THEY’RE NOT TRENDS,
THEY’RE SOCIAL STATUS QUO

Leveraging the latest in social to solidify your brand presence
There’s no nice way of putting it: 2018 was a tumultuous year for social media. Trust took a massive hit, starting with the Facebook’s Cambridge Analytica incident and continued with a consistent stream of data breaches across different platforms. The US Senate’s probing of industry players like Facebook and Google revealed that social media plays a much larger role in (and carries greater influence on) our society than anyone imagined. Though occurring south of the border, there is no denying that these issues in trust spilled over into the Canadian online landscape.

With the curtain drawn back, consumers are beginning to understand just how many of our life choices are being influenced by social media. In turn, brands are being challenged to step up on data privacy as they look to strengthen relationships with consumers.

Armed with the lessons learnt from previous years, 2019 is a chance for marketers to turn a page; to update their digital strategies in response to these changing consumer behaviours.

The problem is, the sheer volume in number of ‘trending’ new digital strategies, tech, programs, and platforms can overwhelm even the savviest of social marketers, making it tough to determine which trends are worth adopting to reach the most relevant audiences.

We at SOCIETY are here to help. After analyzing the bulk of trends out there in the social ethos, we’ve identified the top ten that are poised to transition out of ‘trending’ to become social status quos. By assisting marketers to become early adopters of social tactics, we’re helping place brands ahead of the curve and more importantly, in front of their audiences.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Privacy and Data are Still Problematic
Like it or not, this hot button issue is here to stay. Brands who come out swinging by offering consumers transparency and data empowerment will earn big points in the trust department.

Getting Personal Gets More Difficult
Though consumers expect more personalized experiences, they’re less willing to share personal data. Talk about a rock-and-a-hard-place position for brands to be in. Aside from investing in a crystal ball, marketers will need to get smart about how they get personal with their consumers.

Time Spent on Screens is Being Scrutinized
As ‘screen time’ shifts from common habit to health concern, average time spent on social will undoubtedly take a hit. By being more strategic with their ad placements (and budget spend), brands can increase their opportunity to catch consumers’ eye during their moments spent online.

Dialing up the Benefits of Social Listening
The online stethoscope - social listening - is now essential to gauging brand health. Smart marketers go beyond just reputation management and sentiment analysis to leverage the tool for lead generation and social selling.

Social eCommerce Blooms
The on-demand generation is demanding more from brands no matter the platform, and eCommerce is no exception. Platforms are offering a wealth of options for online shopping – be sure your brand is on board.

Brand Insertion in Instant Messaging
Backlash from privacy concerns is pushing more social conversations into the private sphere via apps like Messenger and What’s App. But when one door closes, an even larger window opens with a surge in in-app ad opportunities for brands to pounce on.

Social Stories are the New Norm
First fueled by Snapchat and now widely adopted, the Story is here to stay (even YouTube is rolling out a format to match). Vertical creative coupled with good storytelling are now a must on any marketing content plan.

Social TV is on the Rise
Mobile is the new normal in video, and with it comes the want for custom-built content on smartphones. In an attempt to steal viewers from major TV networks, 2019 will determine if Social TV can compete with these established players.

Consumers get Friendlier with Chatbots and AI
From offering 24-hour assistance to alleviating drain on customer service to collecting consumer data, what CAN’T chatbots do? If you brand is on the chatbot fence, now is the time to lean in and learn more.

Augmented Reality is up for Adoption
AR truly is the future of tech, offering shoppers an immersive experience with next-level engagement in just one click. Brands looking to disrupt should look no further than opportunities for AR integration.
Though it made waves in 2018, the issue of privacy and data protection is still reverberating in 2019. Consumers are on high alert for privacy risks and looking to take the reins of their own data. Yet while we predict a continued rise in consumer control, the irony is that we should also brace for an increased adoption of connected devices and smart home components that entrench themselves directly into consumer privacy. As a result, it is very likely that regulators in the US and other countries will pass a bill similar to Europe’s GDPR in order to protect the privacy and portability of consumers’ data.

As a brand, this growing discussion around privacy makes being transparent, respectful, and protective of data an essential action to gain consumer trust. Being proactive and acting quickly on privacy protection can become a competitive advantage, while empowering consumers with the understanding of how their data is being used could increase trust (and even motivate them to share more).

Consumers share more personal information on social than ever before, making it easier for brands to build insights through mere social media monitoring. Content, placements, ad formats, and more can now be customized and served dynamically based on purchase history, website behaviour, social media activity, clickstream history, etc. Think Netflix, who gently suggests your next binge-worthy show based on viewing history, or Spotify who creates playlists akin to your personal listening habits.

