

Top 10 social trends for 2016

 By [Farren Roper](#)

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At South Africa Social Media Week 2015, we predicted trends on digital platforms such as online storytelling, convergence of traditional media and social media, social psychology and growth of the image networks.

We certainly have seen many of those trends come to be in the year that was. These are the top predicted trends to watch out for in 2016 across digital and social platforms:

1. Increasing growth of micro video

While traditional television commercial brands have invested large sums of money into the production and flighting they were guaranteed the reach, they have no amount of control over who was viewing and consuming their content. As more and more people access the internet, the potential reach with micro video (particularly on social media) is larger. What's more is that brands are able to target their content and map it to the right consumer. So the brand message is delivered to the right person at the right point in time and in context. Also take into account that the way consumers view advertising is changing, as with PVR consumers are now able to pre-record their programs and skip through the advertisements. In fact many pre-record their programmes just so that they do not have to view ads. Snapchat is one of the fastest growing platforms in the world because of the ability to serve customers with bite-sized video content.

2. Facebook wants to own brands, too

While this may not be a secret to many, recent developments have confirmed that Facebook wants to own your online presence, all the time. Brands that publish videos on Facebook 'competitor' YouTube then publish the link to Facebook have their videos displayed on a smaller area of the user screen than if they were to publish the video directly to Facebook. Why? Because Facebook wants to have videos uploaded organically to their platform. Facebook also has enhanced features around news and also recently updated their notes section, so brands can publish blog type articles.

Facebook rewards brands for publishing content organically by giving them higher reach on these publishes. Whether we will see Facebook introduce promoted conversations or promoted stickers in the future remains to be seen.

3. Instagram will develop into a business-to-consumer channel

Not surprisingly, what Facebook does, Instagram should be expected to do too. After all, it's owned by Facebook. In 2015, Instagram introduced the ability for brands to advertise on Instagram. We also saw Instagram launch their own business profile, [@Instagramforbusiness](#), where they feature business stories. This profile now has more than 27,000 followers. Brands have been experimenting on Instagram with mixed results. A great South African example of a brand that's seen success on the platform, through understanding of the communication style and Insta-fit content, is [Mercedes Benz South Africa](#). Watch out for other brands trying to own this space.

4. Content

Content on social media will become more iterative. Brands will invite more feedback. Facebook and Twitter are setting the trends by introducing polls. Microsoft South Africa, for example, runs rolls on topics of interest at least once a week and this has led to high levels of engagement. One of the big learnings from 2015 is that content consumption had changed. Information-savvy consumers want less product push more entertainment and education on social media. Interactive content also creates more engagement. Micro video, polls and even GIFS, which are used by companies like Coca-Cola, are producing more engagement because they educate and entertain. Look out for this trend in 2016 and for brands

leveraging social listening and data when devising these content strategies. The future of 2016 content is interactive.

5. The definitions of influencers will change

The definition of an influencer and an advocate will change. Back in the day we had what we call the "Oprah effect", with celebrities or quasi-celebrities endorsing products and those products flying off the shelf. This was before the explosion of social media and people becoming more informed. These days, savvy consumers know the difference between a celebrity brand who has been paid to endorse a soap they clearly don't use and someone who is legitimately speaking about a product. A celebrity or media personality with 100,000 followers is less valuable to a brand than 10 consumers with 10,000 followers that are genuine brand advocates. Also take into account that many people are double hatting - business people by day and bloggers by night. This means that the traditional approach towards an 'influencer' needs to change along with its definition. Companies are also increasingly investing in their staff as influencers, feeding them with content and encouraging them to spread the love.

6. ROI

Brands are increasingly expecting their marketing teams to move from being cost centres to profit centres as part of the shift towards revenue marketing. Even the cost of maintaining "free" platforms like blogs and social media is not really free. Because time is money even on these platforms, and reach of good (and bad) content is increasingly being driven by media spend.

7. Brands existing for a purpose

Many brands are using their platforms to show customers, especially purpose-driven millennials, that they exist for a bigger cause. It is the point at which social media and micro video meet philanthropy. Take, for example, Pepsi deciding not to invest in the Superbowl but rather producing online content where customers can vote for a charitable cause, and Pepsi taking the spend away from advertising to fund that cause. Then there's the Microsoft '[upgrade your world](#)' campaign for the Windows 10 launch, where they gave their fans an opportunity to do something for a good cause. Social philanthropy is a top trend to watch for in 2016.

8. sCommerce

sCommerce (to coin a phrase) is where social media meets eCommerce. Social media is increasingly offering the ability for customers to 'buy now', with a social shopping experience. Pinterest offers this, and Twitter cards have been used to great effect to sell product from the Microsoft Online store in December, where store stock sold out in less than a week. Larger global collaborations between Facebook and Shopify suggest this trend is expected to stay in 2016.



9. The year of the emoji

Fortunately - or unfortunately - there is a trend on brands leveraging or designing emojis as part of their campaigns. Skype advertising leveraged their own native emojis and we've seen emoji-based campaigns from MTN and Coca-Cola. Chevrolet recently also wrote a [press release in emoji](#).

10. Personalisation and helpfulness

Brands will become more personal and helpful in their engagement with customers. Take for example Coca-Cola sending birthday messages to their customers, or Hilton Hotels suggesting restaurants to people on social media looking for a night out of good cuisine. A/B testing of messages will allow brands to be able to do more of this personalisation at scale. Personalisation leads to customer experience, and customer experience is the new social and digital frontier in 2016. Watch out for more of this trend in 2016!

ABOUT FARREN ROPER

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