
2019 Predictions: What to expect from Social Media

*Need-to-know trends for 2019
for publishers, agencies, and brands*

2018 in the rearview mirror

2018 was a rollercoaster ride for social media platforms, publishers, agencies, and brands alike.

We started the year with the Facebook algorithm shift that shook up content strategies everywhere. Snapchat had a messy redesign, and we said goodbye to Google+.

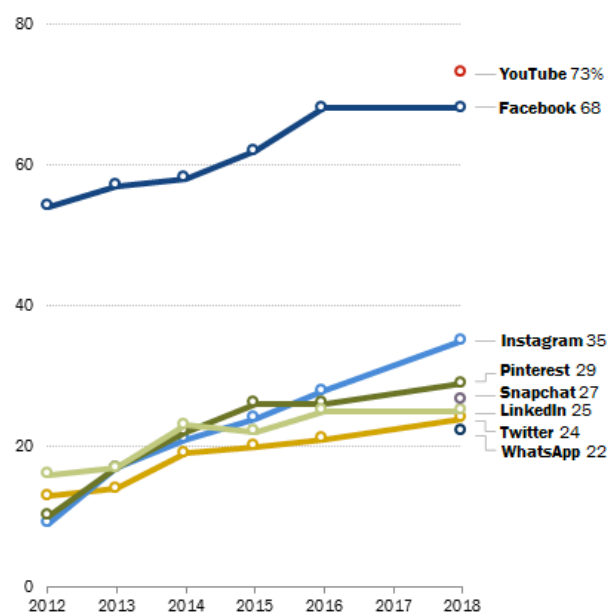
Misinformation and malicious players reached a boiling point, leading to global attention following the Cambridge Analytica scandal and congressional hearings of major tech platforms.

The platforms took measures to purge bots, protect user privacy, and condemn hate speech with the banning of individuals like Alex Jones.

Gen Z emerged as a force not to be underestimated, as Parkland shooting survivors demanded change. Brands stepped up with more socially responsible stances, from banning plastic straws to immigration reform.

Majority of Americans now use Facebook, YouTube

% of U.S. adults who say they use the following social media sites online or on their cellphone



Note: Pre-2018 telephone poll data is not available for YouTube, Snapchat or WhatsApp. Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018. Trend data from previous Pew Research Center surveys.

"Social Media Use in 2018"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

75%

Percent of Facebook users that visit the platform daily. Six-in-ten Snapchat and Instagram users visit each site daily

2018 in the rearview mirror

Influencers continued to shape trends as Kylie Jenner created the most-liked Instagram post, and Colin Kaepernick partnered with Nike for the brand's most controversial partnership. Beyond celebrities, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shook up politics with a viral victory in New York after going unreported by major outlets.

Building audience trust and loyalty became critical to success this year for content creators, as efforts to augment experiences beyond the duopoly ramped up. Podcasts, newsletters, and new channels like Apple News continued to become more sophisticated.

This year, social media outpaced print newspapers in the U.S. as a source for news, according to Pew Research. For Gen Z in particular, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram are the most-used platforms.

Social media is pivoting to mobile-first experiences that encourage sharing in-the-moment experiences. Stories content is growing 15x faster than feed-based content. The format is on pace to surpass feeds within the next year across WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat.

So what's ahead for 2019? We collected insights from experts in publishing, PR, and marketing. Read on as we predict what's coming next.

***Have a great new year,
Gabriele, and all at NewsWhip***

Publishers' distribution strategies will change, and the roles of social media editors will evolve along with them



With declining referral traffic numbers across a variety of social platforms, it's important for publishers to try to stay ahead of the algorithms. Jobs solely focused on the management of a Facebook page or a Twitter account must evolve along with the social networks themselves; social editors, if they haven't already, should be getting comfortable with all of the audience development resources at a newsroom's disposal.

The age of feeling "ownership" of a Facebook page or a Twitter account should be ending. Instead, social editors should be empowered by newsroom leaders to feel ownership for the stories themselves as editors, thinking across platforms and using every tool at their disposal to ensure the maximum possible audience for their organization's work.

With publishers forced to look beyond social platforms for growth, the strongest outlets will begin to cater more to their core readerships (instead of, say, Media Twitter). This may include going back to basics: SEO, stronger homepages, smart on-site recirculation and navigation, push alerts, and newsletters. It may include transforming journalism for audio, video, or photo-sharing platforms. One thing is clear: in 2019, a publisher's platform strategy needs to stretch far beyond Facebook and Twitter.



