THE STATE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN RETAIL
2019

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RETAIL SOCIAL MEDIA COMING OF AGE. There have been some major landmarks over the last 12 months suggesting social media is ensconcing itself as a key part of retail strategy. Increasingly, retailers and brands in the direct-to-consumer space seem to be understanding its importance.

From Burberry's flagship store and social media-only launch of chief creative officer Riccardo Tisci's inaugural London Fashion Week collection to the continued vocal boardroom backing of online fashion house Asos's social strategy, the medium is central to publicly-listed retailers' plans for driving sales and growing brand engagement. Amazon's recently agreed visual search partnership with Snapchat, meanwhile, which allows users of the Snapchat app to take a photograph triggering a direct link to Amazon product listings, is an example of the online titan filling the social commerce gap that has for so-long existed in its operations.

The social media developments at individual brands are supported by innovations at the key social companies themselves, with 2018 the year many new platforms, selling opportunities, and advertising tools were brought to market. There are even murmurings that the social media behemoths will develop their own retail arms in the years ahead.

It's a fast-moving ecosystem, and it is being played out under wider scrutiny than ever before. Long-running issues with privacy and integrity came to a head in Facebook's Cambridge Analytica crisis, as users began to question the value networks provide and seek more meaningful ways to engage.

A radically new social paradigm is emerging, and leading brands are already adapting to it. Consumers want to be treated like individuals, not demographics. They're demanding more value in exchange for their time and information.

The pendulum has swung back to social's roots: real, personal, and authentic. But where does this leave brands that rely on social media to reach their customers, prospects, employees, partners, and other audiences? How can organisations create authenticity and intimacy—at scale—while working within time and budgetary constraints?

In this report, based on our annual survey of 3,255 Hootsuite business customers, analyst interviews, and exhaustive research, we've distilled all the issues into **five key social media trends for brands to watch and adapt to in 2019**. Read on for expert advice, and inspiration from pioneering retailers and the wider business world.
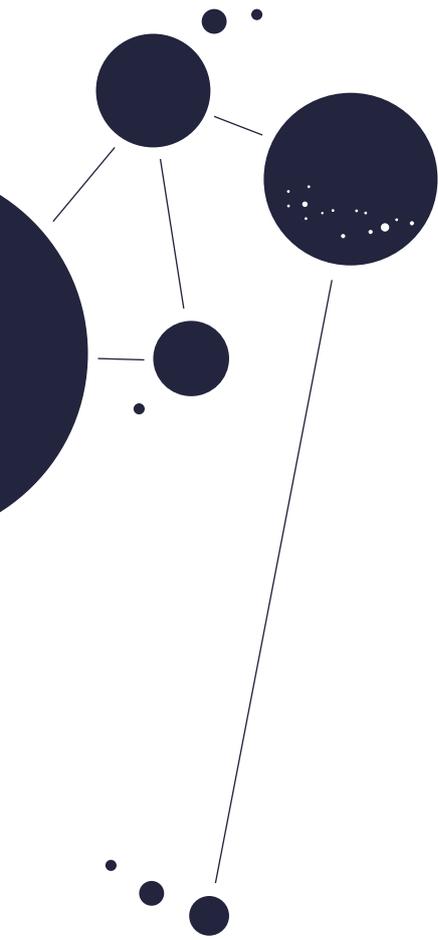
METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a survey of 3,255 Hootsuite business customers from a variety of sectors and ranging from large enterprises to small agencies, conducted in Q3 2018.

We've supplemented these results with insights from primary interviews with dozens of industry specialists, as well as published reports and data from Edelman, Gartner, GlobalWebIndex, Forrester, Econsultancy, Kleiner Perkins, We Are Social, and others.

These trends are intended to be of value to front-line social media practitioners and leaders alike. To ensure all trends are both specific and actionable, we've included corresponding brand examples and guidelines for implementation, for both beginner and experienced social media practitioners.
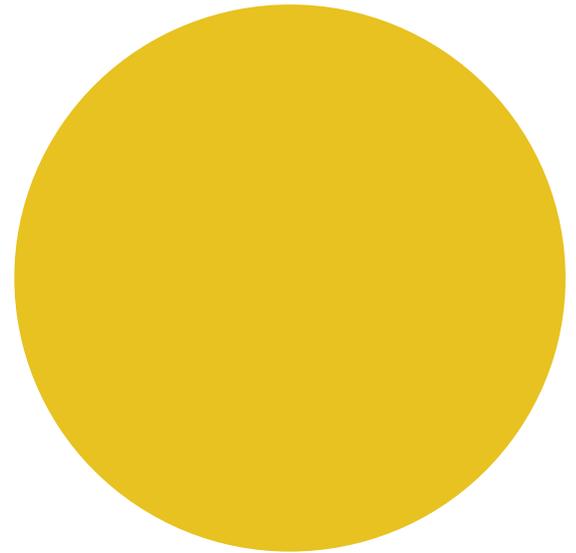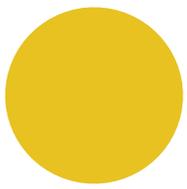
TREND 1
Rebuilding trust

BRANDS GET HUMAN AS THE CIRCLE OF TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA TIGHTENS

2018 represented a crisis year for trust on social media. In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal[1] and a Congressional hearing,[2] Facebook faced unprecedented pressure from users and regulators to improve security, transparency, and accuracy. Twitter, meanwhile, wrestled with controversies over the unfettered proliferation of bots on its platform, purging millions of fake accounts.[3]

In recent months, consumers, regulators, and media observers have called into question the privacy, accuracy, and ethics of nearly every social network. The result: According to [Edelman's 2018 Trust Barometer Report](#), 60 percent of people no longer trust social media companies.[4] Meanwhile, the Ponemon Institute, an independent research firm specialising in privacy and data protection, reports that trust in Facebook has dropped a "shock[ing]" 66 percent.[5]

For brands—including retailers—on social media, this shift presents new challenges and opportunities. In an age of social scepticism, the rules of the game have changed. Users have grown distrustful of many media and celebrity influencers[6] (whose followings, it turns out, are often bought or fake).[7]

In a major pendulum swing, trust has reverted back to immediate friends, family, and acquaintances on social media. Users are also returning to traditional and trusted journalism outlets and local news sources, with 71 percent of people agreeing that social media should do more to support high-quality journalism.[8]

Retailers are adopting various new tactics against this backdrop. Department store chain John Lewis, for example, has put a new app in the hands of some

Deploy Credible Expert and Peer Voices

Percent who rate each spokesperson as very/extremely credible for information about a brand

Experts, peers statistically tied in credibility

Technical expert	Academic expert	A person like yourself	NGO representative	Financial industry analyst	Successful entrepreneur	Employee	Journalist	CEO	Board of directors	Government official/regulator	Celebrity
60	58	58	50	48	47	43	41	40	37	37	28
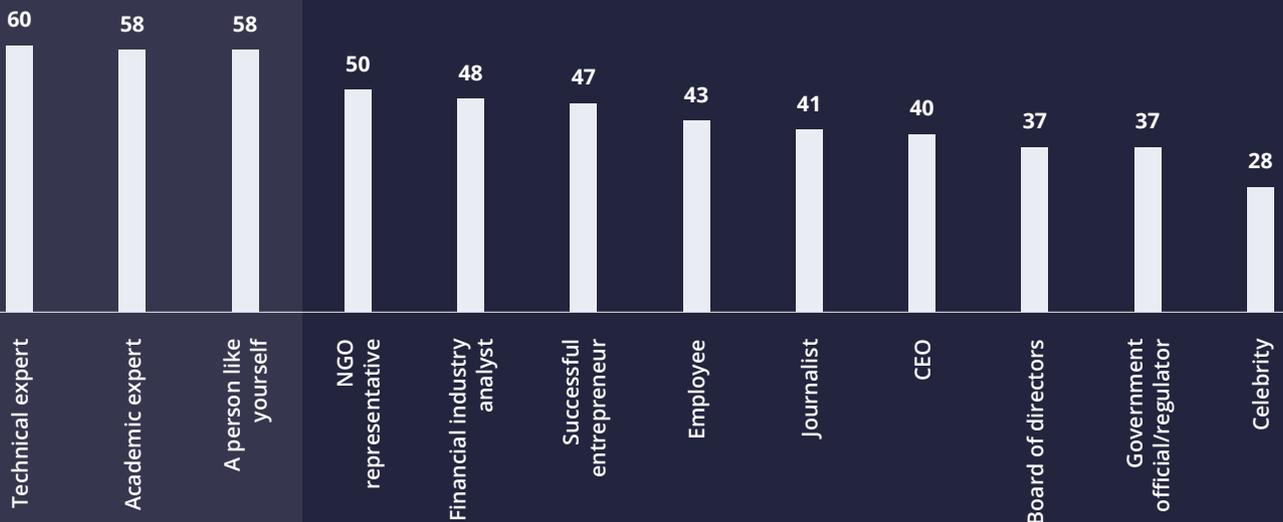
Source: Edelman 2018 Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands and Social Media.

50%

of respondents agree that the need to personalize content and experiences is a key challenge.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

60%

of people no longer trust social media networks.

Edelman 2018 Trust Barometer

71%

of people agree that social media should do more to support high-quality journalism.

