

State of Digital 2017

Summary and Key Findings

Digital media is not only one of the fastest changing industries, it is also increasingly permeable in every aspect of our daily lives. As digital platforms become more ubiquitous, we need a better understanding of what behaviors and trends are emerging on these platforms.

For the second year in a row, Northweather is proud to introduce the State of Digital survey. This survey, which asks a series of questions on social media usage, habits and trends in Western Canada is intended to aid consumers, businesses, non-profits, and individuals to make more informed decisions on how to use the ever-increasing social media channels to better engage audiences that matter to them.

The data (methodology described in greater detail below) tries to ascertain what we consume, why we consume it, and what significant trend lines this consumption can predict (and help us understand) as we head into 2018. The survey, which was completed in June and December of 2017 yielded 1,750 respondents from an independent research company administered online with respondents from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY, HERE IS WHAT WE FOUND:

■ We are going to be using social media more...But there's a big caveat

We want to use social media more: heading into 2018, 12% of Western Canadians felt they were going to use social media more (with only 4% saying that they would be using it less). Moreover, 24% of Western Canadians anticipated others would be using social media more than they did last year. With all that being said, 38% of us, even while anticipating greater usage, classified social media as a poor use of time. This is important for a few reasons. Firstly, we tend to overestimate how much those around us are using social media, which in turn has the ability to drive (increase) our own behavior. Secondly, with nearly 2/5 Western Canadians thinking that social media is a bad use of time, it becomes even more imperative for companies, individuals, and non-profits to create unique value propositions of their social channels and content.

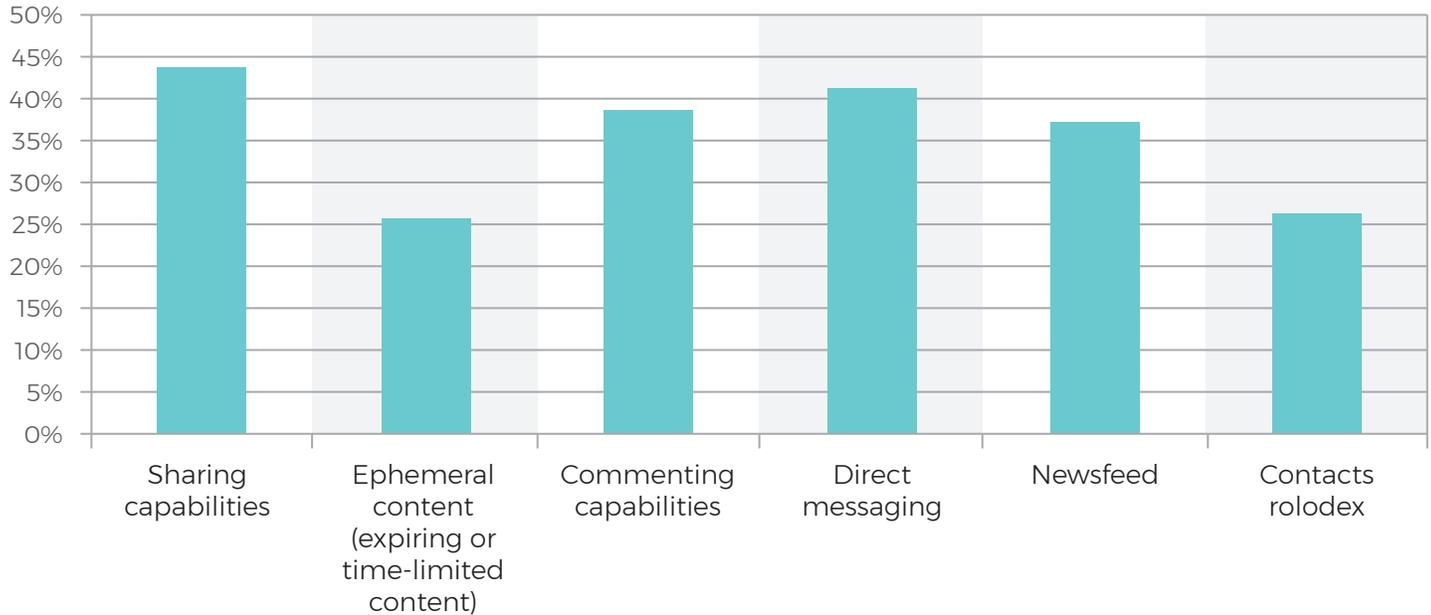
■ Mobile is no longer the Prince...It is the King

