



Industry Trend

Who is on social media?

In just 20 years social media has risen from a fringe online alternative to catching up to an omnipotent force inextricably woven into our daily lives. We explore the rise and rise of social media consumption and how it has evolved with the growing dominance of mobile devices, compare the numerous social platforms and how brandowners are deploying them to engage consumers.

The Media Precinct

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In 2005 a clip was posted to a relatively unknown, fledgling online video-sharing platform that would radically alter the way global brands engaged with their customers.

The three-minute clip, which featured former Brazilian soccer star Ronaldinho putting on a pair of white/gold sneakers before successfully attempting the crossbar challenge, appeared just six months after YouTube became the first global all-access video platform.

With debate raging over its legitimacy, the clip became the first video ever to reach one million views and with it, Ronaldinho became social media's inaugural viral sensation.

It wasn't until the video effectively broke the internet that it was revealed it was actually a paid spot by Nike which, in creating the ad to help boost sales of its new Tiempo Air Legend 1 sneakers, had become the first to expose the enormous potential of YouTube as an advertising platform.

Now, nearly two decades later, the power of social media to reach and engage audiences has never been more potent.



Nike's Tiempo Air Legend 1 advert ft. Ronaldinho

DataReportal's [The State of Digital in Australia in 2024](#) statistics show that as of January 2024, Australia is home to nearly 21 million social media users. Or, to put it another way, more than 78 per cent of the country's total population now have one or more social media accounts – that's virtually everyone other than the very young and very old.

On average, each Australian users spends 1 hour and 51 minutes every day on social media, with YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter) occupying [four of the top eight](#) most frequently visited websites in Australia.

A part of our everyday lives

Lynette Loh, head of digital at Media Precinct, says social media consumption has undergone significant changes since the launch of the first social network to reach a global audience, MySpace, in 2003.

Loh says this consumption growth has been shaped by various factors including technological advancements, changes in user behaviour, and shifts in societal norms.

The rise of mobile devices, the diversification of platforms and the variety of content evolution to include images, videos, live streaming and stories have all combined to keep users engaged while encouraging them to spend more time on social. The seamless integration with people's day-to-day and personalisation of algorithms have also had an important part to play, she says.

"Social media has become deeply integrated into many aspects of daily life, including communication, entertainment, news consumption, and shopping. Almost all social media platforms use algorithms to curate users' feeds based on their interests, preferences, and online behaviour, further engaging users by showing them content that is more relevant to their tastes.

Humans are inherently social beings and social media platforms provide a convenient way to connect and interact with others, regardless of geographical barriers."

Loh says social media platforms heavily rely on advertising revenue, leading them to design their interfaces to maximise user engagement and dwell time.

"Furthermore, because the advertising platforms are self-service, they offer ease of accessibility, low cost of entry, and complete control for anyone looking to advertise, from big international brands to small local businesses."

Data from global intelligence agencies We Are Social and Meltwater backs this up with statistics showing that alongside this rise in consumption, Australia's digital advertising spend also continues to grow, reaching US\$13.5 billion (representing 72.4 per cent of total ad spend) in 2023.

[Digital 2024 Global Overview Report](#) shows social media ads maintain a significant share of the Australian digital advertising market amounting to US\$3.8 billion (+6 per cent year-on-year), almost one-third of the total digital ad spend.

Top social media platforms in Australia 2024

Social media, consuming an average of 2 hours and 23 minutes per day, constitutes approximately one-third of Australians' online activity. It is the second most popular media activity following television viewing.

*Source: Media Report 2024

LinkedIn

Launched:
2002

Users in Australia:
12.7M

Demographic:
Diverse, skewing slightly older, with a higher number of users in 25-54 range than the social platform average

Used for:
Professionals, job seekers, recruiters, businesses for networking, career-related purposes and B2B sales

facebook

Launched:
2004

Users in Australia:
16.65M

Demographic:
A wide range of age groups, particularly older demographics. Younger users, particularly teenagers and young adults have been shifting away from Facebook.

Used for:
Social connection with family and friends, community groups, news, brand advertising, events and entertainment, and marketplace buy and sell

YouTube

Launched:
2005

Users in Australia:
20.8M

Demographic:
Diverse across age groups, but particularly millennials and Gen Z

Used for:
Entertainment, educational and informative content

Pinterest

Launched:
2009

Users in Australia:
5.31M

Demographic:
Predominantly female, particularly those aged between 25-44.