Edelman 2018 Trust Barometer

of its employees, which allowed its workforce to share and comment on the retailer's 2018 Christmas ad via social media before it officially launched.[9] The app is now being rolled out—which will give all members of store staff a chance to engage and book in-store services with customers, building up relationships that John Lewis will hope lead to sales and loyalty.

Elsewhere, progressive companies like Adidas and The New York Times, for example, are working to develop intimate, meaningful dialogue with smaller, more valuable audience groups. They're creating communities[10] and sharing insightful and researched content[11]—then getting out of the way and letting passionate users talk to one another.

In a retail world where the merging of the digital and physical domains is high on companies' to-do list, there are multiple attempts to use technology such as augmented reality (AR), or services such as click & collect, to bridge the divide.

From a purely social media perspective, furniture and accessories retailer The Conran Shop is working with Pinterest to develop new in-store opportunities. By inserting 'pincodes' on products in the store, shoppers can scan their Pinterest mobile apps at the shelf edge to reveal valuable product information and inspiration.[12]

Understanding how consumers are using social media to engage with your brand is crucial in developing these strategies, because people don't use social media in the same way across all their shopping trips.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

John Lewis

New technology that empowers staff to make a social media connection with customers

Department store chain John Lewis has rolled out an employee advocacy app across its UK stores, enabling its 26,000 employees (known as partners) to share content about the retailer and build up a direct connection with consumers.

The aim of the app is ultimately to help the business increase brand engagement and awareness—and drive sales and growth—by utilising its entire workforce not just relying on the head office social media team.

The initial pilot of the app was across eight stores and head office, with those using it able to share information and comments related to the 2018 John Lewis Christmas ad hours before the official launch.

Eva Bojtos, senior manager on the social marketing team at John Lewis says the programme, which has been collated with the hashtag #WeArePartners, is already helping drive appointments in-store, such as those with the retailer's personal stylists.

TAKEAWAY Opening up social media to the wider workforce can empower a retailer's staff to become brand advocates. But make sure it's structured and regulated.

Blackwell's Bookshops

YouTube channel is intrinsically linked to the literature world, featuring exclusive author interviews

Blackwell's has strong competition in the form of chain bookshops such as Waterstones and the continued growth of Amazon, so it always needs to find a point of differentiation.

On its YouTube channel,[13] which has over 1,100 followers, it has started broadcasting regular 10-15-minute interviews with authors, focusing on their favourite reads and discussing their influences.

It's a way of engaging what for Blackwell's is a literature-loving customer demographic via special, exclusive and often high-brow pieces of content that cannot be found elsewhere. The viewing figures for each video vary, but some of the most watched videos have generated close to 5,000 views.

The senior digital team are proud of the series, named 'Books in the Life of…', and the videos are shared across the retailer's other social channels.

TAKEAWAY Fuel your customers' passion and practice what you preach; Blackwell's is a retailer that sells stories, so it uses YouTube to bring together professional storytellers.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from elsewhere

Condé Nast

Encourages a highly engaged following by creating a safe, intimate community for discussion

When Condé Nast Traveler published their Women Who Travel website, they realized they had found an untapped community of readers who wanted to engage more on the subject. In response, they launched the Women Who Travel Facebook Group, which allows passionate female travelers to have conversations in a safe environment.

The closed group, which requires moderator permission to access, was an instant success and grew quickly. It has over 56,000 members, 73 percent of whom are active daily. Condé Nast has since scaled Facebook Groups across seven other publications so they can better focus on the niche communities of their readers.[14]

TAKEAWAY Facebook Groups, including closed groups requiring permission to access, can be a powerful way to bring passionate customers together and facilitate dialogue.
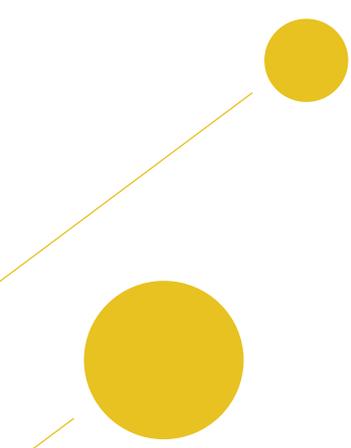
HOOTSUITE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THIS TREND

GETTING STARTED

- **Create a branded hashtag for Instagram aligned with community values.**

  To build conversation around your brand, create a short, easy-to-remember branded hashtag that brings your community together around a common interest. For example, Herschel Supply Co. has a popular branded hashtag, #welltravelled, for people who love to travel. They encourage their customers to share photos of Herschel products while exploring beautiful corners of the world.

  Use hashtags to align users around a brand value or noble purpose, rather than just a product offering.

- **Participate in (or run) Twitter chats.**

  A Twitter chat is a public discussion on Twitter around a specific hashtag. Twitter chats are a great way to build community by generating lively discussions around your customers' interests. The chats are held at a specific time, cover one topic or theme, and are led by a moderator.

  Hootsuite hosts a monthly #Hootchat on social media marketing and strategy, bringing together a group of engaged participants who want to learn more about social media for achieving business objectives.

- **Build a Facebook Group around a core audience interest.**

  If you have a Facebook Business Page, you can easily create a Facebook Group to complement it. While your page will offer more general information to your followers, your Facebook Group can address niche interests and target your superfans.

  The key for brands is to create a space where customers can talk to one another. Facilitate that engagement and then get out of the way. Avoid heavy-handed pitches or product plugs. You can choose to make your group public or closed, and you should clearly identify the purpose of the group so people know why it exists.
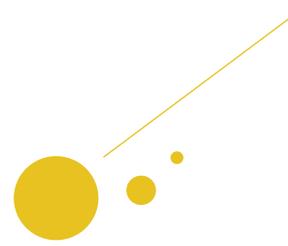
- **Include micro-influencers in your marketing strategy.**

  When planning campaigns, consider hiring a micro-influencer to improve the quality of your outreach with more niche audiences. Unlike well-known or celebrity influencers, micro-influencers have smaller, highly engaged social media audiences. Micro-influencers are more affordable for brands, are viewed as more trustworthy by consumers, and often drive better results.

  One of the easiest ways to find micro-influencers is through a hashtag search on Twitter or Instagram. This will help you find people that have influence in your industry. To learn more about micro-influencers, check out this overview.

- **Start a secret group on Facebook.**

  Public groups on Facebook are open to everyone. Closed groups can be found via search but require admin permission to join. And then there are secret groups: invisible and unsearchable to the outside world. The only way to join is to get a member to invite you.

  For the right brands, secret groups can be an effective way to create an aura of exclusivity or intrigue, especially in the context of launches and special promotions. And members, free from the prying eyes of the outside world, may feel freer to share ideas. For a prime example, check out MEL Magazine's profile of the potato-chip themed Gettin' Chippy With It Facebook Group.[15]

- **Run monthly Facebook Live Q&As sessions around commonly asked questions.**

  To keep customer trust high, it's important to communicate often, address problems proactively, and be as transparent as possible. Facebook Live Q&As are an excellent place to start. Not only do they make your brand feel more human by having someone talk to customers in real time, but they're also easy to manage and budget-friendly to run.

  Don't worry about scripting beforehand—the goal is to be authentic and engaging in an informal setting.

- **Activate employee advocates.**

  To share technical info and unique insights, tap into the experts already on your team, from product specialists to your CEO. And encourage employees to reshare branded social content that's relevant to their unique audiences. This allows you to tap into existing peer networks and gain entry into existing circles of trust.

