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# OVERCROWDING ON THE PLATFORM

*Marketers must be selective when working with the next breed of social networks*

Words JOEL DAVIS

**T**here is no doubt about it, social noise is getting louder. As the big social media platforms from Instagram and YouTube to Facebook become overly saturated with content, it is becoming increasingly difficult to post something and have it organically reach a target audience.

Although the social media giants have become a staple for digital marketing and advertising, breaking through the crowds and standing out is challenging.

Yet conversely, within the current ecosystem, targeting a specific community and gaining interaction organically has never been more important. As every digital marketer knows, it is more valuable to have 100 loyal customers than 1,000 scrolling strangers.

As new social media platforms launch and challenge the status quo, we are already witnessing some interesting shifts and marketers, like everyone else, need to continually adapt and explore new opportunities.

Already 2020 has proven to be anything but usual and this has instilled a need for continuous trend-scanning, as organisations learn to reshape their business models to weather disruptive trends in the external world.

This sets the scene for new consumer behaviours such as the rapid adaptation of ecommerce meshed with livestreaming that delivers interactive, real-time

## Inside...

- ◆ **New social platforms will coexist** with more traditional, scaled networks
- ◆ **Focus on audience** rather than trying to reach every new platform
- ◆ **Social audiences demand textured, relevant experiences**, creatively delivered



entertainment, community and commerce experiences.

## VOLUME VS CONTENT

As these trends rapidly gain traction, keeping a finger on the pulse of up-and-coming social media platforms is vital if marketers are to meet their customers' ongoing changing needs. The continued popularity of the top social platforms is down to the traditional 'network effect', which occurs when a service gains additional value as more people use it. In this instance it is not just the network itself that gains value; the value delivered to each user increases, too.

The likes of Facebook and Instagram have seen exponential growth rates as more users have joined and participated, and of course brands have capitalised on this trend.

It makes sense that if a marketer had to choose between using two identical

social networks, they would probably pick the one with more friends or creators already on board.

Network effects raise the bar when it comes to shifting to a different platform. Even if this new platform boasts better features, less congestion and fewer ads, marketers are unlikely to leave a strong platform behind and switch to a less populated one. This is what makes scaled social networks difficult to disrupt, and of course the top ones have heritage on their side.

That is, except for TikTok. The Chinese music/video app is particularly disruptive as it is not reliant on the network effect but rather on the content network effect. Literally all the content on TikTok serves as remix material for everyone to tap into. This means that every video uploaded to the app makes all future videos more valuable. Every ounce of creativity, from a joke to a dance or a song, generates resources for other creators to exploit.

With more than 500 million active users worldwide, TikTok presents an enormous opportunity to marketers and advertisers. Not only has it surpassed Twitter and Snapchat in popularity but it's also less saturated with ads than its older counterparts. The visual app – which allows users to edit and share 15-second videos with built-in filters, effects and music – has truly shaken up the marketing world with its unprecedented virality.

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TikTok's current audience is, however, predominantly young – unsurprisingly, given that social networks tend to be adopted by younger audiences first, and make their mark on older demographics later.

### THE ENDLESS STREAM OF DISRUPTORS

Just as Facebook responded to TikTok by launching Lasso, a similar video/music app, Instagram's newcomer rival is Vero, boasting an ad-free and 'more authentic' user experience. There will always be a stream of new platforms that aim to disrupt the status quo and corresponding new launches from the current top platforms.

Then there are those platforms that aim to break the mould, such as Steemit, the blockchain-based blogging and social media site that rewards users with the cryptocurrency Steem for creating and curating content; or Caffeine, the social broadcasting platform.

Despite this stream of newcomers, marketers should not try to be everywhere. While keeping track of early adopters and pioneer platforms gives marketers an edge, customer groups will hang out on specific platforms, so it is still about identifying where your ideal clients are, and mastering that platform.

Ultimately, every brand wants to become more than a touchpoint in the consumer's journey. This requires continually tracking the consumer's shifting behaviours, from where they hang out to adapting to their changing needs.

### THE NEW HOMEBODY

Immersive experiences are now defining the future of brands, and the recent world disruptions have highlighted people's craving for meaningful interactions in highly relevant, contextual environments. Moreover, they have sped up certain sectors such as virtual health and fitness, and boosted others, such as the homebody economy.

The homebody economy started life in around 2018, in the US. Made up

Right  
Caffeine's social  
broadcasting platform



of mostly millennials who shunned nightlife for more time spent lounging at home, the original homebodies spent their money on food delivery rather than in restaurants. They also deep-dived into self-care products, the likes of which created the boom of Korean skincare in the US. They are the reason why the K-beauty (Korean beauty) e-commerce site Peach & Lily now has a line of face masks available at its Target mini-shop (which sold out on the first day).

The pre-2020 homebodies were also behind alcohol courier apps (in limited markets) that partnered with Netflix, and the reason for some of the fiercest brand rivalries between mattress-in-a-box companies.

Now, market intelligence company Nielsen reports a resurgence in what can only be called the 'new era' homebody economy, brought on in the main by enforced staying at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. It goes without saying that consumers' online shopping habits have drastically changed since the intense social distancing period earlier this year.

Instead of luxury sheets and pampering products, these new homebodies are embracing technological products. According to Nielsen's report, 93% of respondents were willing to buy 5G mobile phones, and 67% of them believed that virtual or augmented real-

ity devices can be used in virtual shopping scenarios in the future.

These new homebodies have also embarked on a buying spree of smart health and fitness products embedded with technology, a trend that looks set to last as virtual health check-ups increase, too. Responding to consumers' increased health consciousness means breaking traditional boundaries and taking a multi-dimensional approach to consumers' needs, meshed with what technology can deliver.

### THE NEW REALITY

Rich, textured online experiences have become a necessity and, as a consequence, our new reality. These experiences range from entertainment and keeping fit and healthy to learning new skills.

To harness this, the marketing industry needs to continually pivot how they provide interactive, contextually relevant experiences, creatively delivered where their audiences are assembling. Emotional, contextual and conversational commerce is a defining trend for the future, particularly as 90% of the 30,000 decisions made by consumers monthly are based on emotion.

The social media ecosystem has only just started gaining real traction. Those platforms that lower the bar for producing user-generated content are most likely to thrive, as they will allow people to create entertaining content without having to be particularly creative or even original. These are likely to become the platforms of the future. Disruption is propelling us to be more creative and innovative in everything that we do. Let's harness that energy. ◊

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