

News brands boosted as social media habits alter

INSIGHT

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Whether we like it or not, we have become a nation of social media addicts, with as much as 90pc of Irish people dipping in and out on a daily basis according to new research from the media agency MediaCom Ireland.

But fear not, the research, which was carried out by iReach, shows that we may be becoming tired of incessantly checking our social media channels – as just 39pc of us check our feeds several times a day, down from 48pc last year.

This decline in frequency is also reflected in data from GroupM – which MediaCom is part of – that shows the amount of time we spend using social media on a daily basis has

dropped year-on-year from 96 minutes in 2016 to 87 minutes this year.

There could be many reasons for this. Recent fake news controversies will not have helped. It's also possible that social media users are tiring of the crappy ad experience that has been foisted upon them. Or it may simply be that the novelty of social media is finally wearing thin and people are now getting tired of posting pictures of themselves and their loved ones while others are simply getting fed up looking at them. Or, indeed, all of the above.

Now in its second year, the research, which is called Social Nation, shows that Facebook is still the most popular and is used by 69pc of us at least once a day. It's followed by the private social channels WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (both of which are owned by Facebook) on 46pc and 38pc respectively. Snapchat, meanwhile, continues its ascendancy in the social media firmament, rising from 16pc in 2016 to 24pc in 2017. It's followed by Instagram – also owned by Facebook – up 15pc to 23pc.

Spare a thought for poor old Twitter, which continues to languish at around 22pc, unchanged on 2016. Even Google+, which has been written off more times than CNN has been by Donald Trump (on Twitter), managed to boost its popularity, rising ever so modestly from 14pc in 2016 to 19pc this year.

Drilling down further into the research, however, there appears to be a shift in attitudes towards our news consumption. Indeed, one of the most interesting findings is that 38pc of social media users disagree that it's one of their main sources of news, up from 33pc the previous year. The flip side of this, however, is that 41pc say that social media still provides them with their main source of news, although this is down from 44pc in 2016.

Similarly, when it came to sports news – yes, sport is a big thing on social media – 50pc disagreed that social media was their main source of news, up from 42pc the previous year.

Although the research doesn't dwell on the reasons behind these attitudinal shifts, one can reasonably assume that, given the sheer depth and breadth of their offerings, traditional news brands still hold considerable clout and trust amongst consumers when it comes to news.

While the research also examines other habits like online search and second-screening, it's the section on brands and advertising that will probably make marketers choke on their cornflakes.

Hands up who remembers the early days of social media when we were told that these emerging platforms would allow brands engage with consumers in a deep and meaningful way and that consumers would share this online love with their network of friends?

Well, according to the MediaCom research, 80pc of social media users follow brands just to keep an eye on their latest offerings while 72pc do so to get special offers. Some 65pc do it to enter competitions. However, just 24pc of social media users follow brands with a view to sharing their experiences.

Given that the growth in social media platforms like Facebook has been fuelled by massive amounts of advertising revenue flowing into their coffers, just 52pc of social media users actually notice these ads while 48pc would appear to be oblivious to them.

Yes, the American retailer John Wanamaker's famous quote, "half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half", springs to mind.

Not only that, but the research also notes that 61pc find the advertising that's served up to them to be annoying while 44pc of them use ad-blockers to stop receiving any kind of digital advertising when they are online. Just 38pc of social media users, meanwhile, are prepared to share personal data with brands in exchange for an incentive.

"What we appear to be seeing is Irish people questioning the trade-off between the benefits of social media versus the control over how they share their personal information with these big companies. And as they do this, they are adjusting their behaviour in and across social platforms. As this behaviour evolves, marketers should continue to be entertaining, useful and relevant in these channels," says Ian McGrath, managing director of MediaCom Ireland.

McGrath may be right but if these underlying trends continue, trust continues to be eroded and users ignoring the advertising, then who would bet on at least one, if not more, of them going the way of the dodo?

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