SocialFlow analyzed 75 million social posts that were published through our platform from January 2018 to July 2019. The posts were published to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. These posts generated more than 1.75 trillion in estimated reach¹, 15.7 billion clicks, and 14 billion engagements (comments, retweets/shares or likes/favorites). See the Methodology section at the end of this paper for endnotes and further detail on our approach.
Our Findings, After Studying 75 Million of Our Clients’ Social Posts

Many of the conclusions we drew in this report are consistent with previous benchmark studies, but some were a surprise. We've summarized the findings here, with a designation to indicate which we found to be the most surprising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURPRISE?</th>
<th>FINDING</th>
<th>NO SURPRISE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Media companies still have enormous reach on social.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2. Facebook clicks are up.</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Video content continues to outperform other types of posts.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4. Instagram engagement crushes all other platforms. But so what?</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Weekend &amp; holiday publishing yields better results.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>6. Nearly half of scheduled posts go out at the same times.</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Automation helps to post content more frequently, with less effort.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Media Companies Still Have Enormous Reach On Social

*Media content captures considerable attention from consumers on social networks: Over the period covered in this paper, SocialFlow customers generated **1.75 trillion** in estimated reach\(^1\). If it were able to be monetized by publishers at a $5 CPM, it would be worth **$8.73 billion**.*

Social continues to be primarily driven by mobile consumption, with **78%** of the clicks coming from mobile devices. The near-constant availability of a mobile device, combined with the platforms’ ability to create habits out of the use of their apps, has been a massive commercial success\(^3\).
Mobile usage, in particular, drives the “Stories” format that was popularized by Snapchat, perfected by Instagram, and now in play on Facebook. Stories monetize for the platforms at a higher rate than image posts, and both Instagram and Facebook have given strong signals that content in this format will receive more favorable distribution.

The “disappearing” nature of Stories on most platforms creates a challenge for media companies, who need persistence both for analytics and archival reasons. Moving forward, this will no doubt be a key area of innovation: adapting the usage of Stories for enterprise scale and reporting. With “See More” links at the bottom of Instagram stories, publishers have a stronger traffic-driving opportunity than with standard posts, but they have had to adopt on the fly to solve for reporting and archiving.

More broadly, publishers continue to adapt to changes in the social feeds (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) at the same time that they are having deeper discussions with Apple News regarding its plans and Facebook about its upcoming News Tab. Operationalizing the effort required to support additional platforms is a key area of opportunity.

The “Verdict:

High-quality media companies continue to have extensive reach and engagement on the social networks. Users value quality content and reward it with engagement.

Enabling publishing companies to effectively and efficiently manage, and, as importantly, monetize their social presence is SocialFlow’s mission.

CLICK TRAFFIC BY TYPE OF DEVICE

n=9.50 billion clicks

- 78% Mobile
- 22% Other

- NOT - SURPRISING
Over the past 18 months, we have seen click rates rise about **50%**. Our hypothesis for this growth in click rates is that user preferences for high-quality media content have been driving Facebook’s EdgeRank algorithms to serve more of that content to users. The current political climate could also be driving greater engagement on the types of news stories that many of SocialFlow’s clients produce.

This rise in click rate is even more impressive when you put it in the context of an overall decline in reach of about **20%**. This reach decline is not particularly surprising, as in addition to whatever changes to algorithms the platforms may make, an increasing amount of content continues to compete for a finite amount of user attention.
Media companies posting on Facebook have seen a real and steady increase in click rates over the last year.

While we are delighted to see rising click rates on Facebook, we don’t expect it to last forever. The social networks’ changing business strategies leave little doubt that today’s trends will not be tomorrow’s. Publishers and media companies should take advantage of these higher rates while they can and engage audiences to create loyalty so that those same readers continue to return even when algorithms change.

**REACH ON FACEBOOK**

*n*=882 billion in reach on 33.5 million posts

---

**THE VERDICT:**

It would be an accomplishment simply to keep click rates steady in the face of declining reach. But to actually increase click rates is particularly impressive. With so many sources of information available, users may be focusing more on publishers with brands they recognize and trust.
Video represents both a challenge and an opportunity for publishers. While the high hopes for the “pivot to video” in 2017 have been dashed, there is still a lot of room for media companies to win with video. Engagement continues to be high on Facebook and Twitter.

Over the last three months on Facebook, average engagement for video posts was three times the engagement of non-video posts. Similarly, on Twitter, video garnered five times the engagements of non-video posts.