  Dedicated social employee advocacy tools can streamline the process of creating and amplifying social content.
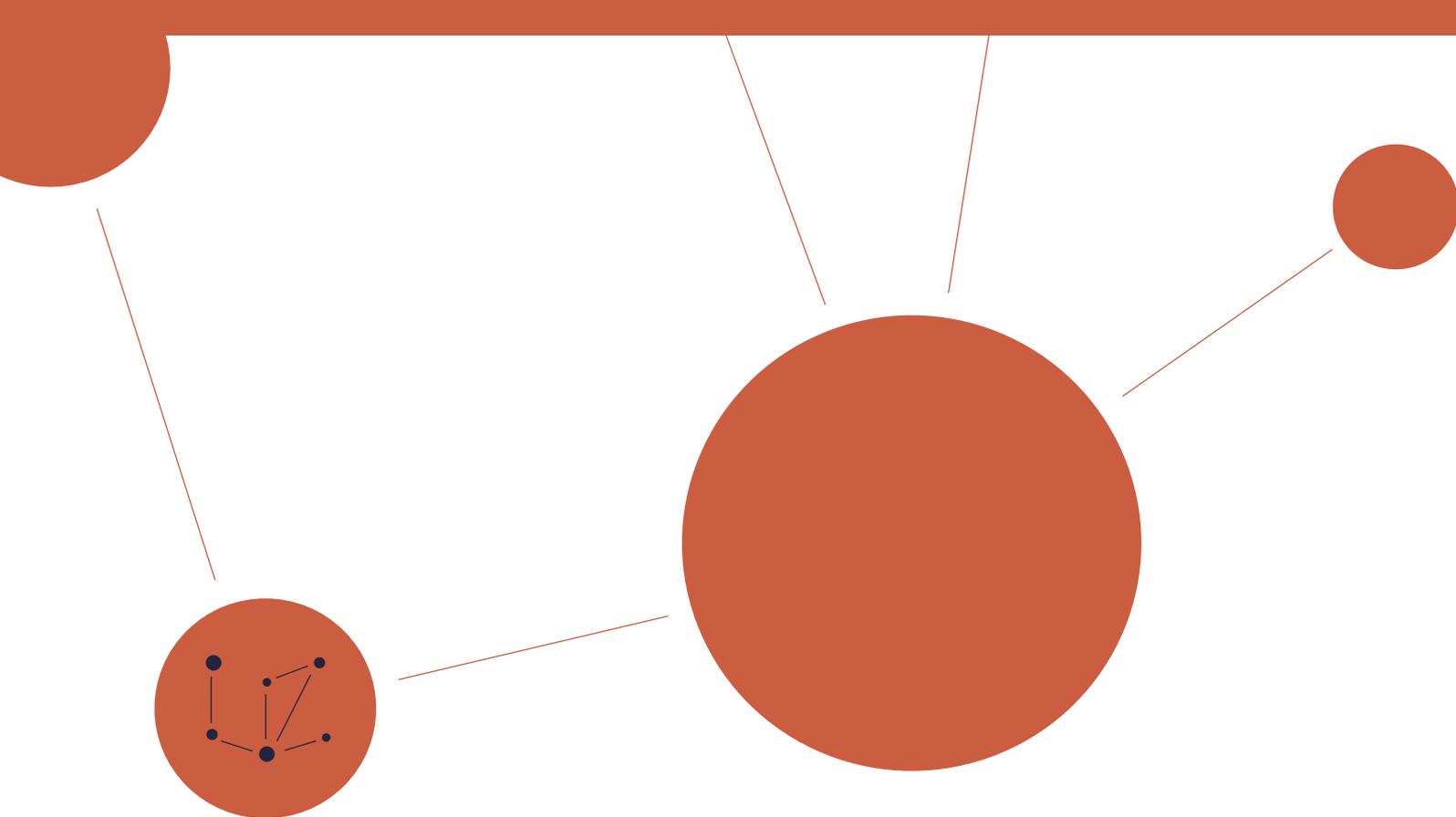
TREND 2
Storifying social

CONTENT TEAMS ADAPT AS STORIES OFFER
NEW FORMATS FOR SHARING

Will the news feed one day be an endangered species? According to consulting firm Block Party, Stories—the vertical, ephemeral slideshows pioneered by Snapchat—are now growing 15 times faster than feed-based sharing.[16]

64%

of respondents have either **implemented Instagram Stories** into their social strategy or plan to do so in the next 12 months.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

Facebook's own chief product officer Chris Cox shared a chart showing that Stories are set to surpass feeds as the primary way people share things with their friends within the next year.[17] And nearly a billion users across WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat already turn to Stories to share.[18] This is far more than just another new format.

Social media is pivoting from text-based platforms originally designed for desktop use (think early Facebook) to truly mobile-only networks that enable users to capture in-the-moment experiences—and Stories embody that pivot. Stories are overwhelmingly visual and meant to be created and consumed on the fly with nothing more than a smartphone and a creative eye. Because they're ephemeral—often disappearing after a day—there's more room for fun and experimentation. Stories feel real, immediate, and intensely personal. For brands, this requires a major shift in focus in 2019.

Stories Product Daily Active Users

WhatsApp Status	450M
Instagram Stories	300M
Snapchat (whole app)	191M
Facebook Stories	150M
Facebook Messenger Stories	70M

Source: TechCrunch, Facebook Stories reveals 150M daily users and here come ads. *Last updated: May 2018.*

Increasingly, the subject of Instagram Stories or general social media reach is becoming a boardroom discussion point, with follower numbers and individual strategies around celebrity influencers finding their ways on to quarterly financial statements. Digital-first businesses such as AO, Asos, and Boohoo are key proponents of this.

Summarising business performance in Asos's 2017-18 final results statement, Asos CEO Nick Beighton underlined the importance of Instagram Stories, saying it brought the company "fantastic engagement" and 244 million views during the year. He noted that social media followers were up 13% globally to 22.7 million, adding that Asos worked with Instagram to launch a geo-targeted shopping feed and was the first business to have successfully launched in multiple currencies on this format.[19]

Of course, it should be stated that the absence of a robust API for Instagram Stories makes scheduling and measuring engagement and ROI exceedingly hard, at least for the moment.[20] But what's becoming clear is that Stories are second nature for a new wave of digital natives—and the news feed may be slowly becoming a thing of the past.[21]

52% cite **lack of video creation (skills and budget)** as a top challenge.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

Stories are now growing **15**x faster than feed-based sharing.

Block Party, Beyond the News Feed

"[The] Stories format is on a path to surpass feeds as the primary way people share things with their friends sometime next year."

Facebook chief product officer, Chris Cox, quoted in TechCrunch

4/5 major brands are already **using the Stories format.**

Block Party, Beyond the News Feed

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

Asos
The addition of the Stories feature multiplied Asos's number of Instagram users

Online fashion house Asos was one of the first retailers or brands to experiment with Instagram Stories ads when the platform launched in January 2017.

A year later and the retailer's CEO, Nick Beighton, was reflecting on the success of the format in an analysts' call following the company's half-year results. At the time, Asos's content on the site was viewed over 30 million times while videos were viewed more than 52 million times, up from 40 million in the previous half of the year.[22]

"When we recognise technology that can help our business, we fold in pretty quick," he said, adding that Instagram was more popular than Facebook with its core 20-something customer.

TAKEAWAY When a CEO is talking about Instagram Stories during quarterly analysts' conference calls, it's clear the social media strategy is working.

Dunkin' Donuts
Embraces new Stories technologies to delight customers

Dunkin' Donuts was one of the first brands to create and use custom Giphy stickers for Valentine's Day.[23] The campaign was fun and interactive, allowing followers to use these branded stickers within their own Stories.

According to Block Party, the Dunkin' Donuts set of 10 Valentine's Day stickers amassed millions of views in just a few weeks—with their highest performing sticker receiving more than six million views. During the campaign, Dunkin' Donuts used its own Story content to engage with fans and promote campaign participation.[24]

TAKEAWAY Early adoption pays off. Experiment with ever-evolving Story technologies—from stickers to AR—to give your customers an unexpected experience.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from elsewhere

The Guardian

Creates spontaneous, low-fi Story content for a higher return on investment

After the Guardian team started tracking its Instagram performance, they made an interesting discovery: high-production, highly-scripted Stories were not giving them the return on investment they expected. In contrast, their more spontaneous, less polished Stories—like its "explainer videos"—performed much better.

These less polished Stories are aimed at a younger audience who seemingly can't get enough, watching nearly half of these videos to completion. They also feature young presenters and use more casual language (including emojis), which have resonated much better with their digital audience. On the strength of its Stories strategy, the Guardian has grown its Instagram followers from 860,000 to one million in just four months.[25]

TAKEAWAY Test your Stories content to find out what resonates best with your audience—high production values don't necessarily guarantee a better ROI.
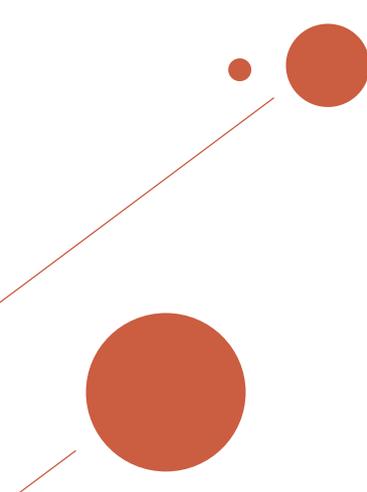
HOOTSUITE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THIS TREND

GETTING STARTED

- **Start experimenting with Stories.**

  An estimated four out of five major brands are already creating Stories.[26] If you aren't already creating Stories, it's time to start.

  Stories can be as easy to create as you choose, so there's a low barrier to entry for any team's skill set. Share content weekly (and at different times of day) to see what works best with your audiences.

  PRO TIP: Shoot your videos vertically. That's how people watch them.

- **Create Story-specific content.**

  Your content should reflect the unique look and feel of Stories—raw, unedited, and live action.

  Our social team at Hootsuite has tested both professionally animated and live action Instagram Stories, and found that live action videos performed significantly better because they matched the Story aesthetic people are used to seeing.

- **Use the Stories Highlight feature.**

  Despite their off-the-cuff aesthetic, Stories can sometimes be time-consuming to create and share.

  For brands reluctant to let their efforts simply disappear after 24 hours, there's Highlights. Selected Stories can be displayed as long as you want, along with a designated custom cover image. This feature is ideal for special promotions, campaigns, or longer, more high-production videos that deserve extra exposure.

- **Tap your team's full creative resources.**

  Stories work best when they integrate video, storytelling, text, images, and more.

  Expecting a single social media specialist to integrate all of these skills is a tall order. Instead, find ways for your video, photography, and graphic design teams to join forces to create something memorable.

- **Get creative with your Story structures.**

  Stories are easy to create and allow you to produce content quickly, so you should experiment with different structures to find what works best for your brand. For example, you can create tutorials showing people how to use your product, give a behind-the-scenes look at your company culture, host a takeover, or run a Q&A on topics that interest your customers.