Used for:
Planning weddings, home décor, fashion, recipes and DIY projects

Instagram

Launched:
2010

Users in Australia:
13.9M

Demographic:
Younger demographics, particularly millennials and Gen Z

Used for:
Sharing photos and videos, following influencers and keeping up with trends in fashion, lifestyle and travel



Launched:
2005

Users in Australia:
Globally, one of the most popular forums – although Australia accounts for just 3.5% of the site's traffic

Demographic:
Younger, tech-savvy individuals

Used for:
Problem-solving and discussion on niche topics



Launched:
2006

Users in Australia:
6.1M

Demographic:
Younger, more urban user base. Particularly journalists, politicians, celebrities and individuals interested in real-time news and networking

Used for:
Public debate, current events



Launched:
2016

Users in Australia:
9.7M

Demographic:
Teenagers and young adults

Used for:
Short-form video content, creativity and entertainment, viral challenges and trends



Launched:
2011

Users in Australia:
7.8M

Demographic:
Teenagers and young adults

Used for:
Known for its disappearing messaging and augmented reality filters. Used by younger users who value its privacy features and engaging content.

Do your homework

Loh says to effectively understand how to harness the power of consumer social media consumption it's important to first get to grips with the different demographics and nuances of each channel. This is to ensure marketers choose the platform that best aligns with their target audience's habits and behaviours.

Using Meta for example, Loh says the massive user base of Facebook and Instagram's parent makes both valuable platforms for reaching a diverse audience and building connections with individuals from various backgrounds.

Facebook's diverse features, including messaging, content sharing, events, groups, and pages, cater well to different user needs and preferences. Its user groups and community engagement opportunities can't be beaten when it comes to driving engagement and interaction among users with shared interests, creating opportunities for networking, collaboration and support.

Yet it also has chinks in its armour that may concern some marketers. These include privacy concerns, where scrutiny over privacy issues, data breaches, and controversies related to user data handling, rings alarm bells among corporates and consumers.

Declining youth engagement is another concern as younger demographics increasingly gravitate toward latter platforms perceived as more trendy, private, or focused on visual content.

Know your audience

In a world where consumers are increasingly sceptical of advertising's persuasive intentions and are installing ad blockers to avoid bombardment with irrelevant creative messaging, an understanding of the relationship between digital engagement experiences and advertising effectiveness is key.

A 2018 [study](#) by three University of Amsterdam researchers, sought to examine how consumers' engagement with social media platforms drives engagement with advertising embedded in these platforms and, subsequently, evaluations of this advertising.

The findings showed that engagement is highly context specific with marked differences between how creative content is experienced on each platform.

This led the researchers to advise that marketers seeking to plan and evaluate their digital media expenditures should do so by taking into account not just quantitative numbers of likes, comments, views,

or followers; but instead by factoring the platform in as a stand-alone metric.

"In particular, advertisers who decide to vastly increase their digital spending should realise that as television is experienced differently than radio, social media platforms also differ in qualitative terms. This engagement spills over to the advertisements placed. This means that when selecting a platform for advertising purposes, advertisers should always carefully align platform character with (1) product type, (2) advertising goal and (3) advertising message."

The study also demonstrated that, when it comes to social media advertising, context trumps content.

"To fully benefit from social media, advertisers should either adapt their content to the platform or choose a platform that matches the goal and message of the ad", the report notes.

"If an advertiser wishes to communicate a message that helps people relax, makes them cheerful, or allows them to enjoy themselves, Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram, and/or Pinterest are good fits, whereas X is not."

Loh says context should also determine content, and advertisers should make the effort to tailor ad creative dependent to the social platform it is running on.

"For example, a straight forward, traditional call-to-action ad would sit comfortably on Facebook but would not have the same relevance, level of engagement and therefore response if it was to run on Snapchat.

The creative would need to be changed up with some freer content and language to strike the right tone with the more youthful Snapchat audience."

The study also found that advertising in itself is not appreciated by consumers on all occasions. This was most notable among X and Meta users who were not always welcoming of advertising.

"Being the quintessential platform for engaging in social interactions, paradoxically makes Meta both more and less attractive to advertisers," the report says.

