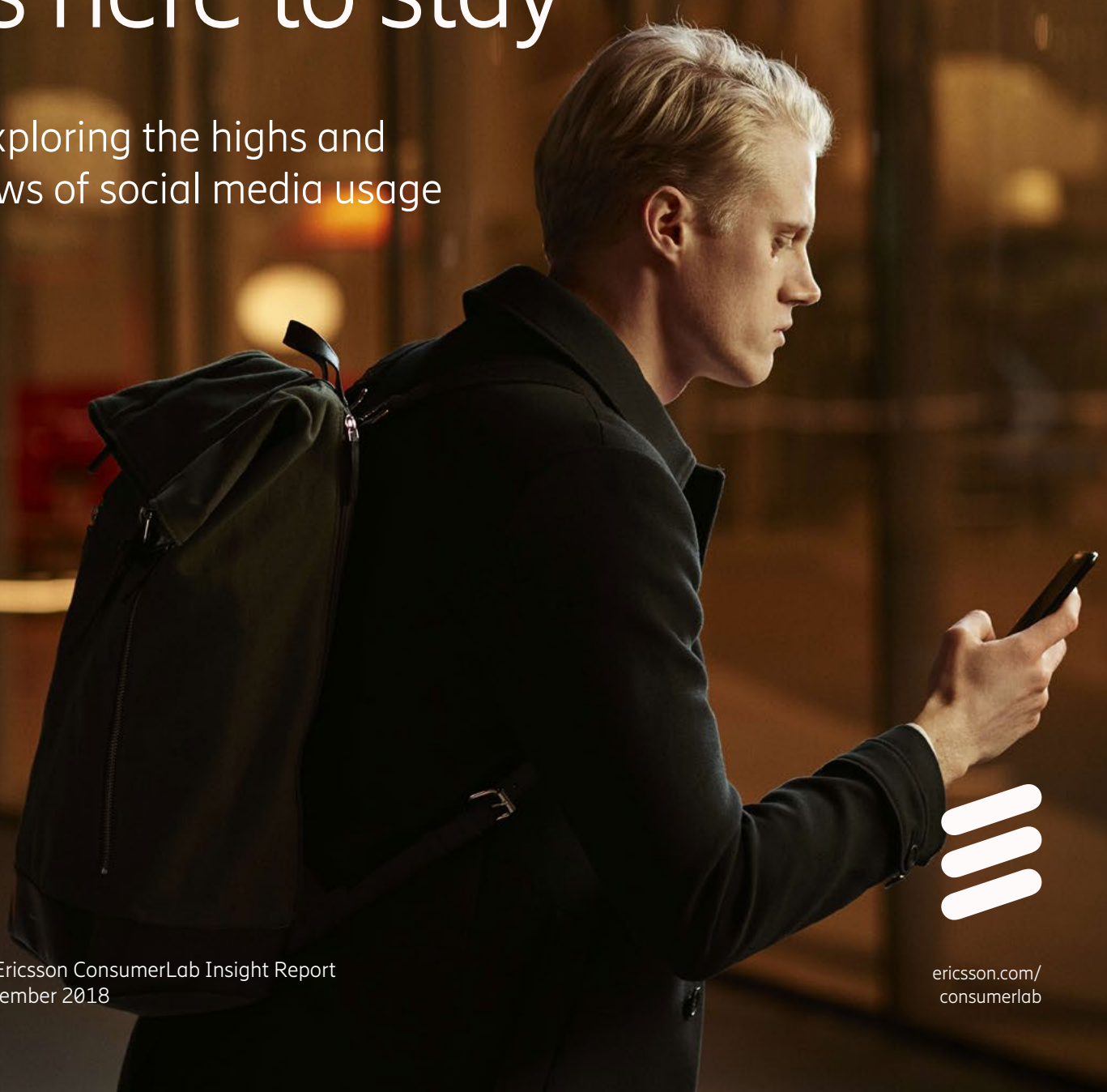


# #OMG

## Social media is here to stay

Exploring the highs and  
lows of social media usage



# Contents

Social media usage is responsible for over 10 percent of total mobile data traffic and is expected to grow 31 percent annually over the next 6 years\*.<sup>1</sup> This report aims to uncover consumers' attitudes towards social media and how social media usage will continue to evolve.



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## Methodology

In September 2018, 2,600 smartphone users from the US and the UK participated in an online survey. The respondents were aged between 16 and 65, and their views expressed in the survey are representative of 100 million advanced smartphone users from those markets.

