

A glimpse of the SA social media landscape in 2015

By  Michal Wronski

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The annual Social Media Landscape Report, compiled by Fuseware and World Wide Worx, is being released in under two weeks and contains some highly impactful findings on social media usage in South Africa...

This report is a must for brands, agencies and marketers across the board to fully understand what is happening in social media.

Local landscape changes

The social media landscape in SA has shifted subtly but dramatically this year, especially in light of the large Instagram growth. Visually rich imagery dominates newsfeeds, and the new streaming content players are certainly going to see increased uptake in the next 12 months. Social media is evolving towards its pinnacle - on-demand content creation, consumption and engagement in any format, at any time and any place. There has been decreased brand content engagement across the board, indicating that newsfeeds have become too saturated and brands need to start paying up to get to the reach and engagement they desire.

Although business impact in terms of revenue is difficult to quantify, engagement and reach of branded content has substantially shifted in 2015. Twitter has become far too crowded to become consistently useful for brands, resulting in large drops in engagement on brand content. Facebook engagement has risen slightly, but this boost is also coupled with an increase in paid media spend on the platform. Instagram is the social network star of the year, with triple digit user growth in the last year as well as engagement on brand content that is an order of magnitude higher than that of the other networks. Social media has also become a large traffic source for publishers and consumer-centric brands alike, and social media optimisation (SMO) has become as critical as search engine optimisation (SEO).



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The use of social media as a CRM tool for businesses has increased dramatically, especially with smaller businesses beginning to use Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with their customers. Social media sentiment can be used to drive business strategy and product innovation, serving as a far more fundamental piece of the business puzzle than just a communications function. Social media analytics are also used to accurately gauge what makes consumers tick about a brand, with this data serving as an input instead of just an output to successful marketing campaigns.

Social media growth is still solid, but has slowed across the board with the exception of Instagram, with most networks having grown at a modest 15% to 25% over the last year. We've seen new entrants that focus on live streaming of video content, Periscope and Meerkat, but they have not seen significant uptake in the local market as yet. Content has become much richer across the board, with large emphasis on video and high-resolution pictures being shared. This trend reflects even on Twitter, where a single picture can tell a story far more than 140 characters of text can, and brands are capitalising on this by publishing a large amount of visual content on the network. Companies have also gotten serious about spending on media, with a significant increase in paid media spend on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube respectively - however Facebook still remains the network that delivers the highest ROI to companies, according to our corporate survey.

The big four...

Instagram is the fastest growing social network in the country, with triple digit growth in the last 12 months. The growth is also leap-frogging the normal early-adopter crowd and reaching mass market earlier than usual, with local television celebrities and presenters leading the charts in terms of followers. Photo filter usage on the network has dropped to record lows, and the most engaged with images tend to have no filter at all, indicating that people have grown tired of the special effects that sparked initial interest to use the platform.

Facebook has experienced solid consistent growth across all segments, with one very interesting difference. Feature phone usage is plummeting in the platform and is associated with an equivalent rise in smartphone usage. As predicted, the low cost of entry-level smartphones are proliferating the market and have shifted device usage significantly in only 12 months. Although the Nokia Asha still leads the way as the top phone used to access Facebook, usage of this phone on Facebook has dropped by over 400,000 people in the last 12 months.

Twitter has increased in usage over the last year, but growth has significantly slowed. With the recent Periscope acquisition, there is an increased emphasis towards integrating the platform with real-time streaming video content. Twitter engagement on brand content has dropped significantly compared to last year. Brands are posting more content than ever before on the social network, but even paid-for campaigns are often not seen as relevant by Twitter users. For the first time ever, more than 50% of all surveyed brands post content once per day or more - but this is translating to a sea of noise that doesn't necessarily result in business value.

LinkedIn usage has grown significantly in the last 12 months, with a large number of smaller businesses joining the platform in 2015. Entry-level workers represent the largest increase in numbers in terms of seniority level, growing by 21% in the last year. Operations, healthcare and education personnel are joining the network the fastest across all industries.

Instant messaging for business

MXit has experienced a further decline in users compared to the year before, but the platform is also restructuring its business model to focus on empowering Africans and accelerating economic and social growth in the region, by placing a stronger emphasis on social services and associated programmes. A fundamental shift away from just the typical instant messenger model employed by WeChat or WhatsApp, it will also allow businesses to help make a difference in education

and healthcare through CSI initiatives in the platform.

In a surprise finding, corporate blogging has seen a strong resurgence as the importance and relevance of long form content surpasses 140 character updates. Corporate blogs are seen as more effective marketing channels than any social network, as surveyed by SA corporates.

The headline results will be presented and discussed by the top industry influencers at the Social Media Landscape Briefing, held in Johannesburg on 16 September 2015, and in Cape Town on the 17 September 2015. To book a ticket to these events, click on the embedded links for [Johannesburg](#) and [Cape Town](#).

ABOUT MICHAL WRONSKI

Mike is technologist, entrepreneur and previous MD of Fuseware (<http://www.fuseware.net>, @fuseware), a company specializing in social media analytics and research. Fuseware was acquired by Ornicogroup in May 2015, where Mike joined the team as a business development manager. Contact Mike at michalw@ornicogroup.co.za or follow @mikewronski on Twitter.

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