TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As the clock struck 12:01 a.m. on New Year's Day 2019, an estimated 395,000 babies were to be born over the next 24 hours. Thus ushered into the world 395,000 future social media users.

What will social media look like when this youngest of populations grows up? What will their browsing and purchasing habits be in 25 or 30 years? How will you market to them?

File away this scenario for another day, as you have more pressing concerns in the here and now.

Every year, social media budgets grow **10 percent,** and social media ad revenue surpasses **$50 billion annually.**
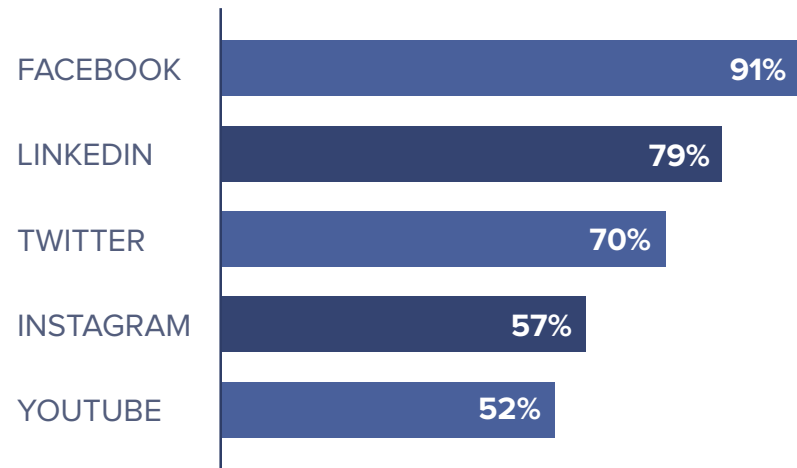
Let's look at several key trends in content types, distribution methods and technologies and what impact they're having — on you, your rivals and the digital marketing industry at large.

THE WHO, WHAT AND WHERE OF SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Among B2C marketers, the following platforms are used most often:

FACEBOOK	97%
INSTAGRAM	72%
TWITTER	62%
YOUTUBE	51%
LINKEDIN	47%
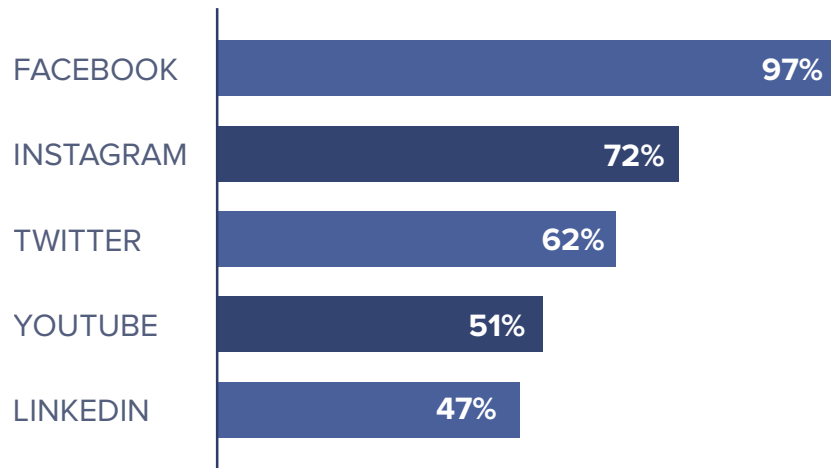
For B2B marketers, things are slightly different:

FACEBOOK	91%
LINKEDIN	79%
TWITTER	70%
INSTAGRAM	57%
YOUTUBE	52%

The clearest divergence among B2C and B2B social media usage is LinkedIn adoption, a differential of **32 percentage points.** This finding is good news. **Ninety-four percent** of B2B marketers say LinkedIn is their most effective distribution channel. Furthermore, **80 percent** of all B2B leads come from LinkedIn.

Undoubtedly, B2B marketers are placing their social media bets on the correct platform, with the goal being lead generation and tangible content marketing ROI.

IN-APP PURCHASING CONVERTS SOCIAL INTO SALES

In 2019, companies are wanting more out of social media beyond surface-level shares, likes and follower counts.

Social media also needs to be a repository for revenue, which makes Instagram's recent forays into buy-direct content a sales breakthrough, particularly for B2C marketers. More than **90 million** Instagram users click on "Shoppable Posts" every month, allowing them to find, research and purchase products in-app, rather than being navigated to a separate domain or checkout page.