- **Add UTMs to your links to track success.**

  Verified accounts can add a "swipe up" feature to their Stories that allow viewers to follow a link to another website or landing page. By adding UTMs to your Story URLs, you can track where users are going and get a better understanding of what content resonates with your audience. If you don't have a verified account, add a link with a UTM code to your bio.

- **Get in early with Facebook Stories.**

  So far, Facebook Stories (which appear on the network's flagship platform) haven't really caught on. But CEO Mark Zuckerberg appears determined to get Stories right on Facebook and is investing heavily in the format.

  Currently, only around nine percent of major brands post to Facebook Stories, but companies that get in early may enjoy an early adopter advantage.[27] Plus, it's easy—the tap of a button lets you syndicate Stories straight from Instagram to Facebook.

- **Experiment with AR and custom GIFs in your Stories.**

  If you're looking to up your Stories game, consider adding augmented reality features and GIFs to your storytelling. AR experiences and GIF stickers are now widely available as features of the Stories cameras on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. You should use GIFs to enhance your images, grab attention, and direct viewers' attention to something like a call-to-action or "swipe-up."
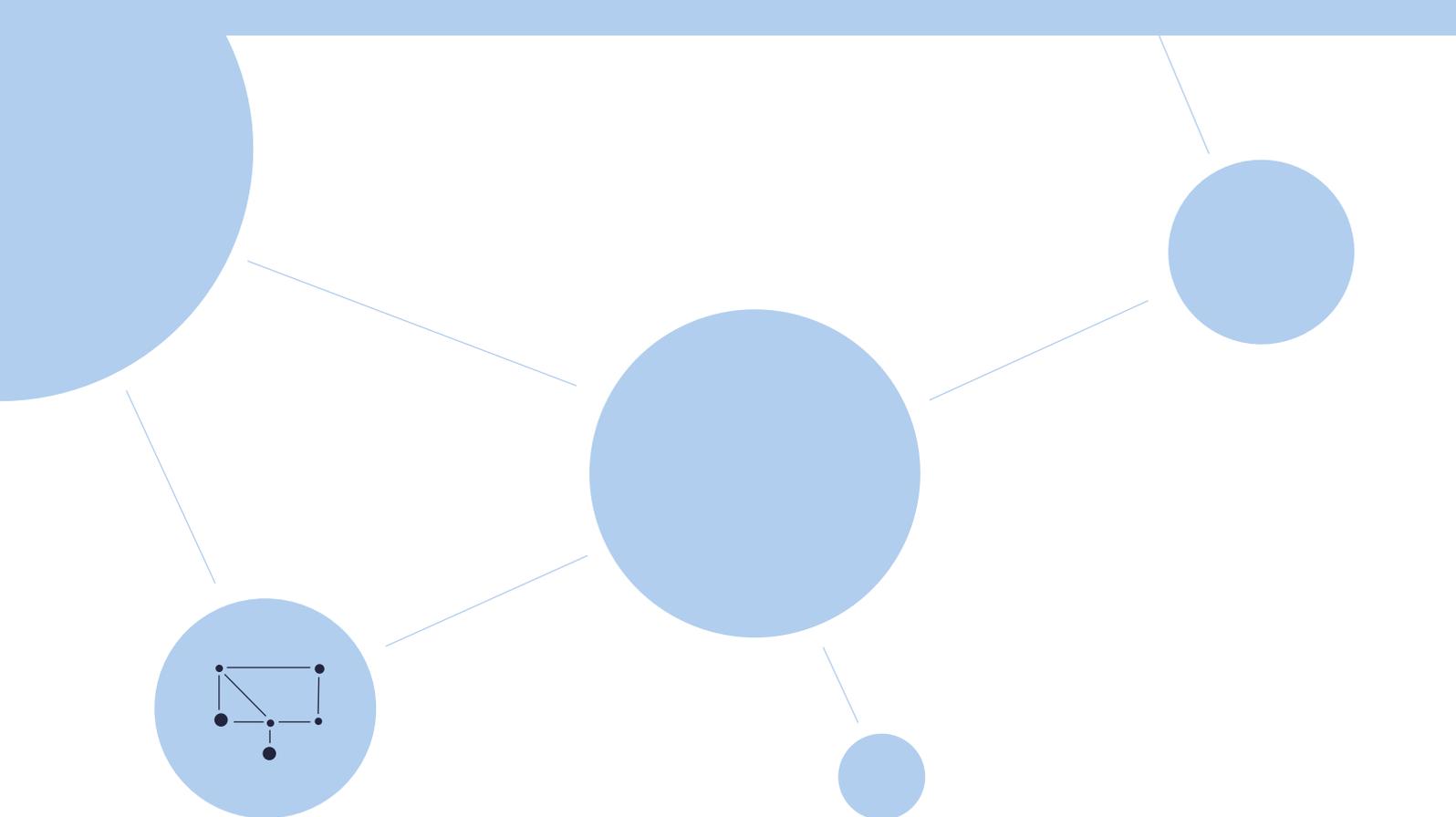
Closing the ads gap

MORE COMPETITION ON PAID SOCIAL FORCES MARKETERS TO UP THEIR GAME

By now, everyone knows we're in the pay-to-play era on social. Accordingly, marketers are increasing social ad budgets (up 32 percent in 2018 alone) and producing more ads than ever before.[28] One of every four Facebook Pages now use paid media,[29] and Facebook already accounts for 23 percent of total US digital ad spending.[30]

78%

of respondents have either **invested in social advertising or plan to do so** in the next 12 months.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

But with the popularity of social ads have come new challenges: Prices are increasing and it's becoming harder to get noticed. According to Mary Meeker's Internet Trends 2018 report, Facebook click-through rate (CTR) costs have increased by 61 percent, and cost per thousand impressions (CPM) has jumped 112 percent.[31]
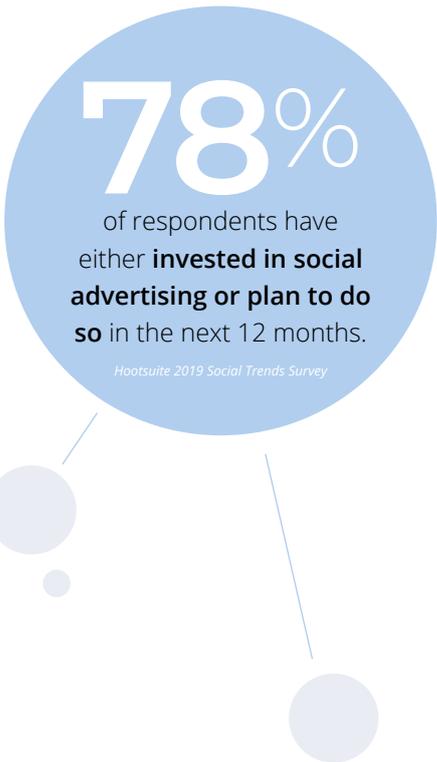
Rising costs and fleeting attention have combined to limit ROI for advertisers and reduce overall margins. So how can brands ensure they maximize the return on their social ad investment? It's critical to remember that impressions, views, and other reach metrics are rarely indicative of campaign effectiveness.

With 293,000 status updates now posted on Facebook every minute, only the most engaging ads rise above background noise.[32] Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, have grown adept at filtering out irrelevant ads, either skimming over or actively using ad blocking tools.[33]

While you may be able to pay your way into someone's news feed, that's no guarantee that anyone is going to pay attention. The solution? Paid social teams are recognising the importance of pairing ad money with an equivalent investment of time, creativity, and targeting savvy. And they're amplifying the best performing organic content with paid boosts.

Average Facebook Page Post Reach

Average monthly growth in page likes ('fans'), average reach of page posts, and the contribution of paid media

AVERAGE MONTHLY CHANGE IN PAGE LIKES	AVERAGE POST REACH vs. PAGE LIKES	AVERAGE ORGANIC REACH vs. PAGE LIKES	PERCENTAGE OF PAGES USING PAID MEDIA	AVERAGE PAID REACH vs. TOTAL REACH
+0.15%	**8.1%**	**6.4%**	**24.2%**	**27.3%**
Q-O-Q CHANGE: -6% (-1 BP)	Q-O-Q CHANGE: -9% (-80 BPS)	Q-O-Q CHANGE: -11% (-80 BPS)	Q-O-Q CHANGE: +27% (+510 BPS)	Q-O-Q CHANGE: +13% (+320 BPS)

Source: 2018 Q3 Global Digital Statshot
Q-O-Q (quarter-on-quarter) changes are vs. Q1 2018. Q-O-Q percentage figures reflect relative change; BPS (basis points) figures reflect absolute change.

Spotify[34] and Netflix[35] are creating social ads that are both personalised and entertaining—not just conveying a commercial message.

The likes of online marketplaces eBay and Wish.com, as well as fashion retailer Guess, reported early success with Snapchat's Shoppable Snap Ads feature, with each of them driving better engagement using this platform compared to Snapchat's previous ads tool. The new Snapchat tool was launched in October 2018, but these three brands were able to test it out beforehand—and seemingly experienced commercial benefits.[36]

Ultimately, brands that respect and engage their customers as individuals and add value to their audiences via content will see real ROI in social ads. The ongoing challenge will be finding cost-effective ways to do so at scale.

