

2017

- Chatbots
- Virtual Reality
- Augmented Reality

2016

- Real time search algorithms
- Marketing Automation
- Snapchat
- Influence Marketing

2015

- Mobilegeddon
- Videos
- Social Media Ads

2014

- Blogging
- Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr
- Image Centric Content

Online Marketing in 2017

Challenges,
Opportunities &
Predictions for the Future

Introduction

Online marketing is a constantly changing regime; where changes happen rapidly. New technological advancements give birth to innovative ways to reach, engage & convert customers. Within a couple of years, these innovative practices become mainstream practices, and finally, an integrated part of online marketing campaigns.

Like the past few years, 2017 is also turning out to be an interesting & learning one for internet marketers. Many new marketing mediums & techniques are emerging, setting new standards for how customers interact with brands and redefine customers' expectations in the process.

For any brand, online or offline, that is aiming growth through online marketing, understanding this rapid shift & adapting to it is important.

This white paper will introduce marketers with what's new in the online marketing arena and practices to capitalize on these trends to make their campaigns successful in 2017 & in the years to come.

Authenticity of Online Content Will Now be a Big Concern

Ever since the Fake News issue emerging in 2016, consumers' confidence in online media has taken a blow. Consumers now have become more skeptical towards what they read online. According to a Network Research survey, 67% consumers think that people shouldn't trust everything they read online. While media outlets are the ones most affected by it, content marketing endeavors that take these media outlets as a source for facts & stats have also been affected. For advertisers as well, it is a big concern, because being associated with a false content publisher will hurt their credibility

The screenshot shows the FactCheck.org website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for HOME, ARTICLES, ASK A QUESTION, VIRAL SPIRAL, ARCHIVES, ABOUT US, SEARCH, and MORE. The main content area features a large image of Donald Trump speaking at a podium. Below the image is the article title "FactChecking Trump's Climate Speech" dated June 1, 2017. The article text states: "In announcing that the U.S. would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, a global accord aimed at addressing climate change, President Donald Trump made more than a few false and misleading claims." Below this is a link to "Click here to read more". To the right of the article is an "ASK FACTCHECK" section with a question: "Q: Has Sen. John McCain 'renounced any affiliation with the Republican Party'?" and an answer: "A: No. That claim was made in a fake news story published by a 'satirical publication.'" Below the answer are links to "Read the full question and answer", "View the Ask FactCheck archives", and "Have a question? Ask us.". Further down is a "Donate Now" button with the text "Because facts matter.". Below that are two more sections: "SciCheck" (Fact-checking science-based claims) and "Ask SciCheck" (Answers to your science questions).

Recently, Facebook & Google have taken some steps to counter false content on the web; however, so far these efforts are considered as not sufficient. Since these central authorities responsible for the circulation of content on the web are still in the process of providing a dependable solution; content marketers will have to ensure the credibility of what they share on their own for the time being. This has also led to mushrooming of fact check websites, whose main aim is to authenticate news with factual data.

Expert Tips/Opinion

- Reference only the reputed sources for facts/stats in your marketing campaigns.
- Double check when the credibility of the source is in doubt, and use citation just to be on the safe side.
- Amid the hype of fake news, made-up reviews & testimonials have also begun to come into light. Ensure their authenticity by asking users/clients to send out feedback in visual format
- Use user-generated content in your marketing campaigns
- Live-stream brand messages, create product & service demo video to make things look authentic, naturally.

Internet of Things (IoT) Will Begin to Be Used as Advertising Medium

IoT has created a constant stream of data related to user behavior & location, which marketers have been extensively using for past few years to formulate better business strategies & plan better marketing campaigns. In the next few years, besides this passive usage (collecting data), IoT will also be used actively for advertising.

Google has already taken the initiative with its personal/home assistant Google Home by playing unprompted ads for the movie Beauty & the Beast during mid-March 2017. It is likely that other players in the industry, namely Amazon's Echo, Apple's Siri, and Microsoft's Cortana will also jump on this bandwagon soon.