Renan Borelli,
Senior Editor, Digital Storytelling
New York Times

This is a good thing. Publishers will begin to focus on creating stories their loyal audiences want to read, and give up on social media's impossible promises of virality. Social teams, who see every story an outlet publishes, are already inherently qualified to analyze and translate audience behavior. As a result, the people formerly known as "social media editors" will escape the hamster wheel of programming, diversify their skillsets, and expand their influence in newsrooms.

What will happen to social media in 2019...?



We will see an expedited growth in new features for messaging apps and private communities such as Facebook Groups. 'Stories' will also continue to gain new creative and innovative tools for both users and advertisers. Interest and usage of AR and VR will show slow but steady progress. Government and regulatory pressure will attempt to tighten its grip on social networks, but its impact will be limited and progress will be slow. The video wars between YouTube, Facebook Watch, Instagram's IGTV and others will heat up, but YouTube will remain top dog for some time yet. Here's why...

The decrease in social sharing on the major platforms, combined with the increasing preference for private sharing will continue. To address this, we will see a wider set of tools and functionality added to messaging apps to give users more creative options when communicating in chat groups or sharing content with friends directly.

It's likely platforms such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and others will develop either new features or restrictions for content sharing in group chats in an effort to reduce the spread of fake news.

With the spotlight on online privacy and security casting a bad light on Facebook and others in 2018, end-to-end encryption for messaging is likely to be made more accessible in popular social apps where it currently does not exist already or is not switched on by default e.g. Facebook's Messenger and Twitter (Direct Messages).



Matt Navarra
Social / Digital Media Consultant

Facebook Watch and Instagram's IGTV are likely to continue to struggle in 2019 unless Facebook addresses fundamental obstacles on both platforms hindering its growth such as:

- Poor search functionality for video content
- Limited monetization options for creators versus rival platforms e.g. YouTube
- Low-quality content with limited flagship shows to drive interest and usage

What will happen to social media in 2019...?

The popularity in the 'Stories' format will continue to grow. Especially since Mark Zuckerberg recently stated Facebook expects News Feed usage to decline, and that he's instructed his teams to focus on building new features and ad products for the format in 2019. The question is whether the popularity of Stories is driven by a genuine interest in and demand for them, OR more Facebook's force-feeding them to users across all its platforms in an effort to maintain ad revenue growth in 2019.

The increasing pressure on social networks to protect its users (data privacy, mental health etc) by government's around the world will lead to platforms giving users more control over their data and ways to manage time spent using social media. Improved options for exporting or porting of historical profile data and content between platforms may arrive, to give users the ability to more easily quit using a social network, OR switch to a rival platform and take their images, videos, and other content with them. Other forms of government-led regulation is likely to be slow to appear, limited in effectiveness, and inconsistently applied around the world.

The integration of chatbots and improved AI, along with increased usage in messaging apps will lead to a resurgence in businesses using bots for customer service and other experiences. WhatsApp is most likely to see the biggest growth due to the rollout of WhatsApp for Business to more companies. The test is whether brands can create truly useful and meaningful services with bots, as opposed to gimmicky and uninspired bots.

The challenges of fake news, online harassment, and hacking will continue to make headlines as social networks battle to keep up with 'bad actors' on their platforms. Facebook, in particular, will remain the focus of journalists pouncing on each and every breach that occurs in due to Cambridge Analytica scandal and other such incidents that surfaced in 2018. Improved AI and machine learning will struggle to keep on top of the challenge faced by social platforms in this area, as new exploits and methods are adopted by those determined to abuse platforms.

2019 is going to be a fascinating year in terms of how we all use social media, and how major social networks respond. It's entirely possible 2018 saw social media usage hit its peak. The question is... What happens next?

Renewed interest in search



If 2017 was all about Facebook, 2018 was all about renewed publisher interest in search.

We've restructured teams, we've reconfigured workflows, hell, we're even talking to developers using terms like 'First Contentful Paint' and 'Speed Index'. But as we religiously watch that hallowed Google Top Stories module, we're also conscious that we should never become too reliant on any one single algorithm.

The Google indexing 'blip' we had in November was a healthy reminder that, in 2019, we need to continue distributing across a range of platforms in addition to developing our brands as true destinations — championing the daring and diverse.



