

RECENT TRENDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

In the past year, a number of significant stories involved social media: Facebook lured Snapchat users to Instagram, the president of the United States communicated official policy positions in 140 characters and Apple announced plans to alter the way we interact with our mobile devices.

Next year, social media is poised to create even more disruption as a number of new technological advancements go mainstream, and as social norms related to social media change. Here are the top 10 social media trends to prepare for as 2018 draws near.

1. Rise of augmented reality

At the first-ever event hosted in the Steve Jobs Theater, Apple announced the iPhone 8 and the iPhone X. Both devices incorporate a new chip that allows the phones to provide users with extraordinary augmented reality experiences. While augmented reality will have its initial impact on mobile gaming, it is likely that social media platforms will find ways to incorporate the new technology as well.

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3. Continued investment in influencer marketing

Over 90 percent of marketers who employ an influencer marketing strategy believe it is successful. Companies like North Face, Hubspot and Rolex use social media-based influencer marketing strategies to connect with new audiences and improve engagement with existing audiences.

This year we saw that brands that opted for traditional advertising strategies struggled to connect to social media users. Next year, it is likely that more brands will embrace influencer marketing as a way to connect with audiences who tend to ignore traditional strategies.

4. Focus on Generation Z

A recent study conducted by Goldman Sachs concluded that Generation Z was more valuable to most organizations than millennials. Today, the oldest Gen Zers are 22 years old. They are just beginning to enter the labor force, and will have increased buying power for some time.

Brands will begin to recognize this, and will shift their social media strategies accordingly. Expect great investment in platforms loved by Gen Zers like Snapchat and Instagram.

5. Increasing brand participation in messaging platforms

Over 2.5 billion people use messaging platforms globally, and yet brands are still primarily focused on connecting with consumers on pure social networks. In 2018, expect brands to invest more time and money in connecting with consumers on messaging platforms. Artificial intelligence, voice assistants and chatbots will enable brands to offer personalized shopping experiences on messaging platforms like Messenger, WhatsApp and Kik.

6. Expansion of live streaming

What was once a novel gimmick has become a mainstream part of social media. Today, brands big and small have started using live streaming to capture the attention of followers.

GORUCK, a backpack manufacturer and the organizer of extreme endurance events, is one example of a medium-sized brand that has grown its reach by live streaming compelling content on Facebook. Thousands of followers tuned in to watch 48-hour coverage of a recent endurance race.

In 2018, more brands will begin to realize the power of live streaming, and will incorporate it into their monthly content plans.

7. Rethinking Twitter

Twitter has failed to grow followers significantly in 2017. In fact, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram all have more social media followers. This year, Twitter also lost access to streaming NFL games (Amazon won the rights). In 2018, it is likely that Twitter leadership will aim to rethink how the platform operates.

Possible changes to Twitter include selling the company to private investors, changing the platform to include some subscription element and/or revamping Twitter advertising options, which have fallen behind other platforms.

8. Digital hangouts go mainstream

Houseparty is a video hangout platform used by over one million people each day. It is primarily used by Gen Zers as a way to hang out with friends digitally. The platform is so successful that Facebook is reportedly investigating ways to create a similar functionality within their platform.

We have already seen video become increasingly important on social media, and live video group hangouts are a natural next iteration of this trend. It is conceivable that in 2018, Facebook will announce a similar product to Houseparty that will win over users, just as Instagram's introduction of Stories did.

9. Facebook Spaces goes mainstream

Facebook isn't just interested in live video streaming; they've been working on a project called Spaces that is designed to allow friends to connect in VR. Given that Facebook owns Oculus, a virtual reality hardware and software company, it is no surprise that the social media giant is developing a platform to make use of this new technology.

Facebook is poised to scale Spaces in 2018. When they do, it is likely that it will be the first successful VR social media product at scale.

10. Social platforms embrace stronger governance policies

After a series of controversial decisions during the 2016 presidential election, social media platforms have embraced a more hands-on approach to governing conduct on their platforms. Facebook recently turned over thousands of ads that seem to be connected to Russian meddling, and has invested in new AI and human forms of monitoring.

Given the wide criticism that Facebook and Twitter received during 2017, it is likely that these platforms will embrace codes of conduct and governance policies that protect the brands from future criticism.