64% identify **decline in organic reach and the need to increase paid budgets** as big challenges moving forward.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

58% cite the volatility of **Facebook's algorithm changes** as a problem.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

Facebook click-through rate **(CTR) costs have increased by** **61**% in the last year.

Mary Meeker, 2018 Internet Trends Report

1/4 Facebook Pages now **use paid media.**

We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2018 Q3 Global Digital Statshot

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

eBay
Boosting customer engagement using Snapchat's Shoppable Snap Ads

Online marketplace eBay was a pioneer in its use of Snapchat's Shoppable Snap Ads feature, which was rolled out to all brands in October 2018.

As one of the early testers of the tool prior to its official launch, eBay reported a five times better engagement rate with its ads compared to when using the older Snap Ads feature.

Available in Snapchat's Ads Platform, Shoppable Snap Ads give users the opportunity to tap directly to access product details via Snapchat, which paves the way for a quick purchase.

TAKEAWAY Don't just think straightforward 'buy this now' messaging will help complete a sale; social ads must offer added value.

Tropicana
Uses Stories ads to integrate video and text into an engaging how-to Juice brand

Tropicana recognised early on the multimedia potential of Instagram Stories to boost awareness and sales among young adults. In an especially successful campaign, they combined mouth-watering pour shots of juice being mixed into festive drinks like Sangria.

Hand-drawn text and arrows offered mixing instructions, and customers were invited to "swipe up" for the full recipe. The result: an 18-point lift in ad recall and measurable boost in purchase intent.[37]

TAKEAWAY Take advantage of new multimedia ad formats to entertain and inform audiences, instead of just blasting them with ad copy.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from elsewhere

Spotify
Creates moving social media ads to inspire customers and drive positive change

Spotify's industry-leading creative campaigns won them Ad Age's 2018 In-House Agency of the Year award.[38]

Why are its ads so memorable? Its secret sauce starts with creating content that matters to listeners, then adapting and promoting it on various digital media in thoughtful ways. For example, Spotify's year-long "Black History Is Happening Now" campaign enlists the voices of Black creators to tell stories through music, video, and podcasts.[39]

Janelle Monáe kicked things off with a takeover of the platform. Then, Spotify partnered with Instagram to promote #BlackGirlMagic, a social ad campaign celebrating black female artists. It highlights the most liked Instagram posts for top ranked artists played within the #BlackGirlMagic playlists.[40]

TAKEAWAY Go beyond your product and create ads that inspire your audience.

HOOTSUITE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THIS TREND

GETTING STARTED

- **Understand and target the right audience.**

  Knowing your audience is key to getting a high engagement rate. Each ad campaign should target a focused group based on interests, jobs, relevant competitors, and previous interaction with your brand. Social networks have different targeting options depending on the type of ad you want to create.

  If you aren't clear on who you're supposed to target and why, research your customers to understand what their challenges are and how they interact with your business, brand, products, and services.

- **Define your goals and metrics.**

  It's important to show that social media has a positive bottom-line impact on your business. That's why every ad campaign should have goals and metrics that tie back to business objectives and that you know how to measure. Depending on what type of campaign you're running and the audience you're targeting, your metrics will be different.

  Awareness campaigns, for example, might prioritise impressions, while conversion campaigns should put more value on click-throughs.

- **Invest in high-quality content.**

  With more brands competing for people's attention on social media, ordinary posts aren't good enough anymore. You need to create high-quality content that will resonate with your audience. Prioritise compelling visuals, which are essential for clicks and high conversion rates on social media. Not every brand will have the budget for expensive equipment or a professional crew, but learning some video basics or even hiring a freelancer can make a big difference in quality.

- **Repurpose concepts from top-performing organic content.**

Creating high quality social ads takes time and money, so you should test your ad concepts as organic posts first to see how they perform. Once you see what's working, you can adapt and repurpose your top performing organic content for ads. This strategy will help increase ROI because you're investing resources into something that has already been tested.

- **Use what you've learned from previous campaigns to improve performance.**

By running ads and measuring their performance, you can compare results and set benchmarks for future campaigns. The right analytics tools can streamline the process of tracking results and revenue generated by your social media efforts. Incorporating insights from what has worked historically helps set up a positive feedback loop, where ads get more efficient and cost effective.

- **Embrace new ad formats.**

The social ad space is one of constant innovation. Newer formats have the advantage of tapping into consumer curiosity, while also avoiding ad fatigue.

Instagram Stories ads, for example, have been around since 2017. But this year Instagram gave brands the ability to use three consecutive photos or videos to truly weave a narrative for users. Pinterest recently rolled out wide-format promoted videos that span the network's whole two-column grid for maximum impact. And Facebook Messenger ads allow brands to connect with customers directly via instant messaging.

- **Split-test for success.**

No matter how savvy your ad team is, it's impossible to predict what users will actually click on. That's where split-testing (also known as A/B testing) comes into play. This scientific approach to social ads involves running multiple ads with slight variations (different images, different headlines, and so on) and then doubling down on the top performers.

Facebook offers basic split-testing functionality through its dynamic creative ads, but for streamlined split-testing with virtually limitless variants, consider a third-party ad tool.
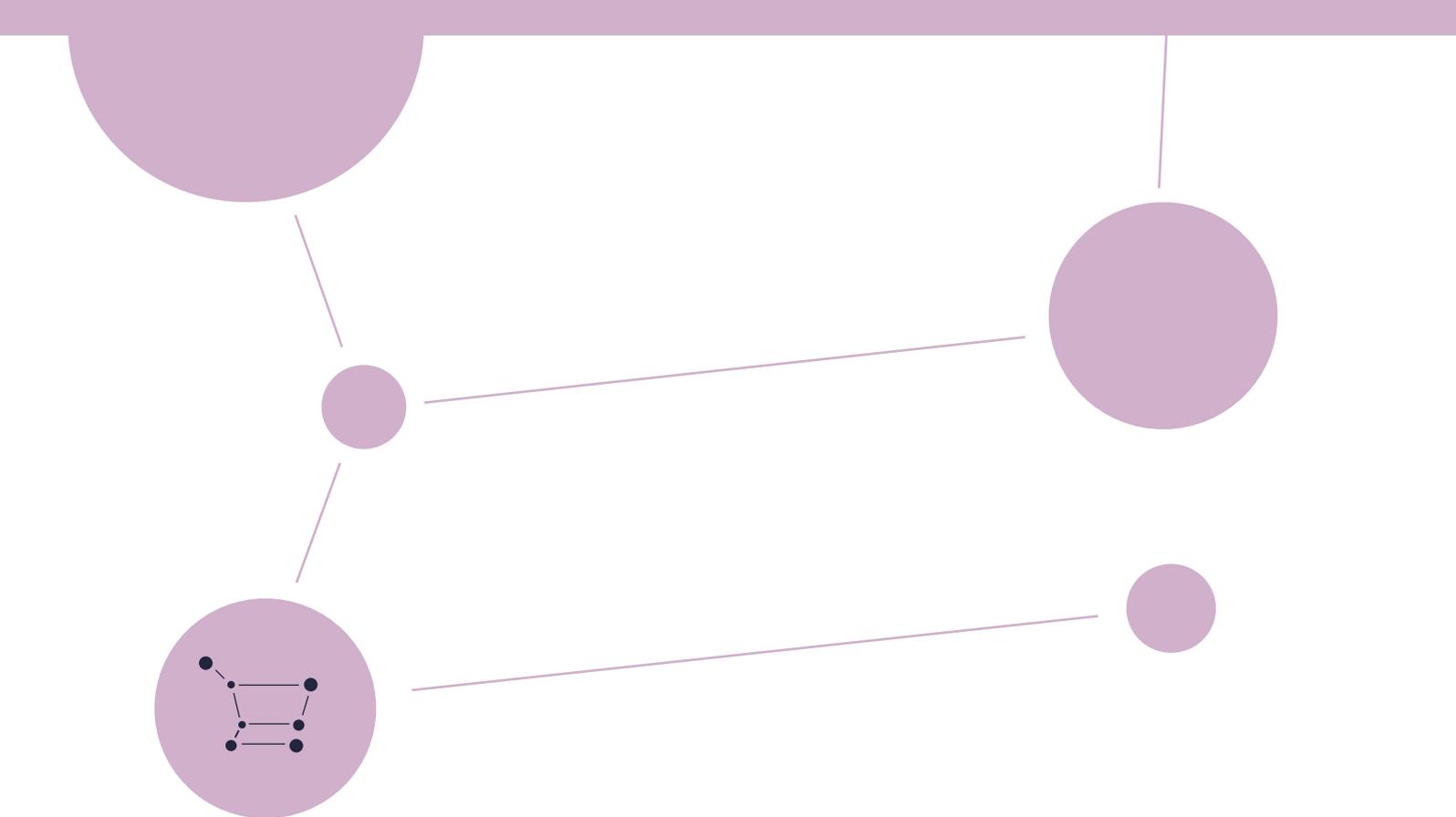
TREND 4

Cracking the commerce code

IMPROVED SOCIAL SHOPPING TECHNOLOGIES (FINALLY) FUEL SALES

What was perhaps one of the few shortfalls in Amazon's customer engagement strategy is arguably a thing of the past, thanks to a partnership it kickstarted with Snapchat in 2018.