The first generation of IoT advertisers will certainly be personal/home assistants. As the practice will begin to move more towards mainstream, technologist & marketers, with collective efforts, will bring advertisements to wearables & other connected devices as well. As the number of connected devices continues to soar, using them for advertising makes sense too for marketers. The year 2017 may not witness these implementations fully (other than that of personal assistants), but it is a very likely postulation for coming years.

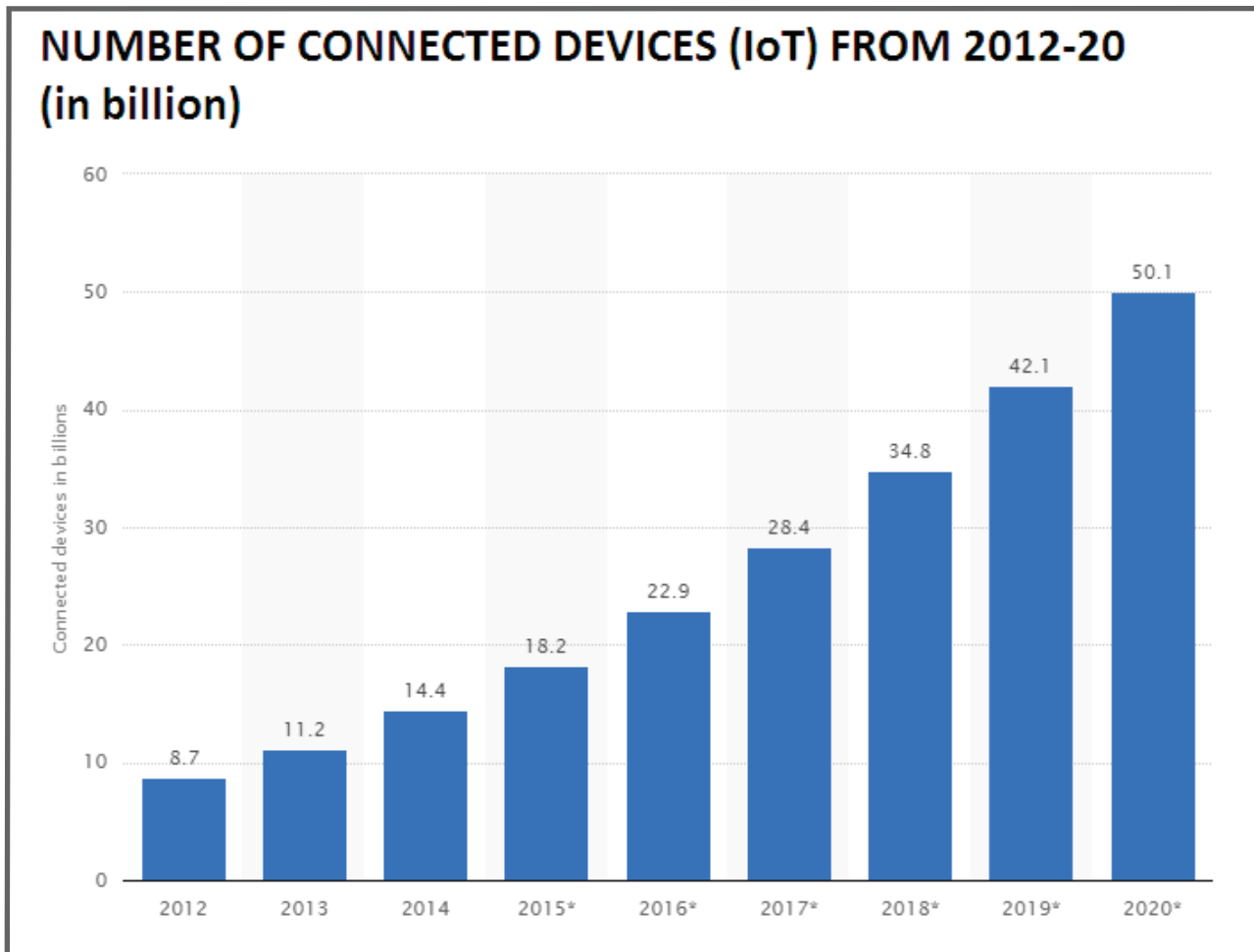


Image: Continuously increasing usage of connected devices will create new opportunities for marketers (Source Statista)