In addition to the online survey, data from ConsumerLab's analytical platform was used, and supplementary face-to-face interviews were conducted in Brazil, Japan, Sweden, the US and the UK. Data from App Annie has also been used for this report. App Annie's Android data on smartphone data consumption and usage is derived from a large global database of real-world users, combined with additional proprietary data sets.

## About Consumer & IndustryLab

Ericsson Consumer & IndustryLab deliver world-class research and insights for innovation and sustainable business development. We explore the future of consumers, industries and a sustainable society in regards to connectivity by using scientific methods to provide unique insights on markets, industries and consumer trends. Our knowledge is gained in global consumer and industry research programs, including collaborations with renowned industry organizations and world-leading universities. Our research programs cover interviews with over 100,000 individuals each year, in more than 40 countries – statistically representing the views of 1.1 billion people.

All reports can be found at:  
[www.ericsson.com/consumerlab](http://www.ericsson.com/consumerlab)

<sup>1</sup> Ericsson Mobility Report, June 2018

# Social media is dead, long live social media

Spending time on social media services like Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp is an integral part of modern life. Consumers use these services to share private moments, keep in touch with friends and family, join communities, watch videos, read news and even interact with businesses. It's hard to imagine life without social media.



## Key findings

### Social media has far from peaked

- Despite recent negativity created due to privacy scandals, social media has not yet peaked. Currently, over 3 billion people access at least one social media service on a regular basis. Globally, between 2014 and 2018, average time spent on social media apps increased by almost 60 percent, from 30 minutes a day in 2014 to 47 in 2018.

### Fake news erodes trust

- Over 50 percent of consumers interviewed in the US and UK acknowledged they have read news on social media they later found to be fake, and almost one in four admitted spreading articles they later found were fake news.
- Less than one in five trust information they read on social media.

### Short life span for social brands

- Out of the 10 most popular social media platforms of 2008, 5 no longer exist and only 2 remain among the 10 most popular in 2018.
- Facebook currently holds the crown as the most popular brand. However its user base and time spent on the site are currently slowing down in growth and even decreasing in some countries.

### Consumers want the publisher role back

- Almost 70 percent think social media companies should ensure there is no fake content on their platform, and over half think social media should be legally liable for fake news.
- Three out of five say social media companies should hire people to review content; and 40 percent want artificial intelligence to do it.

### Is social media the new smoking?

- Social media has gained a negative stigma. Thirty percent of consumers interviewed in the US and UK refuse to say how much time they spend on social media, and almost 7 out of 10 think their friends do the same.
- Four out of ten think heavy social media users are looked down on by others and 70 percent think using social media too much is not healthy.

### Social media is part of social infrastructure

- Although consumers are now sharing less, social media services are too intrinsic to their lives to be abandoned.
- About one in five believe they will get more of their news from social media in five years.

# Social media is still growing

Even though recent privacy-related scandals have fueled negativity and criticism, data indicates social media services have far from peaked. Social media services are witnessing an increase in users, and in the average amount of time those users spend on it.

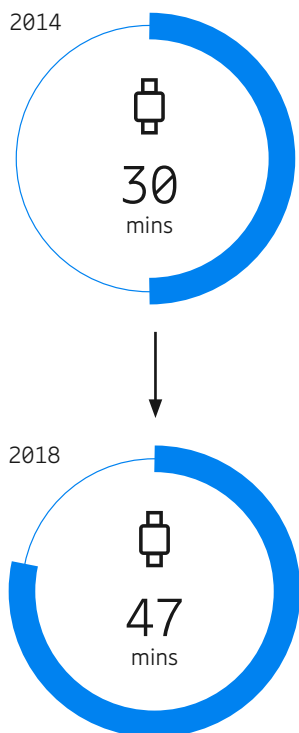
Social media services are used by over 3 billion people worldwide, and new users are constantly being added to their already vast user bases. Facebook Inc. services alone – which comprise Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp – have gone from 1.3 billion monthly unique active users in 2014 to 2.5 billion in 2018. Similar growth rates can also be seen in other social media services. In addition to increasing user bases,

social media has seen the average time consumers spend in their apps globally increase by almost 60 percent between 2014 and 2018, from 30 minutes a day in 2014 to 47 minutes in 2018.

With no signs of shrinking, social media is the main online activity for consumers. Close to 60 percent of social media users interviewed in the US and UK use social media instant messaging features at least weekly.