On Instagram, however, the effect was reversed. Video was less engaging than other posts. Non-Video link posts achieved twice the engagement of video. With a strong visual focus on Instagram, the photos posted there tend to be particularly visually appealing. These effective images coupled with users who tend to scroll quickly through their feeds may partly explain why there appears to be less interest in video on Instagram. Another explanation could be that Stories (not included in this data set) are where users prefer to see video content.

**Engagement Rate for Video and Link Posts**

\[ n=723.1 \text{ million engagements on 6.97 million posts (4/1/19 – 6/30/19)} \]
Monetization of video remains a challenge. As users watch videos within the social platforms, they generally don’t produce clicks back to media company websites. Platform licensing deals, revenue shares, and native or sponsored video are all potential sources of monetization.

- Recycling high quality videos lets media companies get more bang for their video creation buck.
- SocialFlow makes identifying the right videos to recycle more efficient.

LinkedIn Click Rates Are Also Up

LinkedIn is not an area of focus for many titles, and publishing metrics to the platform are correspondingly smaller. But we’ve seen an impressive increase in click rates in 2019 (+300%), with numbers that are second only to Facebook’s (which has much larger fan bases). This represents a real opportunity for those publications that appeal to the professional audiences represented on LinkedIn.

CLICK RATE ON LINKEDIN

\[ n = 36.1 \text{ million clicks on 326,000 posts} \]
Given this high level of engagement and the younger audiences on Instagram, a greater focus on the network is inevitable. Publishers and media companies will need to get creative in order to monetize their efforts on the platform since so few clicks back to their sites are generated there.
Instagram posts represent less than 1% of posts in our study but amassed 17% of overall engagements.

While Instagram engagement reigns supreme, LinkedIn and Twitter engagement has also grown over the same period.

Tips for SocialFlow Users

- Selling sponsorships of viral editorial content is one way to build revenue in the feed. SocialFlow has a sponsored editorial product called AttentionStream.
- Branded content campaigns perform well on Instagram, are favored by advertisers, and can be run by SocialFlow.

The Verdict:

WOW. We all knew Instagram would have high engagement levels, but these rates are even higher than we had anticipated. High engagement coupled with a younger audience seem to make Instagram attractive to publishers, even in the absence of significant click traffic.
SOCIALFLOW SEES SIGNIFICANTLY FEWER POSTS MADE ON WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS—MEANING LESS COMPETITION FOR USER ATTENTION. SIMPLY MAKING SURE THERE IS AN APPROPRIATE AMOUNT OF CONTENT BEING POSTED ON WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS COULD BE AN EASY WIN FOR PUBLISHERS.

The decline in post volumes makes sense, given that media company employees who program social media tend to keep normal Monday-Friday work schedules. But while content consumption does decline slightly on the weekends, the reduction in consumption is not nearly as significant as that in post volume.

RELATIVE CLICKS BY DAY OF WEEK

n=2.7 billion clicks to Facebook & Twitter over 3 months (May–Jul, 2019)
Similarly, holidays tend to show greater opportunity for engagement. On Facebook, Thanksgiving and Black Friday are the only two holidays where this trend does not appear.

**RELATIVE CLICKS ON SELECTED U.S. HOLIDAYS**

*n= 215 million clicks to Facebook & Twitter on holidays*

- **Scheduling is not the only way to publish content on a weekend or holiday.** Try using SocialFlow’s Optimize function, with a narrow publishing window. (For instance, set a post to Optimize, with a “Must Send” option to go out Saturday afternoon.)

- **Using SocialFlow’s recycling feature to recycle high quality content – both seasonal and otherwise – can make it easier to increase post volume during weekends and holidays.**

- **Labeling content as “evergreen” or for a specific holiday can help identify content for recycling year after year.**

**THE VERDICT:**

We’ve seen this trend for years, and the simple arithmetic of “less content is competing for nearly the same amount of attention” illustrates why weekends and holidays offer such strong engagement potential. Automated publishing tools can make this easier for organizations with standard workweeks.
Nearly Half Of Scheduled Posts Go Out At The Same Times

About one-third of posts made through our platform used the “Schedule” function, as opposed to “Publish Now” or “Optimize.” The hour of day for scheduled posts varies widely, but the minutes disproportionately fall on quarter-hour increments—:00/:15/:30/:45. This creates a content glut at the even intervals and leaves opportunity at almost every other minute of an hour.

Of the posts that are scheduled, 46% are set to go out at 0, 15, 30, or 45 minutes past the hour. The impact of platform algorithms somewhat dampens the impact of this clustering behavior, but even so, it makes little sense to publish your content at a time when everyone else is and competition for consumer attention is at its greatest.