Expert Tips/Opinion

Since the practice is still in the nascent stage, it is a bit early to state anything definite. Yet, here are some advices that will be helpful in using IoT as advertising medium & for tracking user behavior:

- Ads on IoT (personal assistants) should be relevant or related to user's query. For that, brands will now focus on voice search data for relevant keyword targeting
- Ads shouldn't be repetitive, as it can be annoying for users
- For marketing - find brands related to your industry and connect with them for valuable user data (Ex: Sports brands can connect with Fitbit to gather useful consumer insights)

Snapchat Will Groom for a Media Platform like Other Big Social Networks

Snapchat enjoyed an impressive growth in 2016 because of its innovative features - stories, discover, geo-filters, spectacles, and an array of image/video filters and the same has continued in 2017. The next few years will see the hype around the platform continue to persuade marketers to incorporate Snapchat in their social media marketing mix.

While Snapchat continues to become a favorite social network among users (especially young) & marketers, in terms of curated content & user base, it is still behind its immediate competitors. And now that Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, all have begun to offer Snapchat like features, the company will focus on bringing a sheer amount of high quality curated content to make users stay with the platform for longer, to attract advertisers; thus, to stay in the competition.

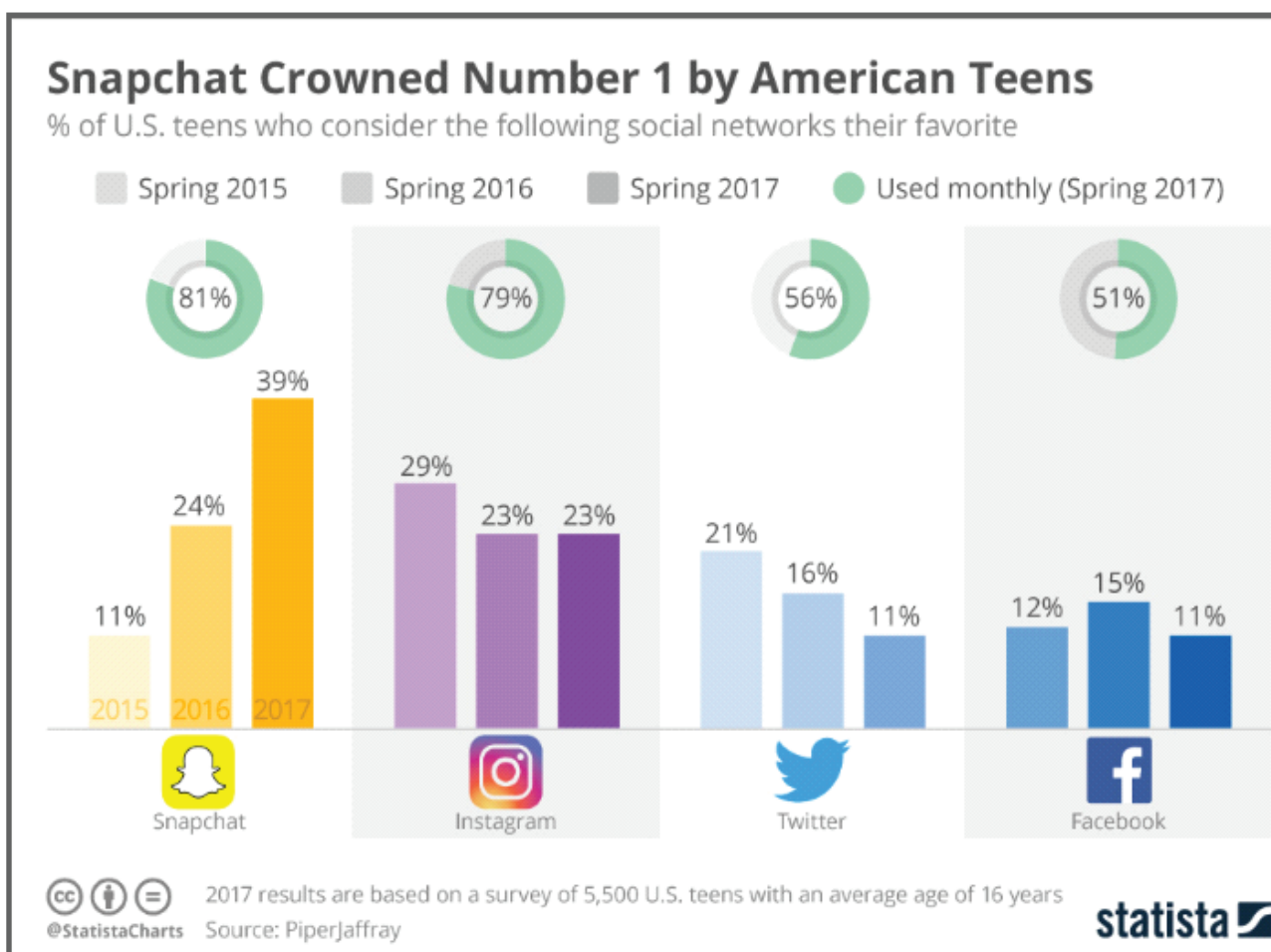


Image: Snapchat is young generation's favorite social network (Source Statista)

The recent IPO of the parent company Snap Inc. has put Snapchat in a better position to become a leading media consumption channel, as now it will have assurance of funds to back new initiatives. As the company will move towards a media platform, its advertising landscape will also transform.

Expert Tips/Opinion

- With Snapchat emerging as a more serious media/ad company, advertisers can now expect to get enhanced analytics capabilities with the platform.
- Snapchat's Stories & Discover features will continue to be effective brand building tools.
- Sponsored Lenses & Geo-filters will continue to benefit creative advertisers.
- Lastly, brands should stay ready for some new innovative advertising opportunities that Snapchat is poised to bring in 2017 to stay relevant to its rising advertiser base.

Ephemeral Content Will Continue to Grow & Stay Impactful

Snapchat's biggest contribution to the online marketing world has been the ephemeral aka short-lived content. This unique type of real-time content with short shelf life has provided brands with an additional channel for marketing, which by nature is more human & authentic; thus, capable of creating better engagement.

Ephemeral content doesn't stick for long; therefore, it doesn't make marketers wary of irritating users by regularly sharing branded content, which is a widely encouraged online marketing practice. Besides, the short shelf life of ephemeral content also allows brands to be causal with users and connect better with them.