Similarly, Facebook Marketplace and Pinterest's "Buyable Pins" continue to streamline their respective social commerce experiences.

28%

Hootsuite estimates **28 percent** of organizations plan to implement a social commerce plan in the coming year.

Online retail adoption of in-app purchasing technology is still early. In addition to ensuring their business profile pages are approved for Shoppable Posts by Instagram, retailers should also spend more time uploading hi-res product images, running product-focused contests and experimenting with staging techniques to create the optimal visual experience that facilitates purchasing.

LIVE VIDEOS EQUAL MORE THAN EPHEMERA

One of the mechanisms for driving higher social engagement and, potentially, sales is **livestreams.**

Live video content is now available on all of the aforementioned social channels, and brands are deriving value from it in the form of **authenticity, direct follower interactivity and product showcasing.**

A traditional online image carousel does little to give consumers an extensive view of a product or how they may use it. A live video, however, provides much-needed context and real-time demonstrations.

Brands are also using livestreams to drum up their target audience's interest in new product launches, upcoming speeches from their CEOs and interactive conversations with product or sales engineers. Viewers can hear directly from their favorite brands, ask questions they need answered and engage in community-building conversations — none of which they could've experienced from just a website or a conventional social post.

The ephemeral nature of live videos also adds a layer of increased viewer demand, as these are often one-time visual experiences.

In 2019, video-centric platforms like YouTube, Snapchat and, increasingly, Instagram will foster stronger connections with followers.
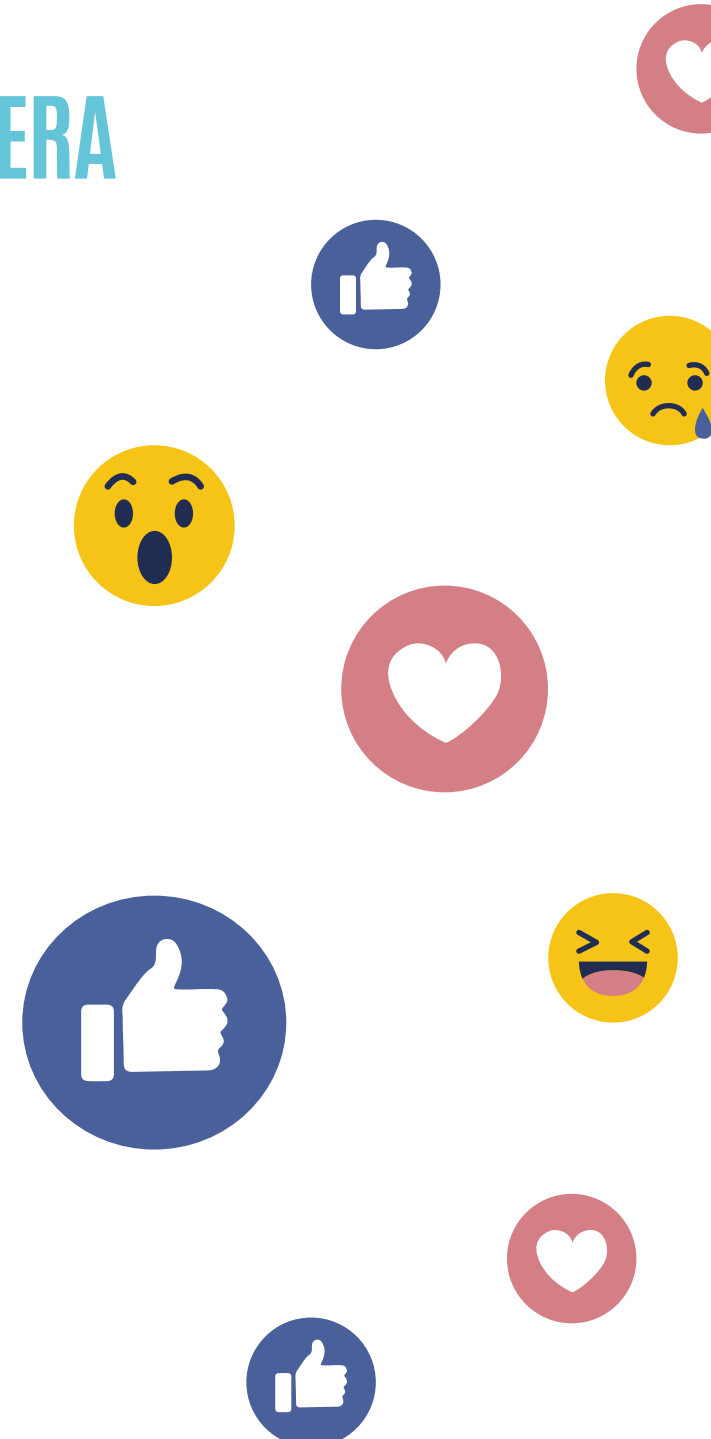
AUGMENTED REALITY REIMAGINES CUSTOMER SEARCH

