drivers still all men or are you revealing that, actually, 50% of are now women?

The opportunity for better engagement for brands is in finding and working with ideas that challenge stereotypes or look at things through fresh eyes."

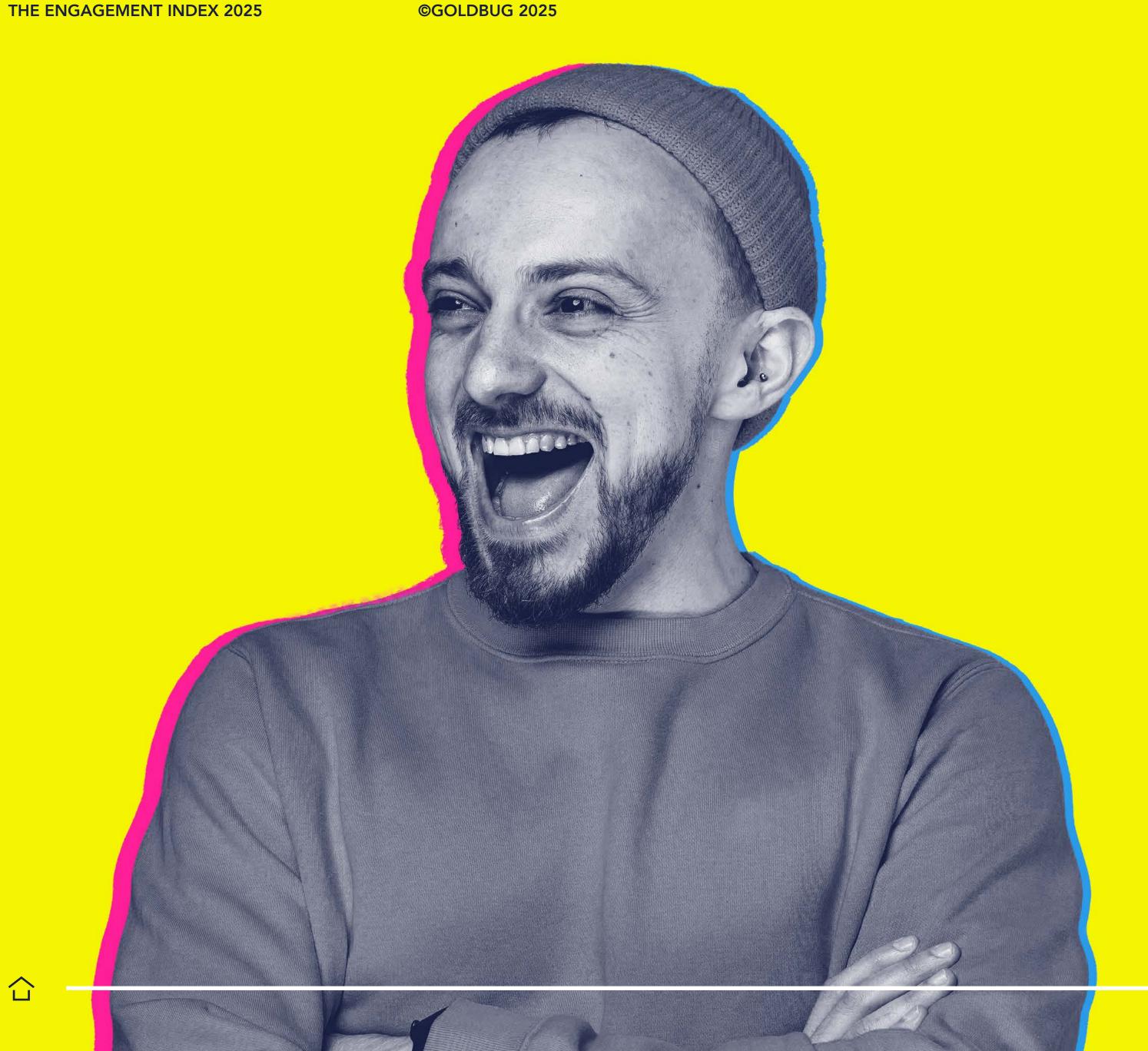
- Lara

When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often.