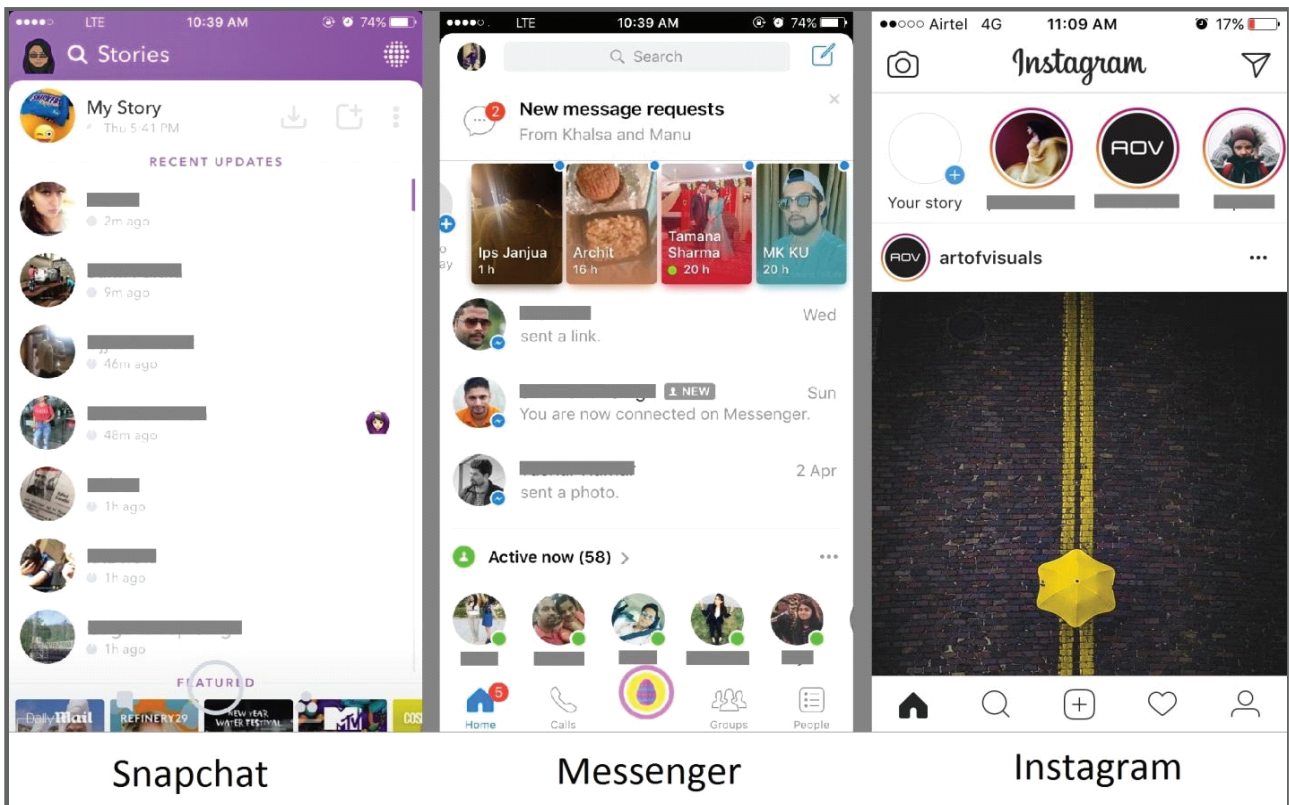


Image: Stories sections of Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, & Instagram

Recognizing its effectiveness, Facebook also launched features for sharing ephemeral content for all its social media apps (Messenger, Instagram, Facebook & WhatsApp) during late 2016 & early 2017. And it makes perfect sense to assume that ephemeral content will be adopted by other online marketing channels as well in 2017; which in turn will push 'ephemeral marketing' more towards becoming a mainstream practice.

Expert Tips/Opinion

- Branded content like how-to videos, behind the scene clips, etc. shared as ephemeral content produce the best results
- Don't push for perfection when sharing ephemeral content. It is the casualness & authenticity of this content that creates better engagement
- Experiment with different types of content – share contest, user-generated content, product announcements, etc.
- Don't get carried away with the hype of a platform, focus on the one you have good presence on. Ex, if you have good following on Instagram, focus on it, instead of stretching your efforts to Snapchat or any other platform.

Mobile-first Marketing Approach + Mobile-oriented Marketing Trends

Ever since the arrival of smartphones, mobile has continued to expand its dominance in the online world. The pace has quickened particularly ever since Google began to take actions in this direction. First the Mobilegeddon update in early 2015; soon after the company tells 60% searches happen on mobile; then mobile indexing becomes a part of the core algorithm, and so on.

While much has been said & written by the marketing world in this regard during past couple of years, in 2017, mobile first approach has started to finally appear at a broader level. The next few years will see it come to the forefront prominently. With 75% of online content consumption happening on mobile (by the end of the year), web designers & marketers will now begin to build things primarily for mobile that also work on desktop (especially in case of B2C marketing).