Visual search functionality on the Snapchat app combined with Amazon's product listings have fast-tracked the online titan into the social shopping arena. Taking a photo of an item on Snapchat automatically prompts that or similar products from Amazon's inventory to appear on screen, paving the way for one-click shopping via social media.[41]

The social shopping conundrum remains one to solve for many other retailers and brands, with The Conran Shop's head of ecommerce Rachel Morris last year describing the social media 'buy button' as something of "a false start" for social commerce. It is crucial not to overwhelm or annoy users with commercial elements, she warned.[42]

Nevertheless, certain territories around the world have really taken to it. In Asia, social commerce adoption has been swift,[43] with 70 percent of China's Gen Z-ers now opting to buy direct from social.[44] In North America, however, social commerce hasn't kept pace. Despite the long-hyped promise of buy buttons, people aren't yet buying on social in huge numbers.[45]

Change is coming from all angles, it seems. Instagram's shoppable posts now allow users to go directly from discovery to checkout without ever leaving the app, and the platform has even added a Shopping tab to its Explore page.[46]

On Facebook, Marketplace has streamlined the process of listing and selling items on social media and is now used in 70 countries by more than 800 million people.[47]

Video, in particular, is proving a critical bridge for social commerce. In a study of 5,500 consumers by video marketing company BrightCove, 74 percent of viewers drew a connection between watching a social video and making a purchase.[48]
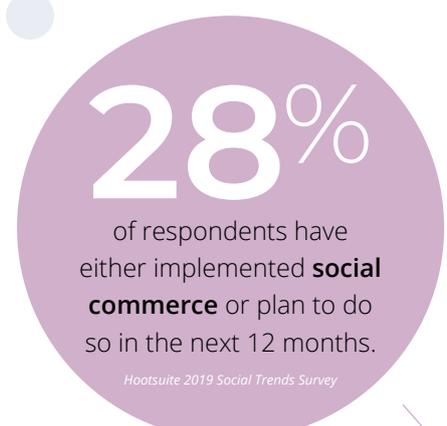
28%
of respondents have either implemented **social commerce** or plan to do so in the next 12 months.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

17%
have either implemented **shoppable galleries** or plan to do so in the next 12 months.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

So, as a brand, how do you start incorporating social commerce into your marketing strategy? Finding ways to make shopping live, interactive, and seamless—and mobile—is key.

Marks & Spencer's CEO Steve Rowe has committed the business to becoming "digital first" to stay relevant and win customers in the future, and that resulted in the roll-out of multiple partnerships and strategies in 2018.[49] The UK high street mainstay was one of the first retailers to use Instagram's 'Shopping' feature, where products are tagged with the name and price of a product and a click-to-buy option in-feed and in Stories.

Supported by celebrities such as Holly Willoughby, the retailer's 'Must Haves' campaign was pushed through these channels and resulted in three million customers in four hours finding out about the products through Instagram alone, says M&S marketing director Nathan Ansell, who described Shopping as "a really important part of the mix".[50]

2019 is expected to see more retailers experiment with the growing array of social shopping tech available, laying foundations for more robust future strategies.

70%

of China's Gen Zers now **buy directly** from social media.

WARC, China's Gen Z Relies on Social Media for Shopping
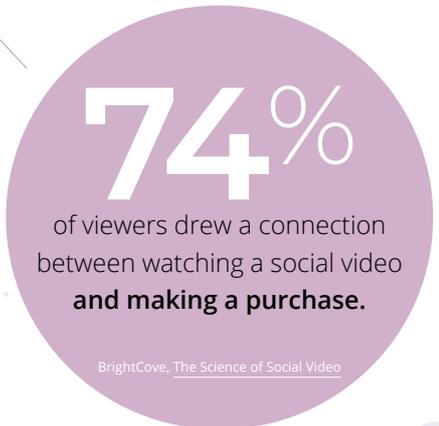
74%

of viewers drew a connection between watching a social video **and making a purchase.**

BrightCove, The Science of Social Video

Facebook Marketplace is now used in 70 countries by more than

800

million people

CNET, Facebook Marketplace is used in 70 countries

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

Glossier
Uses visual social media content to showcase and sell products

Beauty brand Glossier—a retailer that sells almost exclusively online to millennial customers[51]—uses social video tutorials, user-generated content, and photography to showcase its products.

In the absence of an in-store experience, it shares high-quality videos and photos showing followers how the products will look on different types of complexions. It also encourages user-generated content and reviews to show products on non-models and in everyday light. Founder Emily Weiss estimates that 90 percent of the company's growth can be attributed to their social media followers.[52]

TAKEAWAY Sharing a range of video—from professional quality to user generated—helps customers make informed purchases without an in-store experience.

L'Oréal
Shows livestreaming can be the new QVC

For a look at the future of social commerce, turn to China. Over the past year, livestream shopping—where hosts use live social videos to showcase products that consumers can buy while watching—have ballooned in popularity.

On Alibaba, for example, livestream sales are up 755 percent. [53] L'Oréal put livestreaming technology to good use during last year's Cannes Film Festival. Using social network WeChat, the brand streamed a live broadcast of celebrities on the red carpet.

While watching and commenting, fans could also place orders for products used by the celebrities, which were conveniently displayed alongside the video stream.[54]

TAKEAWAY The best social commerce recreates the experience of shopping for customers by combining live video, chat, and "see now, buy now" features.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from elsewhere

Bristol City Football Club

Footballer Twitter GIFs that build followers and attract sponsorship

Bristol City are an English Championship side that have threatened promotion to the Premier League in recent years, but it is on social media where a winning strategy has already been forged.

Ahead of the 2017-18 season, the club's players recorded videos of themselves pretending to celebrate scoring goals. These were converted into GIFs and broadcast on Twitter directly after said player actually did score in a first-team match.

Some of the players' actions in the videos were so random they began to develop a cult following, leading the players to record new eccentric celebration videos as the battled among themselves internally for pageviews. Between 2017 and 2018, Bristol City Twitter followers jumped by a third, and in the last year they have rocketed 10,000 to 163,000.

Commercially speaking, some GIFs have now been sponsored by businesses wanting to get exposure off the back of what was originally just a fan engagement campaign.[55]

TAKEAWAY Think creatively with social, and unexpected commercial opportunities will arise.

HOOTSUITE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THIS TREND

GETTING STARTED

- **Set up shoppable Instagram posts.**

  Before you can start selling products on Instagram, you need to have an approved business profile. Then you can add your product catalogue to Facebook with Shopify or BigCommerce, and Instagram will approve your submission. This will allow you to tag products in your posts so your followers can browse and buy.

  PRO TIP: Tag multiple items in one photo so that people can see how your products look together.

- **Share your products in action.**

  High-quality images and videos can help potential customers browse your products and get an idea of look and feel without going in-store. Showcase your products in a variety of different scenarios to add variety and keep your audience engaged. When building out your content, think about your ideal customers—how they use your products, their interests, and their top questions or concerns.

- **Promote your products with contests.**

  If you want to get more followers browsing and buying your products, run a sweepstakes contest for products that you feature in shoppable posts. Before running your contest, clearly outline contest guidelines and use an easy-to-remember hashtag that helps people share and find your contest.

  PRO TIP: Make sure that your contest adheres to Instagram's promotion guidelines.

● **Leverage high-quality user-generated content.**

To succeed at social commerce, you need to build a loyal following that loves your products and will share how they use them. Glossier calls the value people gain from their association with a popular brand "social capital"[56]—and it can be a powerful motivator to encourage fans to share content relevant to your brand.

To elicit high-quality user-generated content from fans, try running a video series with employees or micro-influencers showing how your product looks in action. You can offer exclusive promotions and giveaways to encourage followers to share their experiences.

● **Create a series based on your top-performing content.**

Once you've done some testing on product videos and know what works, create follow-up videos and repackage them as a series. This will allow you to retarget people who have already watched and engaged with your video content. You're much more likely to get a better return when you invest time and resources into top-performing content.

● **Livestream your product demos.**

A live broadcast on Facebook or Instagram can go a long way toward recreating the energy and urgency of real-life shopping experiences. Schedule streams in advance and encourage viewers to tune in with regular social updates.

Invest in high-quality lighting and audio-video equipment, and be sure that someone is actively engaging with viewer comments during the broadcast.