"On one hand, an ad placed in someone's timeline arguably ensures a lot of views; on the other hand, the ad interrupts what is meant to be a social experience. This causes consumers to view the ad in a negative light, with possible drawbacks for the advertiser."

AI has a part to play

Another factor influencing the way Australians consume social media and the way advertisers appeal to those consumers, is the introduction of emerging technologies such as AI.

As well as uncovering deep insights about a brand's audience, social media AI tools can predict which types of content will resonate most, create posts and images automatically, detect consumer trends and understand sentiment.

Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Australia lead tech Jonas Jaanimagi says because AI can analyse vast amounts of data at scale, smart marketers are already using it to create better detailed, yet anonymised, profiles and more accurately predict potential interests and behaviour.

"Through goal-directed adaptive behaviours, AI will be able to empower advertisers to real-time target and optimise ads more precisely to those users most likely to be interested in their products or services – increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the ads and reducing wastage," he says.

"The consumer experience is improved as ad fatigue can be reduced by AI adjusting the ad frequency or switching to a different ad format or messaging based upon user behaviours and engagement."

In addition, predictive modelling and better forecasting will help advertisers optimise their ad campaigns in advance, reducing ad spend waste, improving ROI, and staying ahead of competition, he says.

However, Jaanimagi adds the flip side of this is the very real fear that digital advertisers could leverage these type of capabilities to create "highly deceptive or manipulative ad campaigns that aggressively exploit vulnerable, misinformed or gullible consumers".

This is already in evidence in the form of machine "influencers" that can be created and deployed quickly and at a lower cost than their human equivalent.

"The capabilities could also heighten privacy concerns of any user data that can be accessed and not competently protected would be leveraged to create highly personalised ads without consumer consent. These practices may take some time to unravel and protect against if there is not decent regulation in place combined with effective methods of real-time qualitative monitoring. Likewise, ad fraud remains a core concern as replicating human behaviours and actions through non-human bots becomes increasingly sophisticated," he argues.

The big question

So, when it comes to determining the social media platforms that offer best audience targeting and segmentation, without compromising any ethical boundaries, what are the best options?

If the decision was determined by reach ranking alone, YouTube which has an absolute reach of 17.8 million is the obvious choice, followed by Facebook (at 14.9 million), LinkedIn (14.0 million), Instagram (11.8 million) and TikTok (8.3 million). Snapchat at 7.7 million rates sixth, followed by X (5.2 million), Pinterest (4.3 million) and Messenger (420,000).

But as outlined above there are many other factors which need to be taken into consideration.

In terms of limitations, social media platforms have had to update their targeting capabilities in response to tighter restrictions on marketing to children, which may prove a problem to brands seeking to appeal to younger audiences.

"Snapchat and TikTok remain the only social media platforms that allow under-18 targeting with additional interest or hashtag overlays," Media Precinct's Loh says.

"All other platforms allow under-18 targeting with no additional overlays."

It's also important to remember that social media platforms rely heavily on user-provided and behavioural data which can lead to potential inaccuracies in targeting parameters and audience segmentation, she says.

"The upcoming deprecation of third-party cookies in Q3 2024 will also impact the data that third-party pixels from social media platforms (on advertisers' websites) can pass back. Marketers should ensure that first-party cookies are enabled on all their social media platforms, and that server-to-server APIs are implemented as soon as possible, to limit any loss in valuable website and sales data."

Largely due to the depth of detail they are able to draw down on, Loh suggests Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn offer the most bang for marketing buck.

"The nature of the usage across Meta, Instagram and LinkedIn requires users to provide more personal information compared to other platforms – for example, your relationship status, education, job history – which provides marketers with more detailed targeting options compared to Snapchat and TikTok.

Meta and Instagram also boast a huge user base, so the sheer volume of active users would also increase the targeting efficacy on both platforms."



MEDIA PRECINCT

Media Precinct is a full-service media and digital agency that specialises in deep understanding of digital channels such as social media.

We mine our globally and locally renowned research resources while overlaying our real world experience using digital platform technology and analytics to provide the best performance outcomes for our clients.

We partner with our clients to deliver tailored digital and social media strategies to ensure the best performance media outcomes for your marketing and advertising campaigns.

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