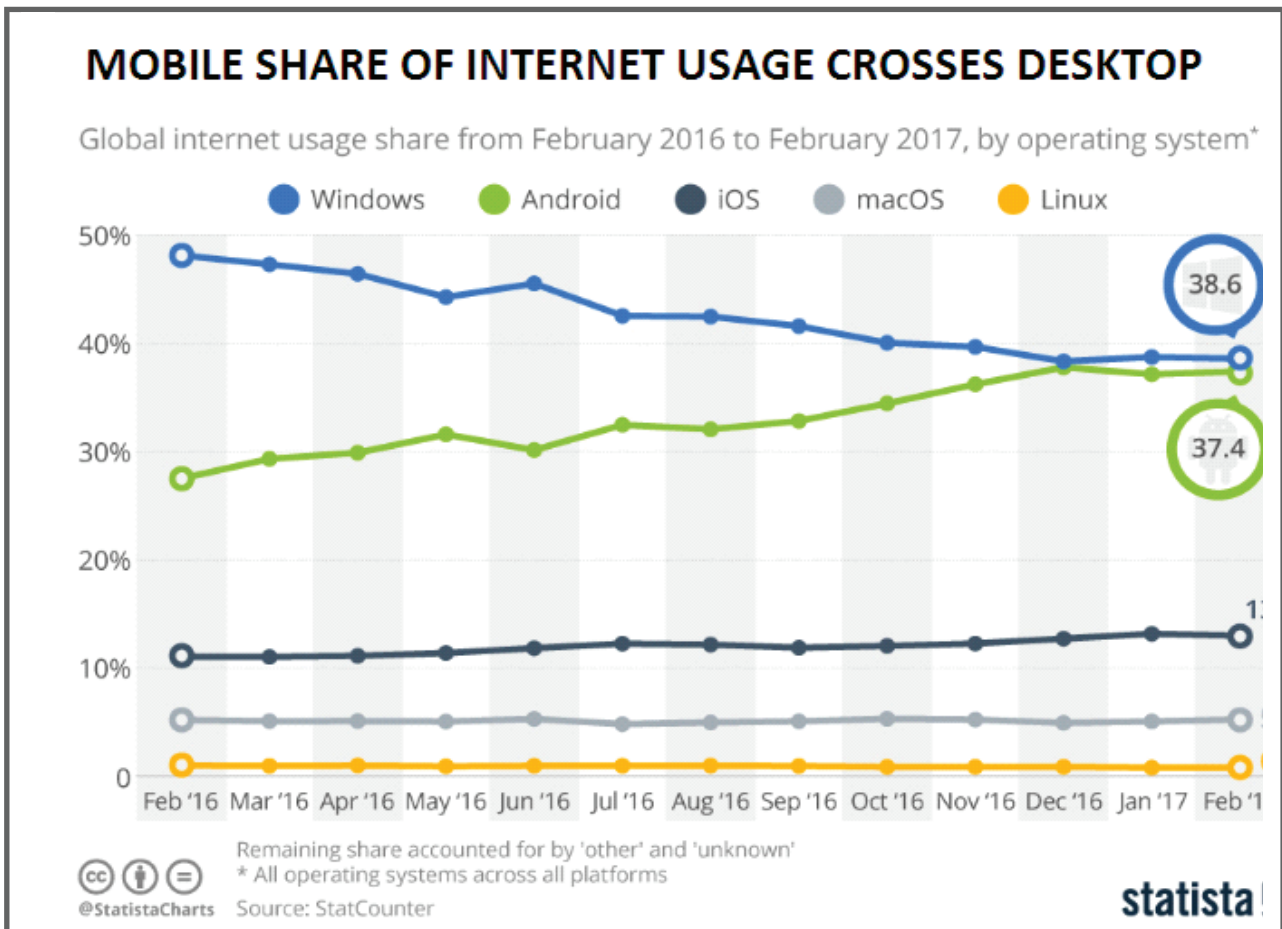


Image: The combined Mobile internet usage share is 51% (Source Statista)

Apart from that, this year, we will also see some new innovative mobile-oriented experiences (just like stories, geo-filters, etc., in past few years) that will equip marketers with new powerful tools to improve user