This level of personalization is now expected on social. Done correctly, it can strengthen customer relationship building and boost social campaign performance. In response, marketers will need to increase their use of hyper targeted audience advertising and retargeting.

However, a massive hurdle facing personalization is the aforementioned consumer privacy concerns. The less access marketers have to consumer data, the harder it will become to target them with personalized advertising. The combination of Ad Blockers and ITP 2.0 by Apple has already accelerated brand blind spots, and we expect this to continue to scale in 2019. Marketers who proactively solve privacy issues, demonstrate transparency, and build trust with their audiences early will be a step ahead of the competition. Those who lag will likely be putting their reputations at risk.
In her Global Web Index article “How Social is Social Media,” Nisa Bayindir reports that users in the UK and North America are becoming overwhelmed with content and, in response, have been downsizing their time spent on social platforms over the course of the last year. Mark Dolliver’s eMarketer piece furthers this theory, showing how growth in Facebook user time has come to a halt in the US and will remain flat at an average of 40 minutes per day in 2019 (bringing the time spent back down to 2016 averages).

This diminished time spent has implications for brands attempting to reach those users on social. Brand marketers must adjust to shifting behaviours by becoming more sophisticated with their placements, formats, and content if they want to continue to capture consumer attention. The notion of quality over quantity is pivotal in this case; when it comes to content strategy, brands need to surround themselves with great creative, and strategic agency partners can help them break through the clutter.

**TIME SPENT ON SCREENS IS BEING SCRUTINIZED**

**DIALING UP THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL LISTENING**

Social media monitoring tools are a necessary edition to any good marketer’s toolbox. They not only keep a brand’s finger on the pulse of public opinion, they shed light on an audience’s consumed content, personal affinities, followed hashtags, and brand sentiment. They also provide valuable information for how organic and paid campaigns are performing beyond the usual key performance indicators. SOCIETY@ME uses a variety of enterprise level listening, analytics, and audience segmentation tools to help our customers gain a competitive advantage. In 2019, social media monitoring will be indispensable to marketers not only looking for customer service indicators, reputation management, and sentiment analysis, but also for lead generation and social selling with a focus on ROI.

As we saw in 2018, organic reach is almost gone from most major platforms. It now takes paid dollars to reach target audiences, period. At the same time, clients are demanding better ROI from their social media investments as social moves from a top funnel branding initiative to a full buying cycle opportunity. As paid social budgets increase, so will the need to further analyze and segment audience data while optimizing across platforms, placements, audiences, and creative formats for better performance. To improve ROI, brands will need to focus their efforts on social listening, creating compelling content, targeting relevant audiences, testing, and spending more time optimizing their social media campaigns.
According to the Global Web Index, 1 in 4 people bought a product or service via social media in 2018. A brand’s social page is becoming interchangeable with their website for both scrolling and shopping. Social platforms took note, with Instagram testing a dedicated shopping channel in its ‘Explore’ feed and scaling in-app shopping with shoppable tags in posts and stories. While this is currently only available organically, we believe it is just a matter of time until this becomes an actual ad product.

On other platforms, Pinterest has launched buyable pins for consumers to purchase products without leaving the platform, and both Facebook and Pinterest have product catalogs that enable consumers to purchase items while in the app. Not far behind, Snapchat now allows users to shop on Amazon by simply taking a picture or scanning the product barcode. For more information, check out SOCiETY’s Sarah Kincaid’s post on Shoppable Ad Formats. With retail eCommerce expected to grow exponentially in 2019, social is an obvious choice for brand marketers looking to grow sales.

Communication is increasing on messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, and especially WhatsApp (according to Forbes, people spent almost 3x more time on WhatsApp than Facebook in 2018).

But it’s not just that they’re using the apps, it’s what they’re sharing. On an earnings call in October 2018, Mark Zuckerberg remarked that users share more photos, videos, and links privately on Messenger than they do publicly on social networks. In response, Facebook has moved quickly by enabling ads in Messenger, allowing businesses to install chatbots to improve customer service and sales. Same goes for Click To Ad units in WhatsApp.

This transition from public posting to private messaging opens a new avenue for marketers to reach consumers, and should be taken seriously. Beyond customer service, messaging applications can be used to share information about upcoming events, promotions, give out discount codes, etc. We expect social platforms to develop more advertising opportunities on instant messaging platforms in 2019, and urge marketers to explore how these messaging apps can provide better customer service and build better relationships with their target audiences.
**SOCIAL STORIES ARE THE NEW NORM**

Pioneered by Snapchat, the ephemeral format of ‘stories’ is a hit with consumers. Full-screen, immersive, and highly engaging, the format was quickly copied by Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube (called Reels). Not to be left out, LinkedIn is planning a similar product launch aimed at students in 2019.