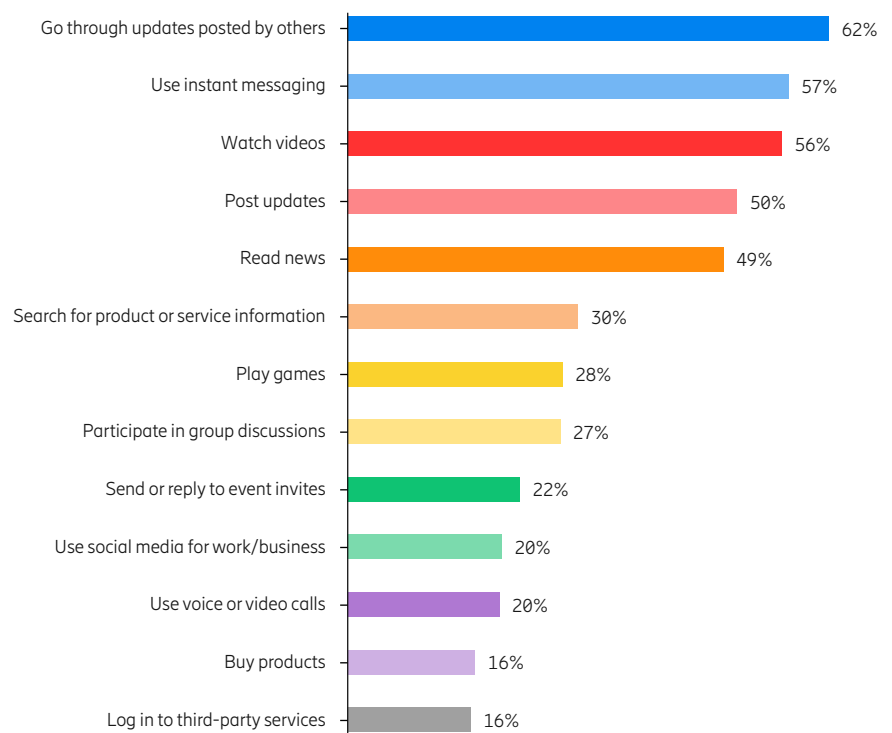
Almost half read news they find on their feed. Almost 20 percent make voice or video calls on social media platforms and some 30 percent search for information about products and services every week. Consumers can now immerse themselves in an almost complete internet experience, and in fact one in four say they can do everything they want on the internet using only their favorite social media platform.

**Figure 1: Average time spent on social media apps daily**



Source: Ericsson ConsumerLab, #OMG Social media is here to stay, 2018  
 Base: Android smartphone users in the App Annie data panel across more than 50 countries

**Figure 2: Percentage of social media users doing different activities on social media at least weekly**



Base: Social media users in the US and the UK  
 Source: Ericsson ConsumerLab, #OMG Social media is here to stay, 2018