Expert Tips/Opinion

- With mobile social apps becoming more and more popular, social media marketing campaigns will begin to go mobile-only in late 2017
- Designing content & experience specific to mobile users' needs (that is entirely separate from desktop) will bring better ROI
- Mobile-oriented experiences will now be the prime drivers for building brands through social media
- Location-based mobile marketing technologies (geo-targeting, fencing & beacon) will assist greatly in personalizing the experience for customers

Messaging Apps vs. Social Media

Social media was a big hit as a marketing channel since the beginning. Back then, primarily being an apps/websites to connect people, social media had a more trustworthy & engaging feel than traditional marketing and advertising channels. But now that all leading social networks are establishing themselves more as a media company & curating content from countless resources, that unique feel of social media is compromised.

The advent of instant messaging (IM) apps has provided users with a more seamless way to connect & interact with people, for which social media was known once. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg himself has said that "Messaging is one of the few things that people do more than social networking."

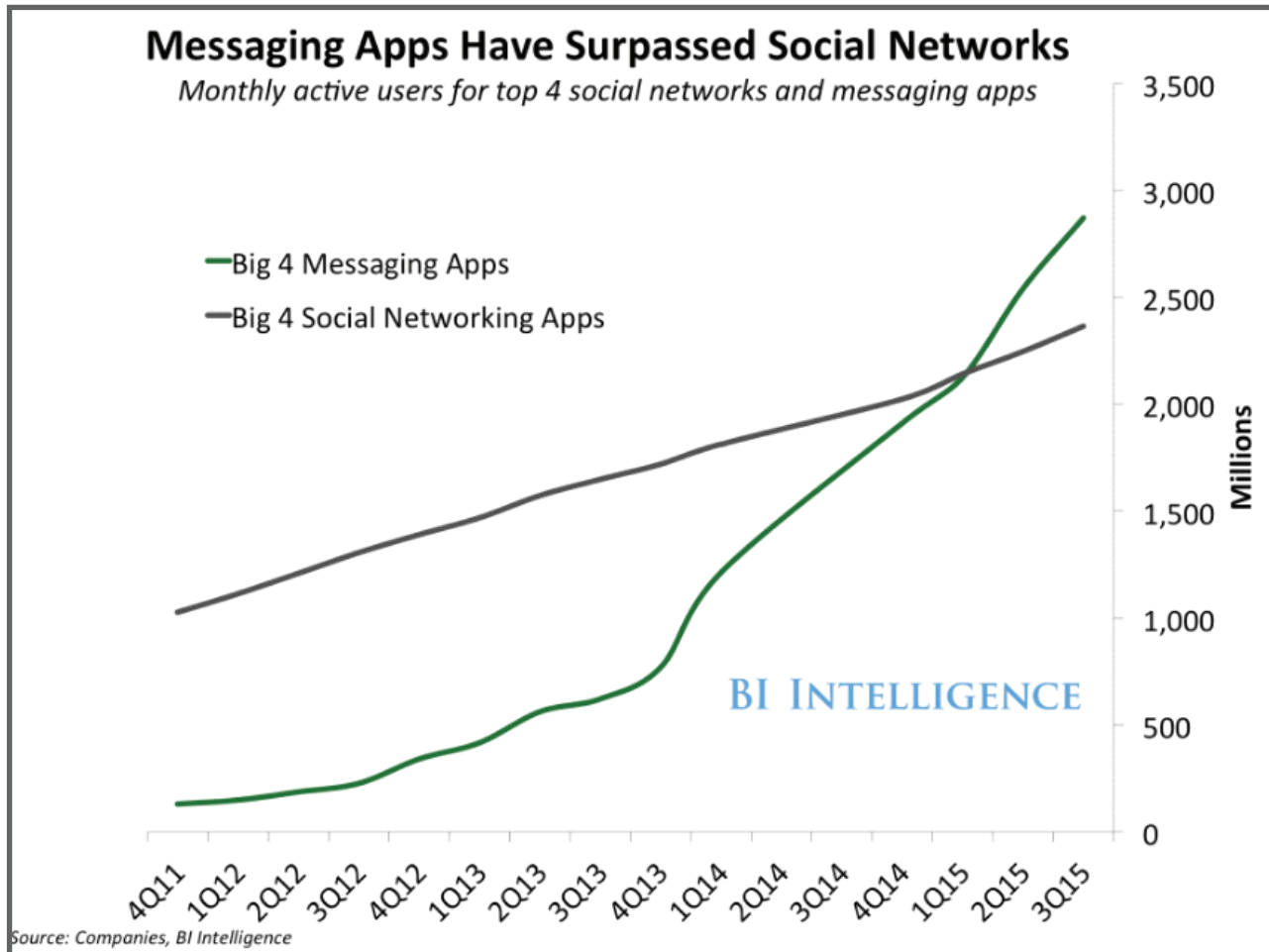


Image: Messaging apps usage crosses Social networks (Source BI Intelligence)

While companies have already started to use messaging apps for marketing & customer service (especially using the chatbots technology), there is still a gold mine to be explored in the area, which will happen on a larger scale in 2018.

Expert Tips/Opinion

- Majority of IM apps users are young; thus, the demographic suggests that fashion, lifestyle, travel, consumer electronics & similar businesses have lots of business potential in there.
- Creating hyper-local communities (chat groups) for brand awareness, sending out important messages, listening to customers' queries, etc. on IM apps will become a popular marketing practice.
- To monetize the service, messaging apps will come up with new gateways to allow brands to reach users. This will bring a huge influx of marketers/advertisers to IM apps from social networks. A great shift that will begin to happen in 2017.

Augmented & Virtual Reality Will Enter Mainstream Marketing

Augmented & Virtual Reality (VR / AR) have been making headlines for quite some time now, but being sophisticated, high-priced technologies, they have a hard time reaching mass adoption so far. However, relentless efforts of big players (namely Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Sony, & Apple) in the field finally made AR & VR experiences real for consumers in 2016.