Not only are we using social media more (and anticipating our neighbors to use it more than us), we are doing it more and more on our mobile devices. Nearly 86% of Western Canadians own a smartphone and nearly 1/3 own two. The mobile phone is becoming the remote control of our lives - for sharing, browsing and commenting on content. The ability to create bespoke content for mobile is going to be integral for all creators moving forward.

■ The ideal platform must have...The 'want' vs. 'use' delta

The ideal digital platform for Western Canadians needs to have two things: the ability to share content (51% of Western Canadians felt sharing content was very important) and direct messaging (46% of Western Canadians felt direct messaging was very important). At the same time, 68% of Western Canadians want access to every main social media feature (newsfeed, direct messaging, commenting, sharing, etc.) but only 29% of us will maximize the use of all features available. We like and appreciate this convenience, even though we do not always avail it. That being said, we are also willing to trade elements of our privacy in exchange for these features: 34% of us are fine being advertised to algorithmically - using our demographic behaviors and values, and 39% of us do not bat an eye when accessing social media features that ask us access to our privacy and personal information (ie. Our contacts directory).

Rank the following social media features in order of importance to you...



■ We care about our personal brand A LOT

Digital platforms are becoming the heartbeat of our personal brands. Because of that, we see more and more people being a) readily cognizant of their online profiles and b) in a position to engineer and finesse their online personal brand on all platforms. 38% of Western Canadians are worried about their online reputation. What's more, 40% have refrained from posting or sharing something on social media because they were worried about what their employer and future employer might think of it. However, even more interestingly, 61% have refrained from posting or sharing something on social media because they were worried about what their friends or family might think of it. More and more, digital platforms are being used to engineer a particular (and in many times more safe rather than reflective) version of ourselves online.

■ Email is going nowhere...

With digital buzzwords such as AI, block chain, and VR entering our lexicon, many have written-off email as a relic of the past. Well, it is anything but. More than any platform (including social media, texting, etc.), email continues to be the most preferred method (62%) of sharing digital content. Furthermore, Facebook (50%) is the only platform that is preferred above email for being the best method to comment on content (41%). The death of email is a long ways away, and it would be a big mistake to ignore its existing power and importance to the modern consumer.

■ More of us are 'just browsing'

We have all seen it. The salesperson that approaches you literally 20 seconds after you walk into the store.

"Can I help you with anything?"

"No thanks, I'm just browsing."

Well, browsing is no longer just limited to the confines of unfortunate retail experiences. More and more of us (Western Canadians) are using social media to exclusively browse content. 31% of Western-Canadians (regardless of platform) are browse-only users -- Instagram (42%), Twitter (39%), and Snapchat (44%). Overall, 58% of Western Canadians are on the top 4 social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat) but only 18% actively use (share, post, comment, etc.) on all of them. Why is this important? Well, two reasons. Firstly, if the trend of increasing browse-only behavior continues, social media platforms will have a problem with content production. Secondly, as the browse-only behavior proves to continue, platforms such as email does not satiate the appetite to browse, which is where the power of Facebook (73% penetration as a platform used for browsing content), Snapchat (40%) and Instagram (48%) come in, giving them a higher ceiling for their growth.

■ The rise of 1:1

While we want to browse more, we are also becoming increasingly more singular, desiring a 1:1 relationship on digital platforms. The rise of messaging applications or features (Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, iMessage, Instagram Direct Messaging) have seen significant growth year-over-year. 80% of us use Text Messaging or iMessaging, 70% (+6 from 2016) of us use Facebook Messenger (+11 from 2016), and nearly 43% (+10 from 2016) of us WhatsApp. The 1:1 relationship of content is also seen across digital music subscriptions such as Apple Music or Spotify (with 28% of the Western Canadian population using them) and podcasts, which 26% of Western Canadians listen to on a monthly basis, up 3% from 2016. The rise of 1:1 mediums reveals that not one platform has captured the increasingly splintered and fickle consumer attention, but there lie significant opportunities to engage socially with your audience on these emerging platforms.