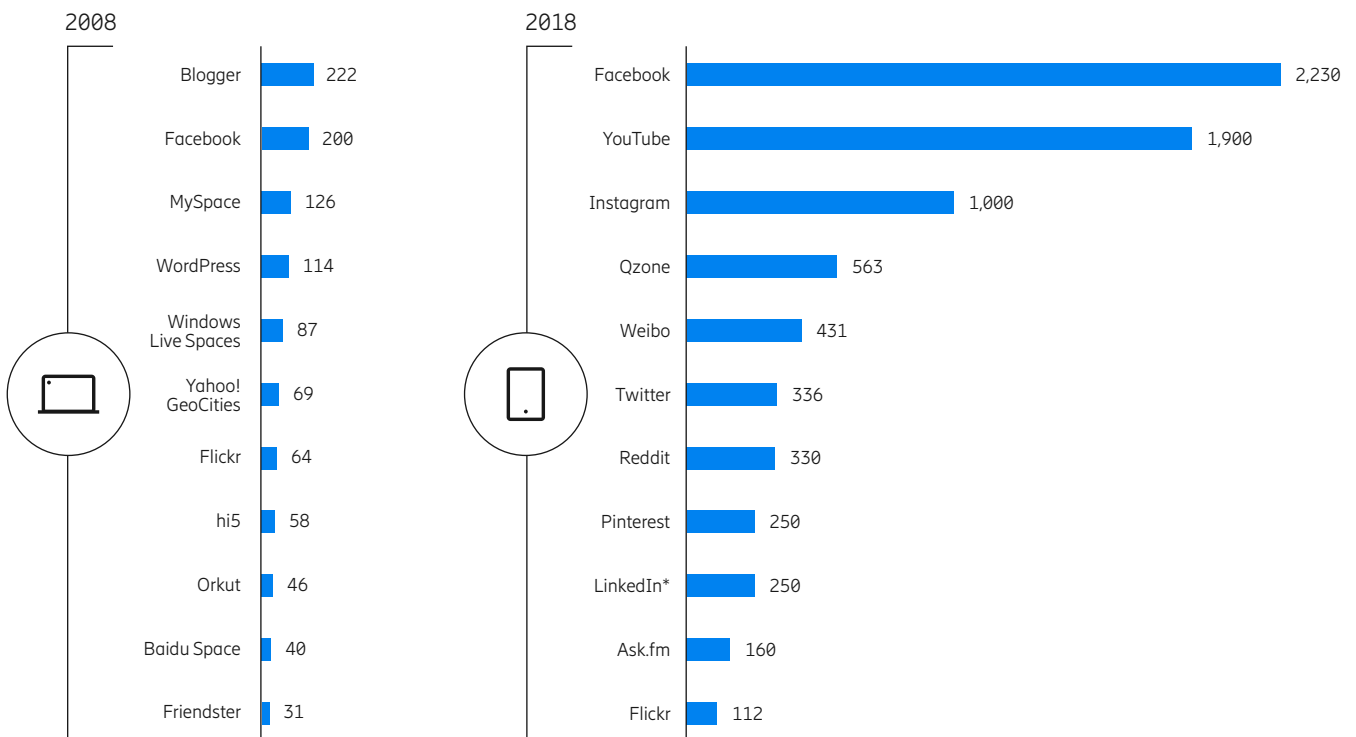


**Rapid turnover of social media brands**

In the space of 10 years, social media has changed drastically. Cute personal blogs on MySpace and pictures of university students on FaceMash have evolved to cover billions of Facebook users, and also expanded into business and employment-related services such as LinkedIn. Social media services face tough competition and can lose relevance quickly. For instance, 5 out of the 10 most popular social media platforms of 2008 no longer exist (Windows Live Spaces, Yahoo! GeoCities, Orkut, Baidu Space, Friendster) and only 2 of them (Facebook and Flickr) remain among the 10 most popular as of 2018, as can be seen in Figure 3. More change is expected, and over 20 percent of social media users believe that in 5 years' time, they will be using different social media services to those they are using today.

Facebook currently wears the crown as most popular social media brand, with over 2 billion active monthly users. However, data shows that Facebook's user base and the time spent on it by users are currently slowing in growth or even decreasing in some countries, while other social media services are gaining momentum.

**Figure 3: Number of active users of the most popular social media services (millions)**



Source: comScore 2008, and official newsroom from each social media  
 \*LinkedIn estimated numbers based on Apptopia analysis

# Eroded consumer trust

## Issues don't impact overall usage of social media

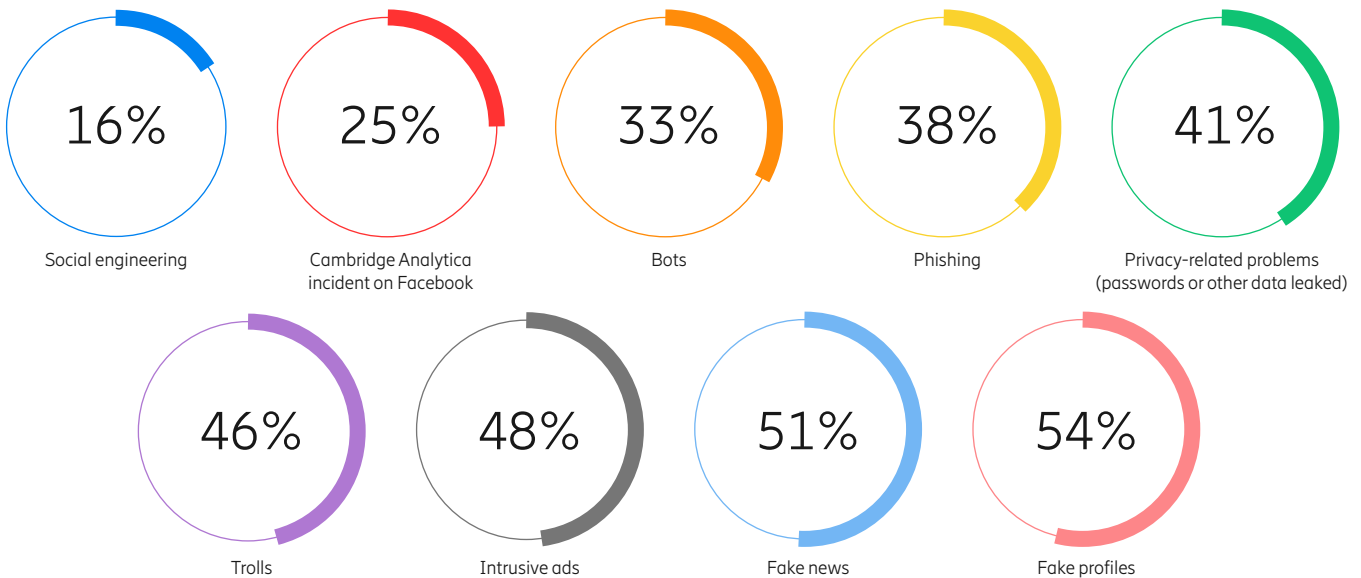
By becoming mainstream and reaching a huge amount of internet users, social media has exposed consumers to various issues. Recently, the Cambridge Analytica case went viral, and other problems have included