In 2017, constant advancements in AR (computer generated enhancements on reality) & VR (computer generated simulations) have made the technology more accessible. As a result, AR & VR will no longer be limited to bigger brands and will be adopted by marketers on a larger scale.



Image: Economic impact of VR/AR technology with its adoption (via Forbes)

Last year, Pokémon GO showed the marketing world how effective augmented reality can be for engagement. A recent Nielsen study also found that VR elicits 27% higher emotional engagement in viewers than a 2d digital environment. As most advertising channels continue to become more cluttered, the novelty of VR/AR technology based marketing platforms will stand out as an attention grabber; thus, will provide brands a fresh way to engage customers.

The latest iOS11 release at WWDC 2017, put Apple at the pedestal of Augmented reality. Their AR kit has given a first-hand view of the capability of this technology and how it can change the way consumers interacted with mobile apps. The latest version of their mobile OS will launch in Fall 2017. Windows had earlier given a glimpse of their future OS, which would focus immensely on VR.

Expert Tips/Opinion

- Apart from retail, travel, education, real estate, healthcare, engineering & architecture, hospitality industries are also stepping forward in 2017 as early adopters of the technology.
- Product trials through AR will be adopted by more & more ecommerce outlets.
- In near future, AR will open scope for visual search on mobile devices; which when coupled with GPS technology, will create new advertising opportunities.

Conclusion

The first half of the year 2017 has already paved the way for new technologies to come to the forefront. Their impact will soon be visible in the next half of the year. It is certain that the next year will bring marketers many new innovative ways to interact with customers. We might also finally see broader implementation of technologies (particularly AR/VR) on which the tech & marketing world has been debating for past few years.

In addition, with easy access to valuable customer data, brands will be able to bring more personalization in their marketing endeavors, regardless of which channel or medium they choose to reach their customers. Being adaptive to these new changes will play the key role in businesses' success, like it always has.