● **Experiment with AR to showcase your product in real-life scenarios.**

AR, which superimposes digital images onto a real-world environment, helps brands offer richer online shopping experiences. Facebook has already announced that it will be investing more in AR technology in 2019.[57] Brands like Sephora and Nike are working with Facebook to test features that will allow users to "try on" their products on social.[58] While these features are not open to the public yet, early adoption will be key for brands wanting to keep up with social commerce.
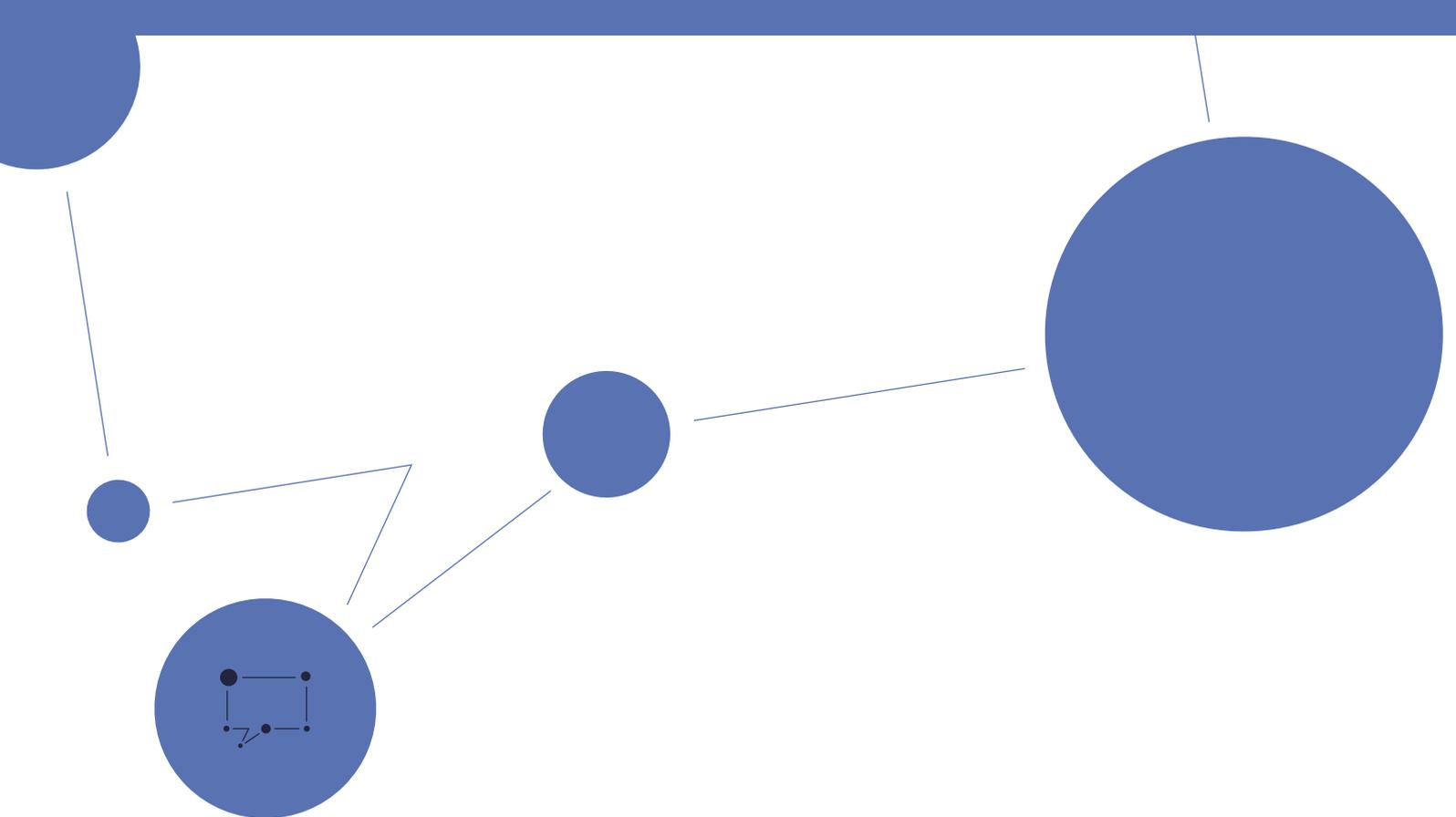
TREND 5

The dominance of messaging

CUSTOMERS DEMAND BETTER 1:1 SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

Luxury e-tailer Yoox Net-a-Porter (YNAP) and fast fashion e-tailer Missguided are among the retailers that are utilising WhatsApp as a customer messaging platform.

In 2018, YNAP said its revamped app—which now provides customer notifications through WhatsApp—has helped mobile-supported sales exceed 50% of total group sales.[59] Missguided, meanwhile, viewed last year's launch of an official WhatsApp platform as a chance to continue conveying its cheeky reputation.

"Say goodbye to drunk texting your ex because Missguided WhatsApp is officially here," the company said in a blog in July, adding: "If you do accidentally drunk text us at 3am declaring your love for us, that's cool. No one else will see, promise."[60]
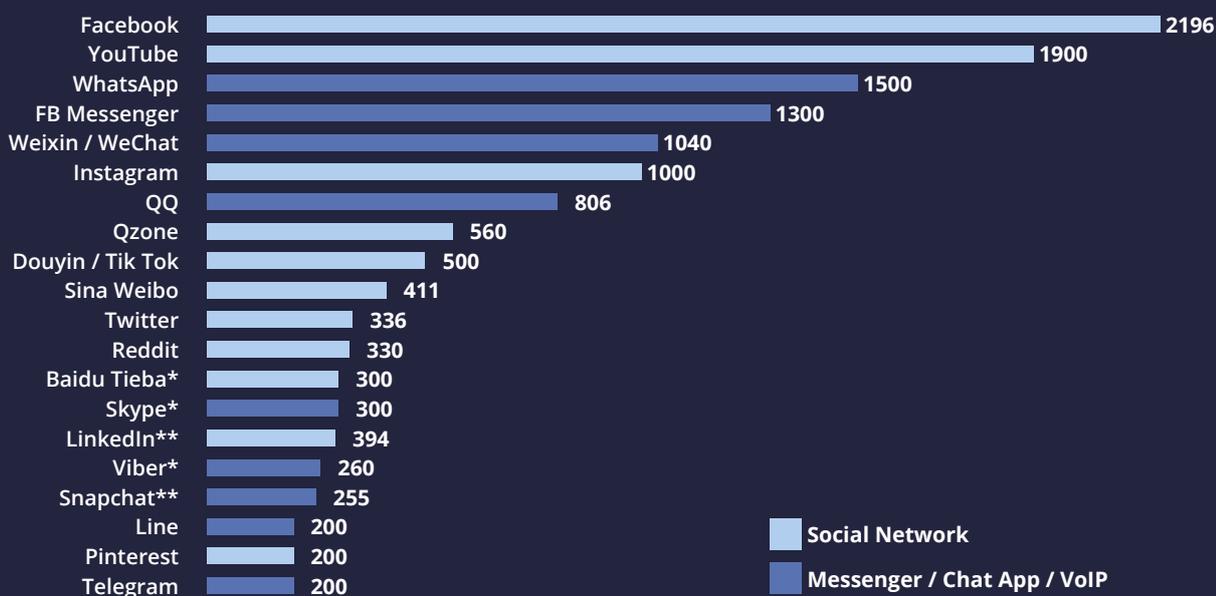
Being part of the Missguided WhatsApp group means customers can ensure they are the first to know about all the retailer's latest drops, exclusive discounts and style tips via notifications straight to the destination they spend so much of their time.

On the negative side, there are fraudsters looking to take advantage of consumers' willingness to use messaging apps such as WhatsApp. Sainsbury's and Morrisons were just two companies impacted by this phenomenon in 2018, with customers receiving phishing messages to WhatsApp purporting to be from these retailers.[61]

Social Platforms: Active Global Accounts

Based on the most recently published monthly active users, user accounts, or unique visitors for each platform, in milllions

Platform	Value
Facebook	2196
YouTube	1900
WhatsApp	1500
FB Messenger	1300
Weixin / WeChat	1040
Instagram	1000
QQ	806
Qzone	560
Douyin / Tik Tok	500
Sina Weibo	411
Twitter	336
Reddit	330
Baidu Tieba*	300
Skype*	300
LinkedIn**	394
Viber*	260
Snapchat**	255
Line	200
Pinterest	200
Telegram	200

Social Network

Messenger / Chat App / VoIP

Source: 2018 Q3 Global Digital Statshot. *Data correct to: 18 July 2018.*
NOTE: We have revised the approach we use to report Facebook's active user numbers since our previous report. As a result, Facebook figures reported here are not comparable to those in our previous reports, and any change to reported figures may not reflect an actual change in active Facebook user numbers.
*These platforms have not published updated user figures in the past 12 months, so figures may be less reliable. ** These platforms do not publish MAU data.

Top messaging apps—WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, QQ, and Skype—now collectively count nearly five billion monthly active users, according to We Are Social and Hootsuite's 2018 Q3 Global Digital Statshot.[62]

For perspective, this means messaging app users now easily eclipse traditional social network users worldwide. And across the board, users are spending more time on messaging and less time-sharing news on social.[63] This shift from public to private spaces is eye-opening for many reasons—not the least of which is the profound impact these changes are having on consumer expectations.

Nine out of ten consumers would like to use messaging to communicate with businesses, according to a survey of 6,000 people globally.[64] In the US, messaging is the single most preferred channel for customer service.

In a 2018 study of 8,000 people by Facebook, 69 percent of US respondents said that directly messaging a company helps them feel more confident about the brand.[65] Given the level of consumer interest, it's little surprise that brands are already developing playbooks for how to do messaging right in terms of content marketing, sales, customer support, and more. Starbucks creates and shares playful, branded stickers on Viber, H&M gives fashion advice through Kik chatbots, and Domino's Facebook Messenger bot allows customers to find coupons and make delivery orders.

46%
of respondents have either **implemented messaging** apps or are planning to do so within the next 12 months.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

35%
say **meeting the needs of changing demographics** (digital natives) is a challenge.

Hootsuite 2019 Social Trends Survey

69%
of U.S. respondents say that **directly messaging a company** helps them feel more confident about the brand.