But if a man bites a dog, that is news."

- Alfred Harmsworth

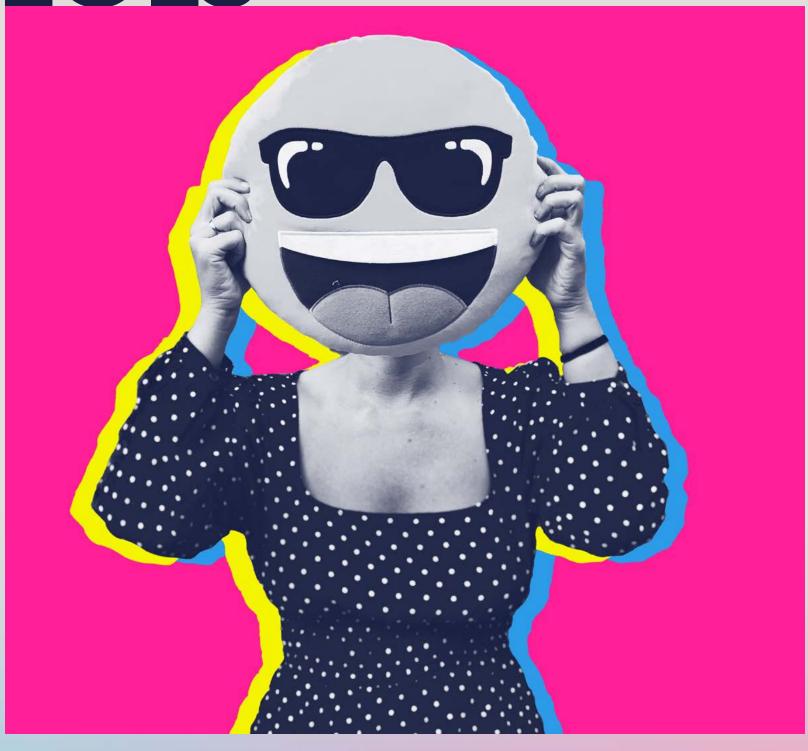






SMILES

TOP LOLS



The moments perceived as 'funny' are less likely to be rated as engaging.

While humour might be a boost to certain elements of engagement, it is not the centre-piece of any of the top moments in the index.

Not one of the Top 10 featured in the top 10 funniest moments, which was made up of a moment on TV show Traitors, social media posts from Dominoes and IKEA and an Apple TV show launch stunt.

When people were asked what emotions they felt by a particular moment, 'amusement' came second behind 'surprise' out of 15 different feelings across all 50 moments.

However, for the most engaging moments, 'amusement' was in the bottom half of emotions, alongside 'disgust' and 'anger'.





MOMENTS VOTED THE FUNNIEST

IKEA DOES THE HARLEM SHAKE - 84%

No16 in the overall Engagement Index

AUSTRALIAN OPEN USES WII-STYLE CHARACTERS TO WORK AROUND BROADCASTING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS - 78%

No15 in the overall Engagement Index

BBC TRAITORS: LINDA TURNING HER HEAD WHEN CLAUDIA SAYS 'TRAITORS' - 76%

No29 in the overall Engagement Index





TOP EMOTIONS FELT BY THE MOST ENGAGING CONTENT:

- 01. HOPE (27%)
- 02. LOVE (27%)
- 03. HAPPINESS (26%)
- 04. SADNESS (24%)
- 05. INSPIRATION (23%)
- 06. SURPRISE (21%)
- 07. COMFORT (16%)
- 08. PRIDE (12%)
- 09. FEAR (9%)
- 10. AMUSEMENT (7%)
- 11. NOSTALGIA (5%)
- 12. ANGER (4%)
- 13. BELONGING (4%)
- 14. SECURITY (3%)
- 15. DISGUST (2%)



The index helps us understand where humour fits on the engagement scale.

Using humour can certainly make content memorable, but does it create lasting engagement? Not always.