■ Serialized content isn't disappearing anytime soon

The rise of disappearing (ephemeral content) is here to stay. Platforms such as Instagram Stories and Snapchat make-up the lion share of this serialized and disappearing content market. 32% of Western Canadians use Instagram Stories (Instagram Stories did not exist in 2016) and 39% of Western Canadians use Snapchat (up +9% from 2016). The conclusion here is simple. As more and more of us begin documenting content through serialized formats, this serialized structure of storytelling will become more and more akin to how we live our digital lives. The ability to harness this new reality (by businesses, nonprofits, and individuals alike) will be critical in being able to adapt to this new mode of storytelling.

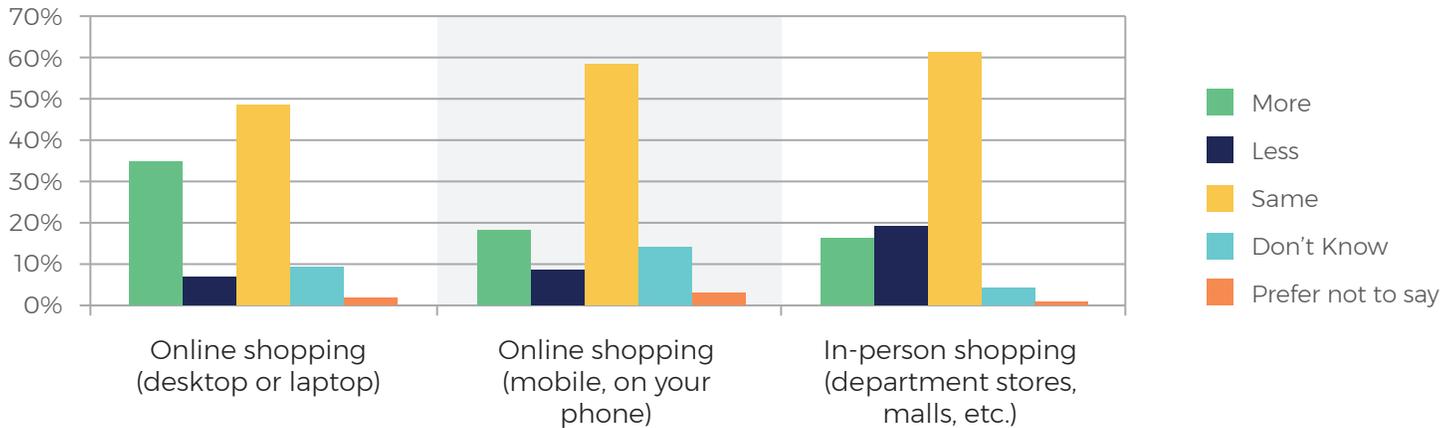
The 2017 State of Digital Survey also asked some questions relating to e-commerce, particularly holiday shopping, online reviews and the consumer decision-making process.

HERE ARE THREE KEY SHOPPING AND E-COMMERCE INSIGHTS THAT WE FOUND:

■ As it relates to shopping, mobile is emerging, but not ruling

While mobile is clearly ruling the digital platform world for social media, 1:1 communications and content consumption, it still lags behind laptops and desktop for online shopping. Heading into 2018, Western Canadians felt that they would be visiting in-person shopping locations less (16% more and 19% less), that they would be doing online shopping more on desktop or laptop more (34% more to 6% less) and online mobile shopping more (18% more to 8% less) but to a lesser degree than desktop or laptop.

