

Social media trends: Just an annual echo?

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The beginning of the year always presents a flood of predictions, trends and forecasts from industry experts, opinion leaders and those who want to jump on the bandwagon. After reviewing the plethora of social media trends for 2024, it quickly became evident that much of the thinking is simply an echo of previous years. Familiar themes like authenticity, video, AI, TikTok's rise, and personalisation have been regurgitated as rehashed trends overlooking the essential human element driving them.



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Social media marketers understand what works and generate the most engagement and interest for their brands in the social landscape. There's no shortage of information available to demonstrate the demographics and performance of the various platforms; what tends to be lacking is a deeper dive and an understanding of what influences and drives the shifts.

Shifts in social media are influenced by a combination of evolving user behaviours, technological advancements, and societal dynamics.

Evolving user behaviours

1. Content consumption patterns

People are consuming more content than ever, tallying in excess of five billion internet users worldwide, or 63%+ of the global population. Users' preferences for the type and format of content they consume change over time. For instance, 73% of consumers prefer short-form videos to search for products or services. In comparison, 57% of Gen Z consumers favour short videos for learning about products and services[1].

2. Privacy concerns

Increasing awareness of data privacy issues has made users more cautious about sharing personal information on social media platforms. It's recorded[2] that 79% of global internet users feel they've lost control over their data, with identity theft and fraud listed as the biggest concerns. This has prompted changes in platform policies and user behaviours, such as adjusting privacy settings and using messaging apps with end-to-end encryption.

3. Authenticity and trust

Social media is the main channel for 88% of traffic related to political fake news[3]. While internet users place a higher value on authentic and trustworthy content, 51% cannot decipher the accuracy of information online. Naturally, brands and influencers that are perceived as genuine tend to perform better.

4. Community and niche interests

Users gravitate towards smaller, niche-focused communities within social media platforms that facilitate forming such communities, like Reddit or Discord, which have seen growth.

Technological advancements

1. Algorithm changes

Social media platforms frequently update their algorithms to improve content relevance and user engagement to enable more meaningful interactions. These changes can significantly impact the visibility of content and the overall user experience.

2. AR and VR integration

Consumers want easy, quick, and accurate product information whether they shop online, on mobile devices, or in physical stores. VR and AR brand experiences are the only way to fulfil these preferences, as they break free from physical constraints, offering a convenient shopping environment. These technologies also allow consumers to immerse themselves in products and brands, making this study relevant to the fast-changing distribution and marketing landscape shaped by VR and AR adoption.

3. AI and machine learning

Social media platforms leverage AI and machine learning to enhance content recommendations, detect harmful content, and personalise user experiences. This technology is continuously evolving and shaping how users interact with social media.

4. Ecommerce integration

Also known as 'Social Commerce', where users can discover, share, and purchase products directly within social media platforms, ecommerce integration leverages the power of social networks and user-generated content (UGC) to drive sales and create a seamless shopping experience. People often turn to their social networks for product recommendations, reviews, and inspiration before purchasing. Social commerce capitalises on this trend by providing a platform for brands to engage with their target audience and build trust through authentic UGC. It enables social proof, such as customer reviews, and ratings, and 97% of consumers claim that reviews influence buying decisions[4].

Societal dynamics

1. Cultural and social movements

Social media often catalyses cultural and social movements, amplifying the voices of activists and sparking conversations on important issues. Movements like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #AmINext and #FeesMustFall gained momentum through social media as Hashtag Activism. Approximately 34% of social media users have participated in a group that shares an interest in an issue or cause. 14% have researched protests and/or rallies happening in their area. 14% changed their profile picture to support a cause, and 12% used hashtags about a political or social issue in the past year[5].

2. Political influence

Social media plays a pivotal role in political discourse and campaigns. Most people across 19 countries believe social media is good for democracy in their country, with an average of 57% supporting this view. Singapore has the highest support, with around three-quarters of its population favouring social media's positive impact on democracy[6].

3. Global events

According to Statista, up to 50% of Gen Z and 44% of Millennials use social media daily to get their news. However, individuals from all generations reported using social media for news, and major global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have accelerated the adoption of social media for communication, information dissemination, and community

building.

4. Demographic changes

The user base of social media platforms is not static; it evolves with changes in demographics, e.g. the increasing use of social media by older generations influences the content and tone of discussions. More than 30% of the social media users are 27- 42, which includes mostly Millennials.

2024 brings both continuity and change. While many trends echo those of previous years, it's essential to recognise that the heart of these shifts lies in the complex interplay of evolving user behaviours, technological advancements, and societal dynamics. Understanding and adapting to these multifaceted forces will be the key to success for brands, influencers, and marketers in the years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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