Facebook, Why Messaging Businesses is the New Normal

Top messaging apps collectively count nearly **5 billion monthly active users.**

We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2018 Q3 Global Digital Statshot
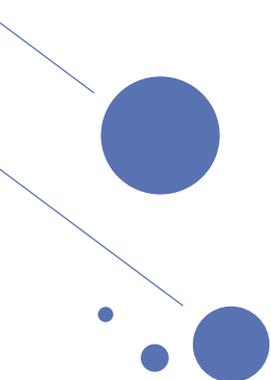
What's clear, however, is that consumers don't want more advertising channels. Smart brands are using messaging apps for more high-value conversations—not as just another channel for interrupting and annoying people.

For marketing and sales, it's equally important to remember that the shift to private spaces via messaging apps means a desire for more privacy, so you'll need to tread carefully with your outreach and avoid unsolicited messages.

One thing is for sure, though. With Facebook running its eponymous website, and owning Instagram and WhatsApp, it's covering many bases. It has a prominent position on many of the different platforms on which consumers now want to communicate with each other and with brands.
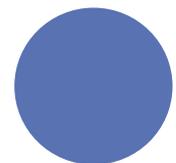
BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

Sephora
Creates a seamless booking service with Messenger bot assistant

To create a more seamless booking experience for clients, cosmetics brand Sephora launched the Sephora Assistant on Facebook Messenger.

To create a more seamless booking experience for clients, cosmetics brand Sephora launched the Sephora Assistant on Facebook Messenger. The bot allows people to book in-store makeovers and appointments in a few simple steps. Customers select their city, store, and times, aided by the friendly, conversational tone of Sephora's bot.

Once the customer books an appointment, they instantly receive a confirmation email. As a result of this new process, Sephora cut down booking steps by over 60 percent and increased in-store bookings by 11 percent. [66]

TAKEAWAY To improve customer satisfaction, use bots to automate repetitive and transactional exchanges with customers, freeing up humans for higher-value exchanges.

Sephora's bot reduced booking steps by more than 60% and increased in-store bookings by 11%.

Facebook, Sephora: Simplifying bookings with Messenger

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines uses its bot to help respond to 30,000 social media conversations weekly in 12 different languages.

Digital Genius, Customer Story: KLM

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from the retail world

Ted Baker
Expands leading customer service across messaging apps

Fashion retailer Ted Baker says its aim is to create new ways for customers to engage with Ted on the social channels they use most often, and that has led the team to launch a Facebook Messenger chatbot called 'Seemore'.

Described as a "unique virtual assistant", Seemore can immediately answer online shoppers' questions, but in its early deployment it has been more widely used to provide product and outfit inspiration to customers.

Using AI, the chatbot has been designed to learn from the interactions it has with customers and, therefore, improve the accuracy of its answers over time and provide an increasingly personalised service for Ted Baker's Facebook community.

The chatbot was developed using input from the Ted Baker customer service and digital product teams, as well as the trade and product departments, to ensure it served a function for multiple areas of the business.[67]

TAKEAWAY For chatbots and other social media tech to gain traction with customers, it requires multiple business functions to have input into their design and deployment.

BEST-IN-CLASS BRANDS TO LEARN FROM
Inspiration from elsewhere

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines
Expands leading customer service across messaging apps

In an average week, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines responds to 30,000 social media conversations in twelve different languages[68]—so new technologies to automate processes are key to meeting customer demands.

Following the success of their Facebook Messenger chatbot, KLM became the first airline to expand their service to WhatsApp and its 1.5-billion-plus users.[69] KLM customers opt in to receive boarding passes and flight status updates and can get 24/7 service in multiple languages via the app.

TAKEAWAY As people spend more time on messaging apps, it's critical that companies develop strategies to engage them there, just as they would on email or social media.
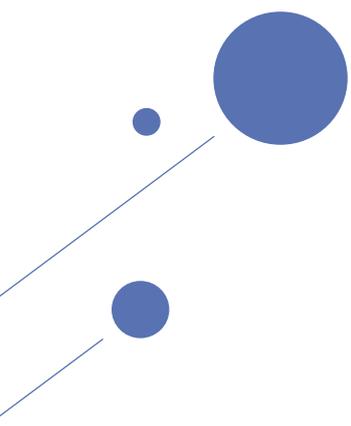
HOOTSUITE'S RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THIS TREND

GETTING STARTED

● **Enable Facebook Messenger for your Facebook Business Page.**

If you're ready to start communicating with your customers via Messenger, you need to enable the Messenger feature on your Facebook Business Page. (Find step-by-step instructions in our Facebook Messenger guide.) Once you've done that, set up an instant reply for when users send a message to your page. This can be as simple as a short greeting, or you can provide additional information such as typical response times and support hours. You can also share links in your instant replies to direct people to support pages or frequently asked questions.

● **Add plugins to your website that drive customers to messaging apps.**

Show that your brand is available on messaging apps by adding plugins to your website. That way, customers can easily click on the plugin and reach you if they're already on your website looking for information.

PRO TIP: Direct customers to the specific messaging apps most popular with your target demographic, based on region, age, or other variables.

● **Use DMs and/or messaging apps to streamline customer service queries on social.**

When customers reach out to your brand on social, it's important to move the conversation from a public to private space. That way, you can ask for personal information like phone numbers and address details to resolve the problem faster. This can also pre-empt the need for time-consuming follow-up phone calls and emails. If your team isn't available at all times of day, post your support hours and time zone in your bio so customers know when they'll get a response.

Set up bots and/or in-app assistants for frequently asked questions.

Bots are an important way to scale your customer service efforts and create better experiences on social. While they can't replace an in-person experience, they're extremely effective for answering simple questions and helping with more transactional exchanges, freeing up team members to focus on more complex customer needs. To get started building your own branded bot, check out self-serve platforms like ManyChat, Chatfuel, or Conversable. (Just be sure to keep in mind the dos and don'ts of messaging bots.)

Run campaigns that incorporate messaging apps.

Get creative with your social media campaigns and think beyond the news feed. Contests are a good way to start connecting with your customers because they often include a private messaging element to share contest results. Messaging campaigns often work best on mobile formats, so keep that in mind when creating your campaign. For example, Coca Cola ran a summer contest using Messenger and chatbots. Aimed at a younger demographic, the entirely mobile campaign encouraged customers to take pictures of their Coke bottles through Messenger to automatically enter to win prizes.

PRO TIP: Always check the latest promotion guidelines for each network before planning your strategy.

Experiment with Facebook Messenger ads.

If your target audience uses Facebook Messenger, it's worth putting some budget into Messenger ads. With features like automatic placement, Facebook will deliver ads automatically to your followers. (However, if you choose to edit placements, you can only run Messenger ads in coordination with News Feed ads—they're not available as standalone placements yet.)

Be mindful of when and how you use these ads, as contacting a potential customer by private message is a lot more personal and intimate than publishing a banner or News Feed ad. Make sure your ads are useful, immediate, and actionable. For example, you can share a discount or coupon after someone has made a purchase.

APPENDIX: HOOTSUITE 2019 TRENDS SURVEY

Hootsuite surveyed more than 3,255 Hootsuite business customers on their social media usage, challenges, and plans for 2019. Research was conducted in Q2-Q3 2018:

Percent of Organizations Planning to or Have Adopted Social Media Strategies

Strategy	Percent
Social Advertising	78%
Customer Experience	66%
Social Customer Service	55%
Real-time Crisis Management	51%
Customer Advocacy	51%
Employee Advocacy	49%
Influencer Marketing	48%
Deep Social Listening	47%
Micro-influencers	45%
Social Selling	40%
Social Commerce/Social Shopping	28%

Q. What are your organization's plans to adopt the following social media strategies? (select one per row)
Base: Those responsible for social media at their organization (n=2070)

Percent of Organizations Planning to Adopt Social Media Tactics

Tactic	Percent
Social videos	78%
Paid ad formats	73%
Instagram Stories	64%
Live broadcasting	62%
Mobile-first content	57%
Facebook groups	47%
Messaging apps	46%
Distributed content strategy	40%
Video marketing for customer service/sales	40%
Shoppable galleries	17%

Q. What are your organization's plans to adopt the following social media tactics? (select one per row)
Base: Those responsible for social media at their organization (n=2070)

Biggest Challenges Looking at the Future of Social Media

Challenge	Percent
The decline in organic reach and need to increase paid advertising budgets on social	64%
The volatility of Facebook's algorithm	58%
Lack of video creation skills and budget	52%
The need to personalize content and experiences	50%
How to better measure social media ROI and compare to other digital channels	48%
How to integrate social media across the enterprise in order to improve CX	47%
Increased competition from digital-first brands	36%
Meeting the needs of changing demographics, including workforce and social-first customers	35%
The ROI of influencer marketing, including measurement, metrics, compensation, and regulation	30%
The impact of GDPR and data privacy on your marketing programs	25%
Ad fraud and the murky metrics of online advertising and affiliate programs	23%
The impact of messaging	22%
Navigating the new digital risks to the brand and social crisis management	21%
The impact of voice technology	18%

Q. As you think about the future of social media, which of the following trends do you see as the biggest challenges ahead? (Check all that apply)
Base: Those responsible for social media at their organization (n=1887)

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