Steve Wilson-Beales
Head of Editorial
Global Radio

Forget about fake followers, let's talk “fake” influencers

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Effectively influencing consumers via word of mouth through family and friends will always stand the test of time. So will influencing them through media and celebrity spokespersons who serve as a third party validators.

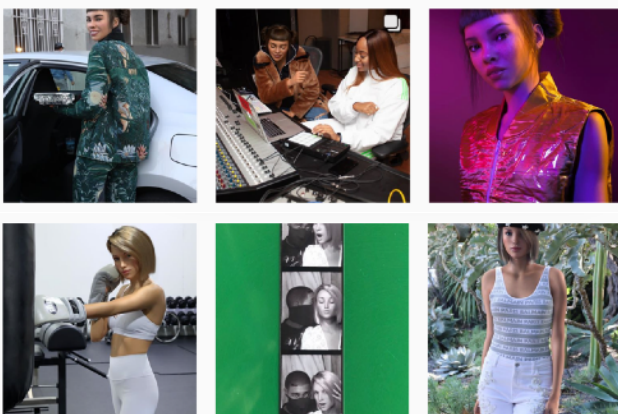
In 2019, a new wave of influencers will emerge, taking the internet by storm. These new lifestyle trend setters have followers in the millions. Who are they? They're robots. Well, sort of. They're most commonly referred to as, artificial influencers (AI).

Now, brands can't turn their entire reputation over to these bots. Copy and messaging is still crafted by real people (fortunately!). We predict these accounts will grow, gaining more attention and followers. We do caution their impact. The verdict is still out whether or not the customer's journey or brand advocacy will be affected.



Geeta Patel,
Executive Director, Analytics
Golin

Blake Bowyer,
Executive Director, Digital Strategy
Golin



Adapting for the walled garden ecosystem



People have been moving their sharing behavior to more and more private spaces, and I expect that trend to speed up in the new year. People increasingly understand the pitfalls of a fully public social presence, and many of them see the benefit of sticking closer to friends, family and those who share their interests. For some, this may mean spending more time in Facebook groups, or taking advantage of the new “close friends” option for Instagram Stories. Many others are likely to move from social platforms to messaging apps.

This presents a challenge to news and content organizations looking for tips and ideas online. But it’s not insurmountable – it just requires more of an investment in building meaningful audience relationships.

Other challenges are more difficult to overcome. As people share in more private spaces, there’s a risk that the “filter bubble” problem will worsen. The private groups and one-to-one conversations that form online tend to lack a diversity of voices and backgrounds. It’s hard to picture a robust marketplace of ideas when apps and social platforms encourage users to connect privately with people who are much like themselves

Also, as conversations move to private spaces, misinformation campaigns move there as well, making them more difficult to detect and debunk.



Eric Carvin,
Social Media Editor
Associated Press

But all is not lost. News organizations and a variety of startups in the technology industry are investing in new ways to build online communities and counteract false information and content. Platform companies have shown some interest in tackling these problems, but there’s a growing consensus that they should increase their investment in practical solutions. Only then, many believe, will a healthier online ecosystem be possible.

2019 in content and social: Groups and stories gone wild



With the organic reach of Facebook pages dropping to new lows in 2018, Facebook groups have officially taken over our feeds. This is just what Facebook wants for its users — authentic content from your peers that leads to real engagement on the platform and not taking you outside of it. Facebook is investing quite a bit in groups, and is already trying to figure out different ways to monetize them. Businesses are already starting to jump on the trend in search of their lost traffic, and we might be seeing more brands trying to build communities around core topics that their users actually care about.

What users cared most about in 2018 when it comes to social content is stories, which are now growing 15 times faster than feed content, according to a recent study by consulting firm Block Party. It's way beyond Snapchat and Instagram — Facebook groups now have their own group stories, WhatsApp is in the game and it probably won't be long before we will see stories pop up in random places like our news or weather apps. Ephemeral content is the name of the game, and brands are only scratching the surface with their abilities to use it for their benefit. Stories, very much like groups, encourage immediate reactions from the user, as they create experiences that are timely, and very personalized.



Shachar Orren
Chief Storyteller,
Playbuzz

Content outside of social is also expected to start adopting more of the mechanisms that made stories so popular, like the narrative structure that takes you by the hand from point A to point B, a visual-first approach (you take a photo first, the text comes second), and the ability to add interactive features like asking questions or voting in polls, that on Insta stories have already become common ways to get users meaningfully involved. The question is - will stories become so dominant in 2019, that by 2020 we will officially be sick of them?