Humour is very subjective and can go horribly wrong on the inside, so as a guide, 'being funny' should not be a regular feature on a comms brief. But there may be times any when organisation needs a big LOLs moment, or a brief lends itself to something lighthearted. When it's appropriate and handled by comms pros who can tailor it carefully, it can bring some engaging brevity and energy.

But if this criteria can't be filled, it's best to swerve it, or make it sparing and special to give it a stand-alone moment in the channels."

- Lynne

We're not saying for one moment that you should stop using humour in your comms. Making your audience laugh is a powerful tool. But amusing them without a reason, without a drive to action, means potential missed engagement or worse - backfire.

According to our index, for a better chance at engagement, it's more important to focus on emotions like hope and happiness – giving people a warm feeling inside and get them thinking that way.

For example, BBC One TV show The Traitors created many moments for the index – particularly thanks to contestant Linda's amusing faux pas.

However, out of four differing moments from The Traitors that were put through the index, the stand-out winner was contestant Alexander Dragonetti's appeal for charity Mencap on behalf of his disabled brother. The other three moments scored highly for 'amusement' but Alexander's appeal was the only one to feature in the top 10 of the Engagement Index – purely due to its higher emotional pull.

It was voted over four times as moving, nearly twice as relatable, twice as likely to make people think or behave differently and four times as likely to teach the audience something new compared to the other moments related to that show.

And the main emotional out-take from that moment was happiness.

It proves on a granular scale, that emotion wins and happiness beats just being funny."

- Sav



ANALYSIS THE WINNING MOMENT



ITS THE SON WOT WONIT



A moment featuring a six-year-old Liverpool FC fan who lives with a rare genetic disorder, Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome, took the winning spot for the most engaging moment in the Index from the content analysed.

The video, made by the club, saw its two biggest stars, Virgil Van Dijk and Mo Salah, pick up Isaac Kearney from school along with his parents and take him to a match.

The content hit highly in all of the key driving factors.

99% **MOVING** 96% **EASY TO UNDERSTAND TAUGHT THEM SOMETHING NEW 75% RELATABLE** 73% **MADE THEM THINK DIFFERENTLY** 73% **SURPRISING** 70% **TOPICAL OR TIMELY** 66% **FUNNY** 19%

87.8

ENGAGEMENT

AND IMPACT SCORE

It was eight times more 'moving' than the least engaging moment.

LEADING EMOTIONS

HOPE	56%
LOVE	56%



KEYTAKE OUTS

YOUR ENGAGEMENT INDEX CHECK LIST FOR CREATING GOLD



STEP ONE:

FIND THE POSITIVES

Think hopeful, happy, moving, emotional. Don't be held back by fear of the news agenda or the mood of the business. Identify the positives and focus on them.

STEP FOUR:

KEEP IT CLEAR

Are there too many messages? Are they confusing your campaign? Keep it simple and clear, even if that means sticking to just one message.

STEP TWO:

PUT PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE

People trust their peers and you're more likely to get engagement by using relatable people and content.

STEP FIVE:

AUDIENCE + CHANNELS

Your audience wants to be able to talk about the campaign as well as share it. How can you encourage this behaviour and make it as easy as possible for them to do this?

STEP THREE:

MAKE IT A TALKER

Sense check with people who represent the audience whether this evokes reaction.

