

Reading 3

Skills:

- Details
- Cause-effect

Getting started: What are the positive and negative aspects of using social media?

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA



At the close of 2019, the number of social media users worldwide had hit 3.5 billion. Social media's rapid growth has had a significant impact on our daily lives – transforming how we connect with not only each other, but also with the world. So, now that we have started a new decade, what future changes can we predict to see on the horizon?

Regulations

Although social media has clearly brought benefits to society and companies, it also brings dangers such as cyberbullying, online harassment, depression, and body image insecurities. As a result, the UK government has announced that they will be watching social media companies to take more responsibility for their content. The pressure to regulate the digital sphere will almost certainly

restrict how advertisers can target users and what content can be promoted. For instance, Facebook already allows users to manage interest-based ads under account settings and we should expect more companies to follow this **trend**. Stronger regulations could encourage users to increase trust in social media networks. This will potentially reflect in higher engagement.

Data and privacy

Events such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal made us realize the power of social media and data as well as the limitations of current social media regulations. Users are becoming aware that data is power. One example of this is that searches for 'My Activity' on Google have been increasing year on year. Users are already changing their privacy settings in order to include the minimum information on social media and accounts are being deleted. Users will continue to push for this with heightened privacy concerns as the world becomes ever more digital. Demographically, younger audiences are increasingly conscious of data privacy and security, which will further add to the soft and hard restrictions placed upon social media. This trend may well open alternative commercial models for social media networks, such as subscriptions which allow a reduced need for personal data. Another possible solution would be to reward users that share their data.

WeChat-like social networks

As more people rely on their phones to make payments and manage their finances, the opportunity for social media developers to blend social and financial functionalities into one platform is growing. Chinese platform WeChat is the perfect example of how social media, commerce and entertainment can be integrated. More than a social media network, it allows users to do day-to-day tasks such as storing their IDs, paying their utilities and getting access to public services, including booking doctor appointments, applying for visas and checking driving records. Western social platforms will try to follow WeChat, but it is unlikely that they will be allowed to play the role as fully as WeChat does in China. This is because in most countries, data privacy concerns and increases in regulation will be pushing social networks in the opposite direction.

Multi-networking

The number of social media accounts per person has been growing among all demographics. The multi-networking effect is a response to the increase number of platforms options, but it's also being caused by a degree of specialization (e.g. Twitch, Pinterest, and TikTok). However, in a busy world as

the one we live in, people don't always have time to check different platforms. A good solution is using a social media dashboard where people can check all their different media profiles in just one place, being Buffer Publish a good example. Social media usage will continue to increase in developing countries, but it has generally reached a peak in advanced economies.

How we consume content will change

The way we consume content is always changing and therefore new social media networks will emerge as a natural response to these changes. Younger demographics will be the earlier adopters, as we saw with Snapchat and now with TikTok. Video has become the most popular format. Views of video content increased by 258% since 2016, and on Twitter a video is 6x more likely to be retweeted than a photo. It's not hard to guess that new social media platforms will be focused on video and powered by **AI**. Additionally, **voice search** is increasing which will also impact social media behavior in the coming decade as people type less and start relying on voice recognition systems to do this job for them. While phones will remain the main device for accessing social media, the usage of **AR** and **VR** devices will also increase in the next decade as they get lighter and more versatile.

Shifts from the current climate

At the close of the decade social media was making headlines for its negative impacts. Due to COVID-19, screen time will increase as individuals download apps to stay connected with friends and family, and to keep entertained. Some platforms will emerge from this dark time with a larger, more diverse and better user base than ever before and perhaps social media will regain respect by returning to its origins, a way for us to all stay connected. It can be challenging to predict the future of social media as it's a fast-changing environment but hopefully it will move towards a safer and more democratic place.

*Adapted from <https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2020/04/21/the-future-social-media-the-turn-the-decade>

Glossary:

- **Trend:** A general direction in which a situation is changing or developing.
- **AI:** Artificial intelligence
- **Voice search:** Application that provides a verbal exchange of questions and answers in the user's native language.

- **AR (Augmented Reality):** This refers to computer-generated simulations that integrate the real world.
- **VR (Virtual Reality):** A computer-generated reality that projects the user into a 3D space.

Complete the chart below based on the situations discussed in the text.

Problem-solving Map			
Aspect	Problem	Solution	Future Consequence
Regulations			Users may trust social networks more, and more people will join different networks.
		Using dashboards like Buffer Publish where you can check all your media profiles.	
	Lack of stronger privacy policies to protect users.		Subscriptions / Reward users that share data.
How we consume content	-----	-----	
	-----	More social networks will try to follow the model of this Chinese network.	

What do you think?

Is it possible to imagine the decline of Facebook? Will people stop using it in the near future?