Audience-focussed journalism

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Next year, I think you're going to see a rise in more audience focussed journalism – re: what do our audiences want to know about and are we providing it?

The world feels more complicated but is very much connected. I think it's up to journalists to figure out what is important to the audience and engage with audiences about the questions they want answered, not what news organisations necessarily think is important.

I'm hoping in my new role as Head of Storytelling at Tortoise, we really will slow down the news and help the audience wise up with us.

It will also be interesting to see news audiences tackle the concept of time. The biggest competitor for Amazon isn't Netflix. The biggest competitor for the BBC isn't the New York Times. It's TIME. The time to fit all this content into everything else we do, like seeing friends, going to the gym, eating dinner! How will news organisations make sure they become a habit like everything else? And that relates to having a strong identity and being relatable. That's what brands have built for years, but the bar is crowded and not everybody will get a seat.



Ravin Sampat,
Head of Storytelling,
Tortoise

Filter bubbles impact more than just media consumption

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I predict that social identities will continue to consume news coverage, consumer behavior and social media behavior.

As people continue to sort themselves according to political party affiliation and other forms of identity online, this will likely have a profound influence on all aspects of their lives.

Understanding the nature of identity—how it shapes our behavior, but also how we can shape identity—will become an even bigger part of the broader national conversation.



Jay Van Bavel,
Social Neuroscientist
NYU

Opportunities within the “trust vacuum”



2019 will reward publishers who've invested in cultivating the trust of their audiences.

Brands and publishers enter 2019 with more tools than ever to engage audiences on social media. But public trust in social media has reached a new low due to concerns around privacy, fake news, and data security. As a result, people around the world have begun to question the role of social media in their day-to-day lives — and they're beginning to look beyond the big social networks for real community.

This “trust vacuum” presents a golden opportunity for publishers to step in. The publishers who excel in this environment will be the ones who empower their readers through trustworthy content and peer-to-peer connection — the very same values that big social networks used to offer.

That means publishers who prioritize social trends and “growth hacking” over investing in audience trust will continue to be made victims of unpredictable social algorithm changes. On the other hand, successful publishers will articulate the value they provide to readers and align their cross-channel social media strategies around a user-first, trust-based approach.



Michael Mezzatesta
Chief of Staff,
The Mighty

As the social media toolkit continues to grow, publishers will need to make more targeted, deliberate investments in the social channels that best complement their approach to delivering user value. (That means each publisher will need to de-prioritize certain social platforms and features — because hey, you can't be great at everything!)

The publishers that “get it right” will emerge from 2019 stronger than ever.

Newsroom predictions from JOE Media



A rise in the quality of branded entertainment: Brands are getting closer and closer to trusting capable publisher editorial teams to create content which both entertains large scale audiences AND delivers on the brand's values, and ultimately their KPI's. In 2019 we're going to see the standard rise considerably when it comes to branded entertainment productions.



Gavin Johnson
Managing Director

Newsroom predictions from JOE Media

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The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time: In an age of distractions, supposed low attention spans and cheap, disposable content - young people will continue to seek out the brands that can offer clarity and quality. In video this means longer viewing, shows that have more in common with the space once dominated by TV and radio broadcasters. The winning digital media brands will be the ones that can move beyond the three second view addiction and hold the attention of viewers for hours at a time, never underestimating the audience's appetite.



Brian Whelan
Content Director

Newsroom predictions from JOE Media



Vertical video will have a lead role: Whether the audience want it or not, 9:16 viewing is here to stay. 94 percent of users hold their devices upright when capturing content on their smartphones while billions of Snapchat Stories and Instagram Stories are created every year, nearly all are shot vertically. So, we consume content vertically, we capture content vertically and now social platforms have created products/features to allow us to consume quality content vertically. Snapchat have launched 'Shows' and 'Snap Originals'. Instagram have launched 'IGTV'. Facebook have launched 'Facebook Stories'. Why have they done this? They can't monetise throwaway short-form content like YouTube can with their long form quality video. IGTV and Snap Originals are the respective platforms answer to YouTube. It houses their long-form content. At the UK launch of Snapchat 'Shows' they recommended content between 3-7mins while IGTV allows up to 10mins of vertical video.

I also predict this vertical trend to leak into Facebook news feeds with publishers beginning to play with 3:4 video instead of 1:1 that has dominated Twitter and Facebook feeds for the past 12-18 months. The reason being it fills up more of your screen when scrolling through timelines.