According to a Tech Crunch article, sharing stories is expected to surpass feed sharing in 2019 across the platform. It seems that Facebook is counting on this ad format to help sustain its revenues in 2019 and beyond.

To help advertisers embark on the stories bandwagon, Facebook has gone as far as creating what they call “Stories School” programs aimed at teaching ad execs the visual language of ephemerality. They have also expanded stories to groups and events. These initiatives are helping Facebook monetize stories faster and it is the reason why these education programs are becoming so popular at any event where Facebook is present.

With consumer behaviour shifting from feed perusal to story consumption, marketers should begin considering stories as a complement to their feed, and remember that story content curation requires a more engaging hook to better capture attention.

**SOCIAL TV IS ON THE RISE**

Video’s popularity is nothing new. YouTube is nearing 2 billion active monthly users and video views on Facebook are clocking in at 100 million hours daily. What is new, however, is the rise of social TV like Instagram TV (IGTV), Facebook Watch, and YouTube originals. In an attempt to steal viewers from major TV networks, it looks like 2019 will determine if social TV can compete with the established players.

One advantage in social’s corner is the increased adoption of mobile. Statista says over 52% of all online video views are now happening on mobile devices, and eMarketer goes so far to declare 2019 the tipping point, with users expected to spend more time looking at mobile device screens than TV screens.

The rise of vertical video production in 2019 is a key indication that mobile is becoming the new normal in video, as the layout is custom-built for smartphones. Social networks are not only adjusting to vertical video but training marketers, agencies, and publishers to do the same. IGTV and Instagram Story formats are great examples of vertical video platforms, and YouTube followed suit with their own new vertical video ad format. It will be key for marketers to ‘think vertical’ in 2019 to respond to this change in preferred device for video consumption.
CONSUMERS GET FRIENDLIER WITH CHATBOTS AND AI

With today’s consumers craving instant, 24-hour communication with brands, artificial intelligence and chatbots are well positioned to not only improve customer service and drive sales but also help brands save money in 2019. Using chatbots on social media can alleviate the burden placed on call centres by answering frequently asked questions and prompting actions, while also collecting data on customer goals and shopping habits.

One of the most recent (and successful) examples of using chatbots to add value while providing customer support is WestJet’s Juliet, a conversational AI chatbot created for Facebook Messenger. While Juliet is currently setup as a digital travel assistant for WestJet customers, it is just getting started. The more “she” learns, the more capable she will become in helping WestJet’s guests. Bottom line: every business should have a chatbot strategy for 2019. Improving their customer service game while gathering valuable user data feels like an obvious win for brands.

AUGMENTED REALITY IS UP FOR ADOPTION

An immersive experience with next-level engagement, Augmented Reality (AR) allows consumers to interact with your brand or product in just one click. What’s more, it’s already available in Facebook News Feed. IKEA is the golden boy of AR, having pioneered this model in their app where consumers can visualize how products would look in their home before purchase. BMW was the first carmaker to try AR immersive technology in late 2017 by testing of Snapchat lenses in their first 3D ad card for their X2 launch – a campaign that earned great results in both product awareness and PR.

By incorporating calls-to-action within the camera experience, people can seamlessly go from engaging with your product to making a purchase or installing an app. With the writing on the wall, both Facebook and Apple are investing heavily in AR, as did Snapchat with their Lens Studio launch in December 2017. In our opinion, it’s nothing but incline for AR in 2019, as it continues to disrupt the market and bring exciting new opportunities to marketers.
WHERE TO NEXT?

Change is the norm in social media, and building flexible, tweakable social strategies is key to keeping pace. Marketers should use a data-driven, customer-centric approach – one that uses the right tools and resources. We as marketers need to do a better job at managing data analysis, using human resources, and incorporating technologies to better understand audiences. Leveraging these learnings into social media strategies is the way forward for improved consumer relationships and increased ROI.

Reach out to SOCIETY@ME for more information on opportunities to best integrate these strategies into your brand’s marketing plans in 2019 and beyond.

SOURCES:
- https://content-na1.emarketer.com/ten-key-digital-trends-for-2019
- WARC “Drivers of Change in 2019” December 2018 ADMAP Drivers of Change in 2019 Report