10 trends in

In an always-connected world, brands must learn to understand how consumers are changing their usage and expectations in the social space, says **Brett Petersen** of Trendstream

Social media is changing rapidly as new platforms become popular and consumers find new ways to connect with friends, family and brands. The challenge for brands is to ensure they understand how consumers around the world are evolving both their usage and expectations in this space.

A holistic internet strategy requires a broad view of all media and content types and an understanding of how they connect. It also requires a detailed view of your target customer across all internet platforms and applications. From a research point of view, it means that understanding one internet platform, without taking into account all of the others, is becoming pointless. Consumers have an integrated, always connected experience across multiple devices. Also, as internet experience is increasingly about content, social, and apps, understanding behaviour is increasingly more important than counting visits to any one URL. Brands need multiple platform internet strategists, people who understand all media types, the big picture and how they fit together.

Based on six waves of research in 27 markets around the world, GlobalWebIndex has identified 10 trends that all marketers will need to consider if they want to be successful in this channel.

THE WAY WE USE THE WEB IS INCREASINGLY VARIED

1 The global internet has become a mix of local internets, each with radically different adoption levels and behaviour profiles.

Broadly, emerging markets are driving the uptake of social channels, while consumers in more mature markets are focusing on purchasing and e-commerce. Brands cannot simply roll out a single global online strategy. Localisation is key and their social media presence will have to be adjusted market by market. They will also have to be aware that online influencers will increasingly emerge from outside the English language internet.

THE WAY THAT WE ACCESS THE INTERNET IS CHANGING

2 PCs and laptops are being replaced by mobile and devices such as tablets and connected TV as the favourite 'go to' device for connection.

The number of consumers with smartphones who have downloaded a mobile app in the last month has increased since GWI. I in July 2009, from 14%, to 27% in North America, from 16% to 27% in Europe, 29% to 47% in Asia-Pacific and 19% to 47% in Latin America.

Brands must have a multi-platform strategy: website, mobile and applications are a must, as packaged platforms such as mobile and tablets reintroduce barriers to distribution. The fragmentation of the web is an opportunity for brands that have the connections and budgets to gain access.

MICROBLOGGING AND SOCIAL NETWORKING ARE GROWING

3 They are the fastest-growing social media activities, with their usage up 43% and 27% respectively from GWI. I (July 2009) to GWI. 6 (February 2012). Real-time fundamentally changes what consumers do online. It encourages sharing over creation of content. In fact, the more consumers use micro-blogging platforms, the more likely they are to link to another microblog, send a link to a video, link to a news story or images.

Transmitter culture makes journalists, media owners, content producers and brands more relevant in the online economy. The challenge for brands in this space is to create content that is equally valuable and that consumers want to share.

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TIME HAS WEARIED USERS OF FACEBOOK

4 Total usage of the platform is growing thanks to emerging markets, but established markets such as the US, UK and Canada have seen large declines in terms of active participation, such as status updates, sharing content, messaging and installing applications.

The trend is even more pronounced among college-educated, twentysomething Americans, the pioneers of the platform.

Brands need to remember that the web is not just Facebook even as they increase investment in profile pages and advertising on the platform. The current decline in activity raises questions over whether brands would be better served by building a more multi-platform social offering to maximise social engagement.