Jake Gallagher
Head of Social

Newsroom predictions from JOE Media



Performance marketing in a data-driven age: In a world where acronyms such as KPI's and ROI are becoming even more prevalent than usual, data driven marketing will play an even bigger role in 2019.

Via tools such as Circus Street et al, organisations are investing more in upskilling marketers in the world of digital marketing to make the right choices when it comes to making decisions on their media plan, and being able to push back to ask the right questions to media agencies. There is little point in buying / targeting audiences if the content won't resonate. Content marketing will therefore also play a huge role in 2019. The content needs to resonate with the audience it is targeting, not generic global content forced upon a UK audience. Am I targeting the right audience? Is the audience I'm buying UK based? Is the content right for the my target audience?

Although understanding audiences online and performance marketing is not a novel idea, organisations will double down on performance marketing in 2019.



Dilraj Athwal
Brand Strategy Director

Newsroom predictions from JOE Media



Podcasting will grow and diversify: Podcasts are going to continue to grow through 2019. Already the fastest growing medium, they'll remain the cinema of audio: something that retains the users undivided attention like very little else. It will be interesting to see whether other providers follow suit with what we're doing at JOE and roll out audio and visual programming as one: retaining the linear podcast element, but making it available in a YouTube format to extend growth, such as we do with 'Unfiltered', 'Boys Don't Cry' with Russell Kane and 'House of Rugby' together with GUINNESS.



Simon Clancy
Head of Audio

Agencies need to cut through the noise



1. Deepfakes

As disinformation becomes the new normal in 2019, deepfakes will start to become more common. These fake videos will help increase the impact and spread of misleading content generated by AI-powered bots. And those bots will expand further from their base on Twitter right across other social platforms, drowning out genuine content and deliberately confusing audiences. Social media activity around the European Parliament elections will be closely watched for signs of who's winning the fake news wars. To get cut through in 2019, communicators and publishers will have to make people care and actually want to engage. The best way to do that is by taking an authentic, creative, truthful, intelligent approach to the work - and by not giving oxygen or airtime to fake news and troll bots.

2. Video-first campaigns

The growth of video-first campaigns is one of the biggest trends we're seeing with our European clients across marketing and communications and is sure to be a big feature in 2019. For brands, European institutions and publishers to connect with consumers in the age of social media and digital marketing overload, they've finally realised that a picture is worth a thousand words.



Diarmaid Mac Mathúna
Director,
indiepics

In today's attention economy, we need to follow the lead of the global social media giants by using visuals and video to capture hearts and minds with "thumb-stopping" creative. Those global social media platforms will ever evolve but pictures and sounds and words remain at the heart of storytelling. And storytelling is how we encourage people to engage and care and act. But in 2019 more than ever those creative stories need to be part of strategic campaigns that make content work both for audiences, brands and publishers.

Agencies need to cut through the noise

3. Specialist agencies

Another big trend in the industry is the move towards specialist agencies. Clients are buying smarter these days, picking and mixing the combination of in-house and specialist agency expertise that works best for them. Gone are the days where the agency of record controls everything. This has created exciting new opportunities for agencies such as ourselves to get a seat at top table and join forces to play a strategic and creative role in big, noisy campaigns. From our unique position spanning the television and online video worlds, it's clear that clients will increasingly need agencies to be able to deliver creative video content at scale for them. With everything from Instagram Stories to the much heralded augmented reality creating growing opportunities for storytelling in new ways in 2019, it'll be more important than ever to focus on creating content that matters that audiences actually want to watch.

Take charge of 2019

Looking for more insights ahead of the new year? Here are some of the top blogs from NewsWhip this year:

- [These are 2018's top influencers on Instagram](#)
- [These are the top reporters on Facebook](#)
- [8 ways to captivate Gen Z on social in 2018](#)
- [Likes vs comments on Facebook: What's the difference?](#)
- [What's the Best Content on LinkedIn?](#)
- [What to know about the Facebook Algorithm before 2019](#)
- [Who is still sharing fake news on social media?](#)
- [10 tips to creating the best Snapchat & Instagram Stories](#)
- [Social video trends for Summer 2018](#)
- [LADbible and UNILAD: How two U.K. sites rocketed to the top](#)
- [5 quick things to know about sponsored YouTube videos](#)

Check out the [NewsWhip Research Center](#) to make sure you don't miss out on our reports in the new year, or sign up for our [newsletter](#) here.

Thank you!

*Questions? Get in touch
at blog@newswhip.com*