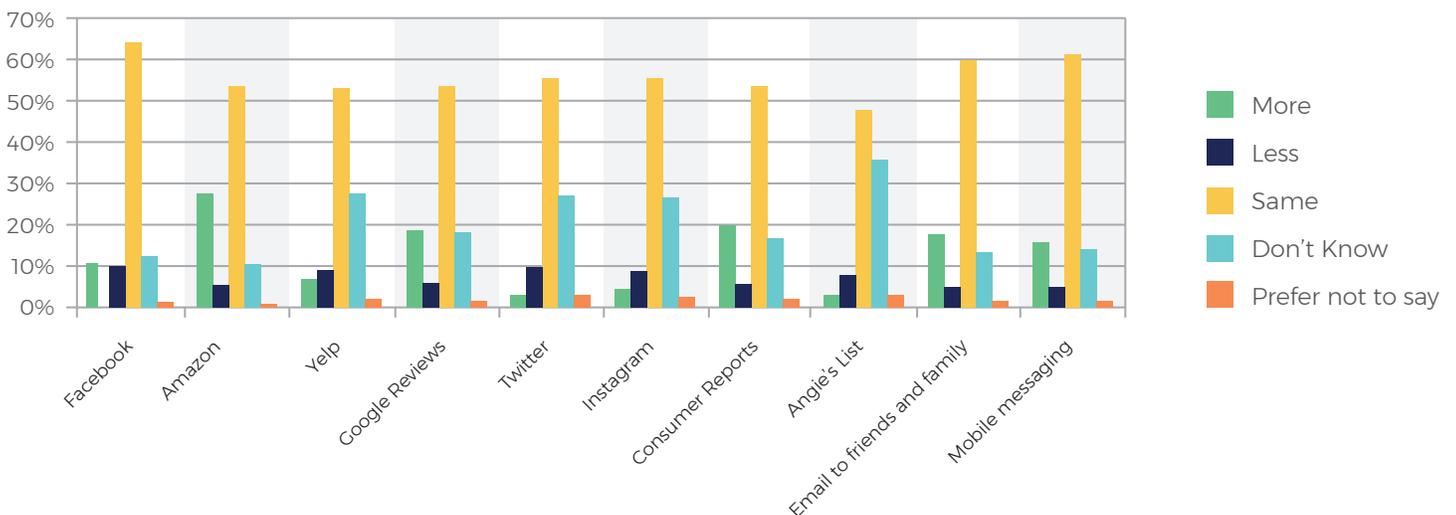
As the holiday season approaches, in the coming months (leading into the coming year) do you see yourself shopping using the following more, less or the same?



Reviews are important...and a new method is emerging

Consumer reviews online continue to be an important method of how Western Canadians make decisions on what to purchase. However, some interesting trends are emerging. Sites that specialize in online reviews – Consumer Reports (20% of Western Canadians see themselves as using it more to 6% see themselves as using it less), Amazon (28% more to 6% less), Google Reviews (19% more to 6% less) – continue to be mainstays, however traditional social channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) are all going to be used the same or less. Amongst this, the biggest growth of reviews is now being found in mobile messaging (16% more to 6% less) and email (18% more to 6% less).

In the coming months (leading into the coming year) do you see yourself sourcing product reviews more, less or the same using the following sources?



■ We want answers, quick

The majority of us (depending on the platform we choose) expect a same day response when we reach out to a brand or a company. 81% of us expect a same day response when we email a company, 63% when we use Facebook Messenger, and 54% if we use Twitter. 14% of us expect a response within the first fifteen minutes when we use Facebook Messenger and nearly 20% of us when we contact these companies by telephone. The advent of digital tools has meant that Western Canadians want their customer shopping experience to happen on-demand, which also means when in contact with a brand or a company.

■ About the survey and methodology

The 2017 State of Digital survey was developed by Northweather and conducted online by an independent research company between June 2-9, 2017 and between November 28-December 4, 2017. The Western Canadian (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) sample included 1,750 respondents aligned with the Canadian Census for age and income. The industry association for survey research does not allow for the reporting of a margin of error, but a similar phone-based poll would have resulted in a margin of error for the entire sample of plus or minus two to four percentage points.



Northweather

■ About Northweather

Whether it's selling a product, encouraging a change in opinion, or advocating for an issue, Northweather builds the tools and solutions that help engage your audience for what matters to you. With over 40 years of experience, our team of expert practitioners knows what it takes to engage people. Whether it be retail, politics, nonprofits or corporate, we have done it across many domains.

State of Digital