In addition to livestream, augmented reality (AR) provides an immersive, rich content experience when featuring products.

If customers can now purchase items directly on social media, they should also be able to "try" them on or "test" them out on social media, too, right?

That's the thinking in 2019, but actual execution hasn't yet occurred. Limited use cases on Facebook and via big retail brands like Nike have shown customers can use AR to determine whether a product will fit while also allowing them to customize their own sneaker features.

Global ad revenues from AR will hit **$780 billion** in 2019, and as ARtillery noted, "camera is the new search box."
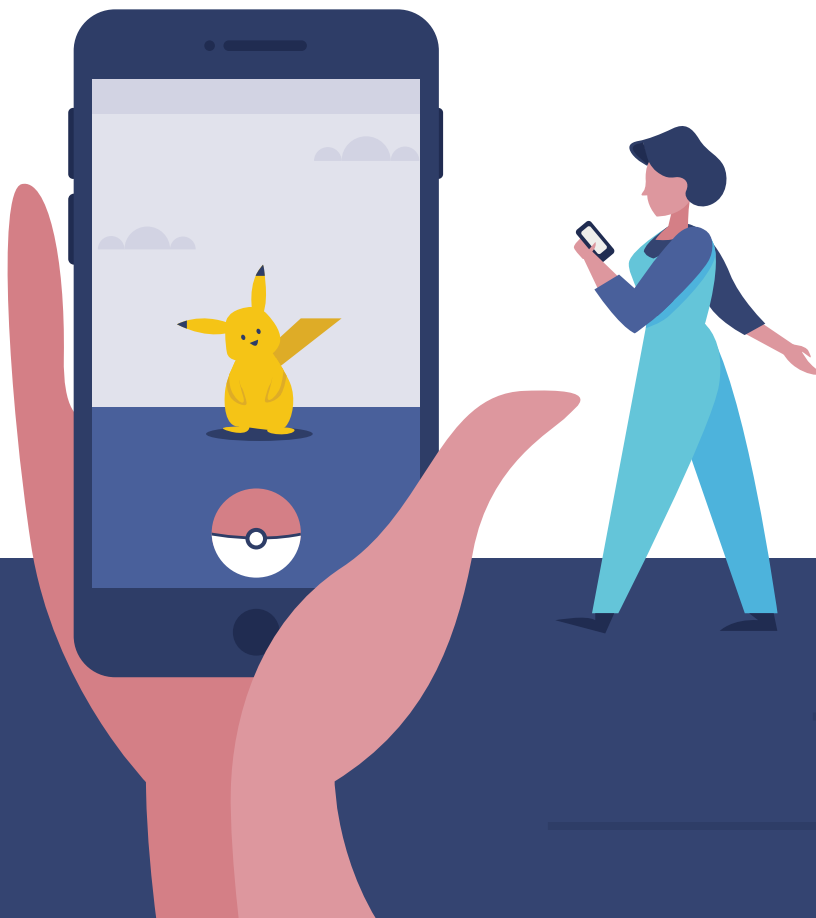
CHATBOTS RISE ABOVE THE CHATTER

Chatbots are a divisive topic. Our own research shows that close to **90 percent** of online users have interacted with a chatbot but less than **50 percent** find them useful. About **33 percent** actually find them "kind of annoying" or "extremely annoying."

