

The highs and lows of social media marketing in 2018

[SOCIAL MEDIA](#) [THOUGHT LEADERSHIP](#)

MICHELLE GOODALL, ONLINE PR AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONSULTANT, ECONSULTANCY 25 MAY 2018

Jeff Semones, MediaCom's Head of Social, was one of four experts who contributed to the 2018 Econsultancy report.

Between GDPR regulations, Facebook's US congressional and European parliament hearings, evolving social media platform features and formats, the development of AI powered experiences, 'fake news' and fake influence, there is a great deal keeping us social media strategists busy at the moment.

There is much to consider as budgets are scrutinised and marketers need to show business value through ROI or improved efficiency.

Against this backdrop, I've been speaking to social media experts from the US and UK who

have kindly contributed to our updated [Social Media Platforms Overview Best Practice Guide](#).

We couldn't have chosen a busier or more disruptive time to update the guide, which highlights the major social media platform features, as well as providing statistics and options available to marketers when developing a paid, owned and earned strategic approach to social media marketing and communications.

Our experts are from agency, vendor and client-side, and span B2B, B2C and many industries and sectors. All were open and frank about the social media trends and opportunities and the challenges that they are contending with.

Here's a flavour of just four of the topics covered in the [190+ page guide](#), with quotes from a few of our global experts.

No slowdown in social media growth, no significant new social media entrants

The global growth of social media is documented by We Are Social's immensely helpful [Global Digital Reports](#).

According to the Global Digital Report 2018, there are 3.196 billion active social media users, which equals 42% of the global population. This is an increase of 5% from 2017.

In spite of this growth in users, the past 2-3 years have seen relative stagnation in the realm of social media. While there have been flurries of excitement around ad-free social networks such as Vero, Ello and Mastodon, ultimately, none of these platforms have expanded beyond early tech adopters into mass user adoption.

Helen Wood, Planning Director at H&K Strategies, noted that Snapchat appears to be the most vulnerable amongst the big players due to a combination of many of its features being emulated in Facebook products, and the challenges of audience scale for advertisers.

“It’s hard to see any new platform really breaking through and if a new platform does pop up, it’s highly likely that Facebook will find a way to somehow include the new popular functionality within their platform mix.

Snapchat, I’d say, is the one platform at risk; while it’s probably the most innovative and boundary-pushing of the big platforms, there’s no denying it’s struggling.”

[Influencer marketing](#) – fake influence and fake metrics

As we see significant shifts in budgets towards working with influencers, we’ve moved from a period of throwing money around to a more considered and strategic approach. Nano- and [micro-influencers](#) are now as likely to be a part of an influencer campaign as the top- or mid-tier social media influencers.

The ease with which [fake followers and engagement can be bought](#) has also ushered in a need to understand fraud and to ensure due diligence.

A influencer reputation tipping point was reached when vlogger Logan Paul was [vilified in early 2018](#) for posting a video of a man who had committed suicide in Aokighara, Japan, in an area known as the “suicide forest”.

YouTube took action by suspending advertising on his channels. They have subsequently published guidelines and applied sanctions to content producers and influencers who pursue a ‘drive to the bottom’. Ethically and morally dubious approaches to content in the pursuit of subscribers and viewers is increasingly being called out and stamped out.

Jeff Semones, Managing Partner, Head of Social Media, MediaCom spoke to me about the change in focus on improving influencer choice and the possible sacrifice of reach for relevance.

We also discussed the importance of metrics that ensure influencers metrics and data is interrogated by those with significant spend and that influencers are not left to be able to

“grade their own homework”.

“Based on an uptick in budget allocations coupled with surging client interest across all verticals, we anticipate continued growth in marketers’ investment in influencer marketing. We expect brands to increase overall spend as well as adoption over the next 12 to 18 months.

As the influencer space continues to mature and evolve, there’s a growing need for standardized metrics and unbiased reporting. We predict the emergence of a new crop of service providers that will deliver objective and unbiased reporting, from a third-party perspective that’s currently lacking.

This will address the current situation where creators (aka influencers) are essentially grading their own homework. Eventually, the industry will also adopt a set of agreed upon, standardized metrics to aid efficacy reporting.”

Bots and artificial intelligence in social media

In the guide, we consider recent the growth in bots and AI on social platforms, as well as their applications in customer experience, brand experience and marketing communications.

The consensus is that it’s an exciting time. We are at the very early stages of developing social AI experiences and figuring out a few things.

Developing new workflows, and reviewing AI applications through a both an ethical and human lens, are both critical.

If there is one important thing that we have learned through social media, it is that technology can be used for great things such as civil and environmental action, but can amplify the darker side of human nature. Fake news, fake influence, bullying and trolling are

all examples of this.

Unless we underpin our adoption of AI with an ethical framework, we risk not only reactive legislation, but possibly much worse.

Stephen Waddington, Chief Engagement Officer, Ketchum makes this point:

“Ultimately, convincing people to interact with a robot requires a significant change in behaviour but it’s no more significant than previous shifts in technology. There’s also a serious ethical challenge. If a bot creates content that breaches copyright or defames an individual or organisation, who is liable?

We’ve seen time and time again that legislature cannot keep up with the pace of technology, and in particular the internet. We’re at the early stage of the adoption curve of a technology that could prove incredibly exciting.”

Social media data tremors – it’s having a very real impact!

All of our experts spoke of the deep implications of the [Cambridge Analytica/Facebook story](#) on trust between consumers, platforms and advertisers.

All agreed that ethical and regulatory ‘checks and balances’ are very much required to ensure that consumer data is utilised fairly and ethically for marketing purposes and that consumers can take back control of their data.

The line of questioning to Mark Zuckerberg in this week’s European Parliament testimony should give a good indication of how European Governments are focusing on GDPR compliance and will keep platforms such as Facebook firmly in their regulatory sight.

However, many are also concerned for a future where the platforms might self-regulate to the point where they hold back critical data that strategists require for effective measurement and analysis.

Once organisations cannot make effective business cases for social media activity, budgets and resources may be diverted elsewhere.

Mark Frankel, Social Media Editor at BBC News, provided an interesting angle on the impact of platforms being too restrictive with data sharing in the light of the current data compliance issues facing them.

” In many ways there is a fascinating moral/PR battle going on at the moment. Some people are arguing that there is no point being on these social media platforms – they are robbing you of your data and you have no control of the visibility of your content.

On the other hand, the algorithms work for a reason, ensuring that the content that resonates with users interests and what they care about.

My fear about the data argument is that there is a danger of pivoting towards a world where we are no longer able to use data for audience analysis or successfully disseminating information, because of the theoretical risk of people’s data being mined for the wrong reasons.”

These are just a few of the considerations in the ever-evolving world of social media marketing: a timely reminder of how social media must be viewed by marketers through a political, economical, social and technological (PEST) framework.

For more context, guidance, opinions and data on social media best practice, download the updated [Social Media Platforms Overview Best Practice Guide](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA THOUGHT LEADERSHIP