privacy breaches, intrusive ads, internet addiction, phishing and even cyber bullying. Before social media, those issues affected a much smaller share of internet users.

A quarter of consumers interviewed in the UK and the US claimed they had experienced such issues on social media,

and over one-third personally knew someone who had experienced these. Furthermore, extensive media coverage has raised awareness, with over 60 percent having read articles about social media issues on news websites and more than 40 percent having seen it on TV.

Figure 4: Percentage of consumers aware of different social media issues



Source: Ericsson ConsumerLab, #OMG Social media is here to stay, 2018  
Base: Advanced smartphone users in US and UK

These issues have negatively impacted consumer trust. Less than 20 percent say they trust social media services with their personal data, and about 60 percent are concerned about how social media services are using their personal information. However, it appears these issues are not reducing usage, at least not on a global level. Even though 30 percent of consumers claimed they had reduced their usage of social media because of one of these issues, over one-third of them said they soon returned to their previous levels.

## Fake news travels fast

On top of these issues, the fake news phenomenon arrived, leveraging social media tools, such as share and like buttons, to spread misinformation

faster than ever. Over half of consumers interviewed in the US and UK acknowledged they have read news on social media they later found to be fake. Almost one in four admitted spreading articles they later found were fake news.

While to a large extent being driven by the hunt for advertising money, fake news poses a major threat to social media's advertising business model, as fewer than 20 percent now trust information found on social media platforms. Social media is included free of charge on some mobile data plans, and for many who use those data plans, social media is their sole source of news and information, and that might harm not only social media's business model, but also damage democracy and society as a whole.

## Consumers yearn for the return of the publisher

Social media companies themselves are only now waking up to the threat of fake news. Consumers expect social media services to act, with two-thirds thinking social media companies should ensure there is no fake content on their platforms, and well over half agreeing social media services should be legally liable for fake news and misinformation on their platforms. Consumers want the publisher role back; three out of five say social media services should hire people to review content on their platforms to ensure fake information is not spread. Forty percent think artificial intelligence should do it, while half believe social media services should only host users with verified real names.

# The roller-coaster future for social media

## Is social media the new smoking?

Social media has gained a negative stigma. Thirty percent of consumers interviewed in the US and UK refuse to say how much time they spend on social media when asked by their peers, and over two-thirds believe their friends are lying about their usage. Even though social media usage continues to grow, users don't want others to know how much time they spend on it, and 4 in 10 think people who use social media excessively are looked down on by others. Seventy percent think using social media too much is not healthy.

Social media services now have to overcome this negative stigma, address issues like fake news and evolve their business models and policies to fit with growing demands for privacy online. As the last decade has shown, social media services can have short lifecycles, and a service that is mainstream today may no longer exist in the near future.

## Integral part of social infrastructure

Consumers are rapidly changing their behavior. They are sharing less personal information, updating their privacy settings and questioning information they read on social media. On top of that, many have experienced or are familiar with issues like intrusive ads, phishing, fake profiles and fake news. Almost 10 percent even believe they will not be using social media 5 years from now, while 20 percent think they will be using a different social media platform than today, highlighting how social media services might change. In addition, about 1 in 5 believe they will get more of their news from social media in 5 years, and over 60 percent believe their social media usage will increase.

Social media services are too important a part of users' lives to be abandoned, and even if social media services are unable to restore trust completely, it is likely they will continue to find new relevant features, and will become an even more important part of consumers' lives.

"I don't trust any social media, but I use all of them."

Giovanna, 21 years old, São Paulo



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