The issue may boil down to improper chatbot deployment. When consumers need quick answers to simple questions, **70 percent** prefer chatbots over email or calling customer support.
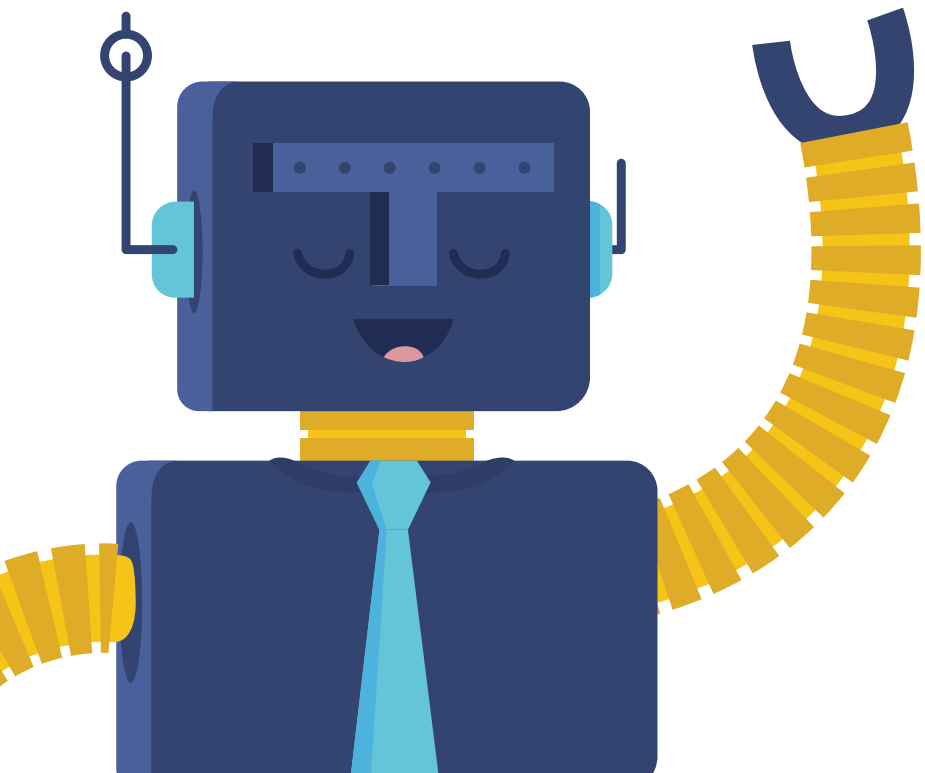
By 2020, **85 percent** of customer interactions with enterprises will involve no human whatsoever, so chatbots have plenty of upside in both the near and long term, filling the gap left behind by frustrating call centers, slow email followup and confusing FAQ pages.

Facebook and Twitter chatbots are already used on a wide scale, but brands are finding that bots cannot replace human touch. That's why bots should be augmented with real customer support as well, immediately notifying users that their issue will be resolved by a rep or agent should it be escalated to that level or require human intervention.

The goal is to make automation approachable and genuinely helpful.

# MOBILE-FRIENDLY PORTRAIT VIDEO IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

The television's expansion — physically — has occurred horizontally over the last several decades, with widescreen now being the standard setting for every living room.

Ditto for movie theatres. Screens are so wide viewers can't even sit in the first few rows without having to crane their necks and pan their eyes back and forth to capture the full picture.

This all stands in stark contrast with what's happening on smartphones, where screens are sized vertically and videos must be rendered in a portrait format to properly adapt to the device.

A marketing strategy that includes video content is only the first step in the creation process — video also needs to be built to fit **multiple formats, with mobile being the primary medium.** As desktop and laptop social media scrolling declines, the vast majority of social media video views occur on mobile, so it's only natural to prioritize vertical video.