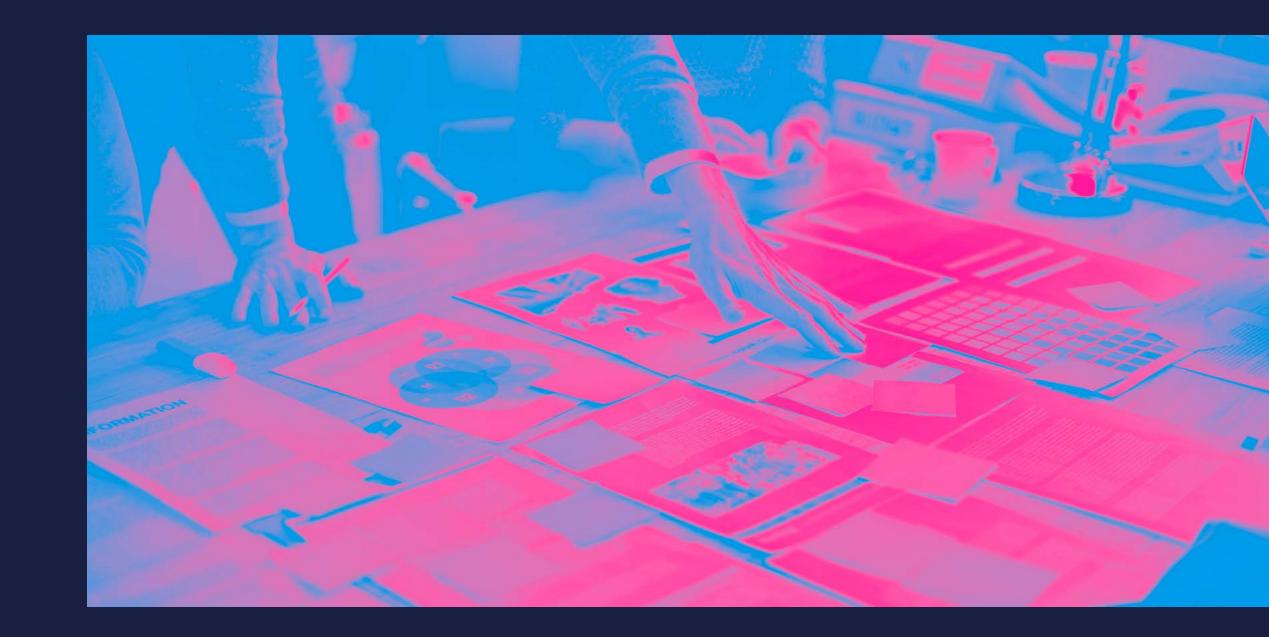
STEP SIX:

TEST AND LEARN

Experiment with dialling up different engagement drivers and work out what gets your audience most interested.



The Engagement Index 2025 © Goldbug 2025





HOW THE ENGAGEMENT INDEX WORKS

Analysis of one whole month's worth of 'moments', using January 2025. Our guardrails on choosing each moment were that they had to have impact, with a balance of proactive, engineered content and organic news, both positive

Each of the 2,000 UK respondents in the research was asked to mark the moments they were aware of, before being shown their known list in pairs in a 'this or that' elimination process.

and negative.

5

We were able to narrow down the Top 10 most recalled moments, then the 'winning' moment, which in turn, was tested against our criteria of diagnostics, alongside two other randomly selected moments from the participant's known list.

We also asked where participants came across the moment, before diving into what they thought was engaging or impactful about it.



CALCULATING ENGAGEMENT

TOP 10 IN AWARENESS

Helped us gauge awareness and select moments to ask follow-up questions on.

Allowed us to determine which moments had the most cut-through across the news and social media noise.

TOP 10 MOST IMPACTFUL

Helped us narrow down the list of most impactful moments in a straightforward way.

Allowed us to keep participants engaged in the survey process without overwhelming them with too many variables.

TOP 10 ENGAGEMENT & IMPACT COMBINED

Helped us clarify our understanding of engagement and impact with a variety of discrete metrics that could build a story.

Allowed us to establish the comparison between the moment that stuck out to respondents the most in contrast to those who haven't cut through as well, giving us robust measures for all 50 moments.

The overall index was calculated by recoding the original four-point endorsement scales into 100 points, where:

1= 0 2 = 33.33 3 = 66.66 4 = 100

The two re-scaled scores were then averaged together, ensuring both Engagement and Impact carry equal weight in the index.

US

We're experts in engagement.

Founded by journalists and clientside brand experts, Goldbug is built differently from other agencies.

We know what makes a story – and why putting people in the middle is essential.

We know how to make employees feel valued - and how to give their brands a distinct, genuine voice.

That is the cornerstone of the way we work: Understanding what makes people care, whether it's employees, brands, customers, or stakeholders.

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