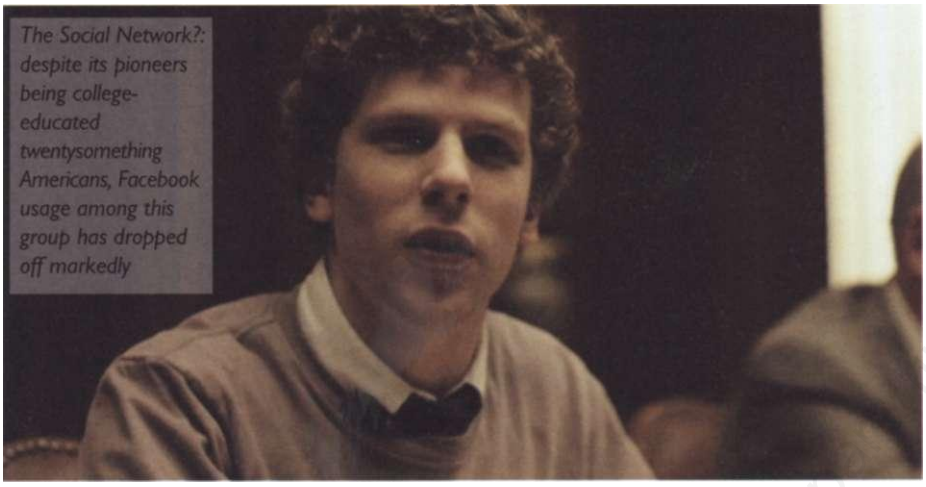
RISE OF REAL-TIME WEB HIGHLIGHTS VALUE OF TRADITIONAL CONTENT

5 As consumers have switched from being content creators to transmitters of information, so demand for news, video content, films, TV and sports has exploded.

Consumption of professional video content online now outstrips user-generated content. There is a massive opportunity for brands to build global content strategy, and consumer demand for professional content in emerging markets is particularly strong.

Combined with the transmitter culture created by the rise of real-time, content has never been so popular, and the line between produced content and advertising will disappear online.

social media



The Social Network?: despite its pioneers being college-educated twentysomething Americans, Facebook usage among this group has dropped off markedly

TRADITIONAL MEDIA OWNERS CAN TAKE HEART FROM CHANGES

6 Contrary to expectations, younger and emerging market consumers are willing to pay for content. But this propensity to pay differs strongly by market. It is strongest in BRIC markets, while the five biggest EU markets are the least willing to pay for services. More than half of internet users in France, Italy and Spain would not consider paying for online content such as ebooks or dating. Content producers should look at the global opportunity, while bearing in mind how the localised internet trend makes localised content even more important.

B2B DECISION-MAKERS ARE MOST SOCIALLY ACTIVE CONSUMERS

7 For all markets and demographics, this underlines how fundamental social media has become to B2B marketing. For example, as of June 201 1, global figures show that: 43% of decision-makers had used a micro-blog in the last month versus 24% for the average internet user and 88% had used a social network versus 78% for the average internet user. B2B marketers must have a sophisticated strategy for leveraging the right platforms, empowering their staff to participate and making contact with client decision-makers.

CONSUMERS WANT SOCIAL BRANDS THAT IMPROVE THEIR LIFESTYLE

8 41% of consumers want brands to connect with them, with people, and be part of their daily routine. This highlights the growing power of recommendation and the increasing need for brands to earn attention. Liking a brand or product on a social network is popular among consumers in all regions, and social marketing techniques are close to matching brand websites in reach. However, brands need to understand the 'rules of engagement' and identify what consumers want from them on these platforms. This doesn't necessitate constant two-way conversation, but requires brands to be attentive to when that conversation is wanted.

PEOPLE ARE EVOLVING INTO A STATE OF CONSTANT CONNECTION

9 Thanks to non-PC connections, more and more consumers are permanently connected to the internet. Many are using services such as Facebook and Twitter across all platforms, creating an integrated internet experience of total and constant connection.

More than 39% of Facebook users used more than one platform to access the social network in June 201 1. Consumers are adding more and more platforms, increasing their connection time, rather than replacing one platform with another. This need to connect extends to 'non-digital' media occasions. Just over 40% of internet users globally use their mobile while watching TV, 48% their laptop and 10% a tablet. Only 19% never multi-task between TV and the internet.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A DIGITAL LIFE

10 Before the age of smartphones and social media, our digital lives were a separate experience. We had desks where our computers were, and sitting at that desk was the only time we interacted in the 'digital' world. In the past decade and over the past six waves of GWI research, however, there has been a wholesale shift and we have become constantly connected. People increasingly prefer to access online service via their tablets and smartphones. They are also contributing and interacting on a real-time basis online.

The death of digital has become a reality and the internet is now integrated into people's everyday lives. Traditional TV is now being complemented with video-on-demand services like Netflix. People plan parties on Facebook and then share photos and tweet in real-time once they are there.

In February 2012, we found that 46% searched for local services and places via the internet using their mobile phone. Wherever you look, people are evolving into a state of constant connection and the difference between real and digital life has disappeared. It is critical that brands adopt wholly integrated strategies where offline and online communications work in tandem.

more on trends in social media at www.warc.com

Fonte: Admap, Washington, v. 47, n. 4, p. 38-39, abr. 2012.