Vertical video has long been central to the Snapchat model, but Facebook and Twitter now use vertical video ads as well. IGTV, Instagram's standalone video app, hosts videos up to 60 minutes in length and mandates vertical video, exemplifying just how paramount mobile-friendly portrait videos are.
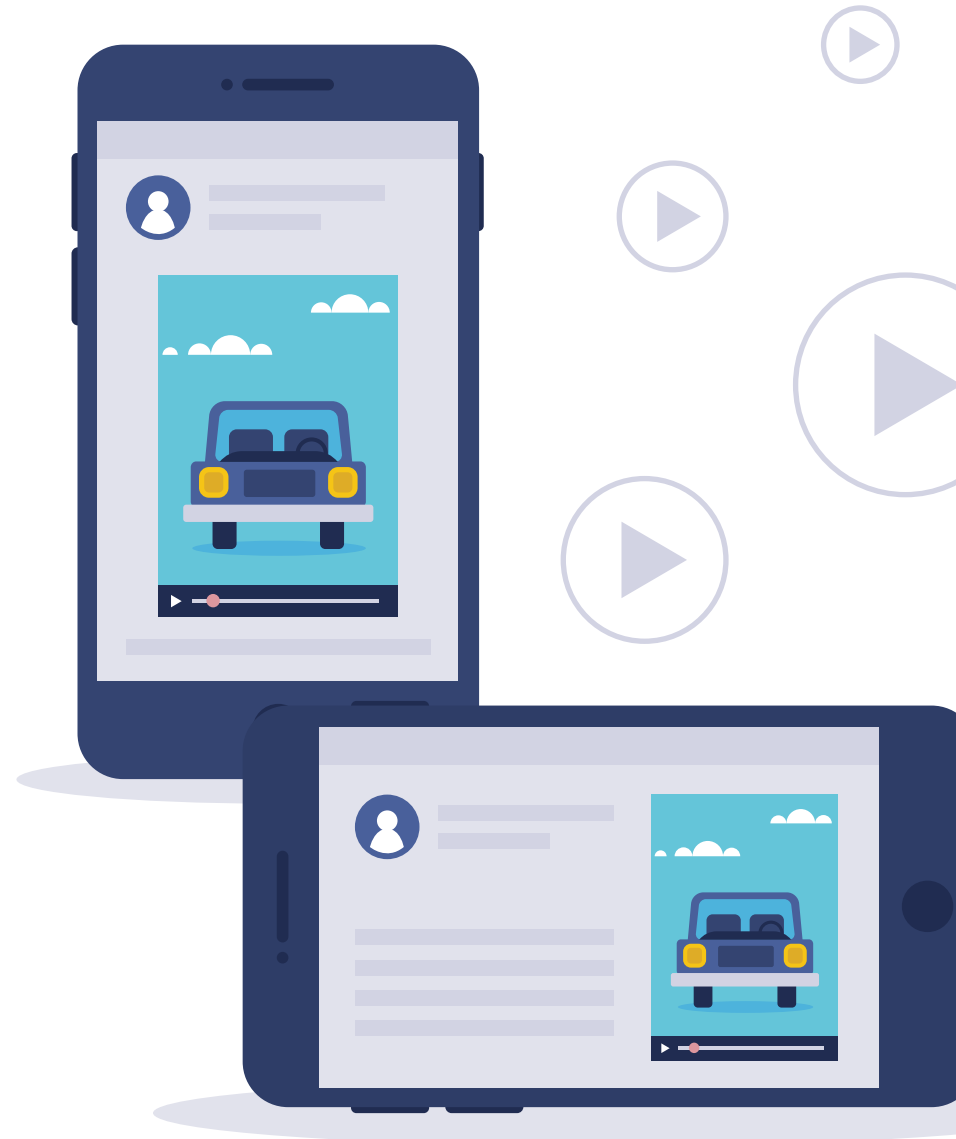
INFLUENCERS SHRINK

As 2018 came to an end, the media industry promoted an even newer — and tinier — form of social influence: **the nano influencer.**

The New York Times and The Guardian evidently identified a trend of brands circumventing expensive, often-risky social media influencers — think big-name celebs — in favor of micro influencers, those social mavens with somewhat smaller followings but hyper-niche, active engagement across their channels. But it doesn't stop there.

A nano influencer is loosely defined as an account with **1,000-5,000 followers,** one that is operated by an ordinary human being with a regular job outside the echo chamber of online media. These nano influencers are so authentic and average that they are deemed more trustworthy and nonpartisan, all valuable attributes for any organization in search of brand ambassadors.

This development is due in large part to the users' erosion of trust in famous, obviously orchestrated celeb endorsements. Isn't your neighbor John, whom you know personally to be a decent human being, a better advocate of a product than, say, a public figure you've never met with a potentially sordid past?

Expect content marketers to leverage an army of ordinaries in 2019. More power to them.

JOHN'S
HOUSE

CONCLUSION

Social media is increasingly becoming a channel for cold, hard cash. Its convergence with e-commerce is already evident in a number of ways.

Amazon uses social proof on its platform in the form of user ratings and reviews. Wayfair is realizing exponential growth by hanging digital price tags on its Instagram and Pinterest posts.

And with social ads being more sophisticated, indistinguishable and targeted than ever before, it's clear the days of simply scanning social profiles for the joy of it — or to pass time — are over. The inescapable reality is that **social media is commerce,** so an uncoordinated or nonexistent cross-platform social strategy is an admission of marketing incompetence.

Harsh but true.

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