Number of Scheduled Posts by Minute, 0-60

75% of all scheduled posts were set to go out on an even quarter hour (0, 15, 30, 45 minutes after), or one minute later (1, 16, 31, 46 minutes after)
Based on our data, changing the scheduled times to 4, 19, 34, and 49 minutes past the hour would reduce competition for attention among this sample set by a staggering **97%**. Even more pragmatic: using optimization, so that machine-driven algorithms can slot the content into available windows of attention.

**Tips for SocialFlow Users**

- If you currently schedule posts, try using Optimization, with narrower windows if you’re trying to get coverage in a specific daypart.
- If you do schedule posts, change your standard posting times a few minutes earlier or later to avoid the traffic jam of posts on the quarter-hour.

**THE VERDICT:**

We know that our eyes lead us to schedule posts in easy-to-see increments (15 minutes, 30 minutes, etc.), but it’s surprising to see this behavior even after a decade of social publishing experience. If your goal is to provide smooth, even, coverage of posts, this is an effective strategy. If your goal is to maximize clicks, engagement and reach, it’s not.
Automation Helps To Post Content More Frequently, With Less Effort

**MEDIA COMPANIES CAN CREATE MORE CLICK TRAFFIC TO THEIR SITES BY INCREASING THEIR SOCIAL PUBLISHING FREQUENCY. THE KEY IS TO DO THIS WITHOUT INCREASING STAFFING COSTS. THIS IS WHERE SOCIAL PUBLISHING AUTOMATION AND OPTIMIZATION PLATFORMS SUCH AS SOCIALFLOW COME IN. MANY OF OUR NEW CLIENTS SEE A SIGNIFICANT JUMP IN THEIR POST VOLUMES WHEN THEY ONBOARD WITH SOCIALFLOW.**

The chart below shows one large newspaper publisher’s increasing social post volume after signing on with SocialFlow.

This publisher saw a **26%** increase in content posted, with everything else being substantially similar. Even on a per employee basis, the simple workflow and automatic settings of the SocialFlow platform often results in a greater velocity of published posts. The graphic below charts the **25%** growth in posts-per-employee as a new client leaned more and more heavily on our platform.

**VOLUME OF SOCIAL POSTS, BEFORE AND AFTER SOCIALFLOW**

*same team, publishing to 65+ properties*

---

NO. OF SOCIAL POSTS PUBLISHED BY TEAM

**+26%**

MONTH 1 | MONTH 2 | MONTH 3 | MONTH 4 | MONTH 5
Using social publishing platforms to automatically get stories and video content out to social is an effective way to increase output without increasing internal resources. Easy-to-use workflows, and scheduling and optimization windows, make publishing at scale a breeze.

Media companies can most easily take advantage of the increased engagement available on weekends and holidays with automated social publishing tools, as discussed earlier in this report. With their simple scheduling and optimization timing windows, these tools can ensure that social handles are being filled with new content all week and all year long, without requiring additional manpower.

The previous SocialFlow benchmark reports recommended media companies recycle quality content and that advice stands: media companies can get more out of each one with an effective recycling strategy.

• All media companies have evergreen content that could be reposted at a later date to gain more traction without requiring additional content creation.

• Seasonal content that engaged well with readers last year, or highly engaging more recent content, are great candidates for recycling.

• Media companies worry that users will be frustrated by seeing the same content posted again, but only a small fraction of the potential audience of a social handle sees any given post the first time it’s published.
Media companies can’t control social platforms’ changing algorithms, but they can control the amount of content published.

**Tips for SocialFlow Users**

- SocialFlow’s simple “recycle” feature makes the mechanics of reposting particularly easy.
- Cross-posting stories across social handles is also an efficient way to increase post volume. SocialFlow works with clients to develop efficient ways to cross-post (especially given that Twitter has imposed restrictions on cross-posting the same content to multiple Twitter handles).
- API ingestion technology, such as SocialFlow’s, allows easier onboarding of your site’s content to your social channels.

**The Verdict:**

The benefits of using automated social publishing tools are not surprising. SocialFlow and other automated publishing platforms reduce the time needed to handle the high-volume of posts that media companies publish to social.
"Love" Beats "Angry," At Least In Emoji Reactions, On Facebook

Facebook’s ubiquitous like button is still the reaction of choice, but users are becoming more expressive. We looked at more than 8.6 billion reactions, and the use of reactions other than like grew from 28% to 38%. If this trend continues, the aggregate use of other reactions will exceed like sometime in the next two years.

We chose to look at Facebook reactions because the narrative around social platforms has turned decidedly negative, and we wanted to see if user reactions supported the thesis that people are angrier or more polarized on Social Media.

Facebook Reactions, Q2 2019
n=8.63 billion reactions starting Q1 2018

Cumulative Reactions Other Than Like
n=2.90 billion reactions, starting Q1 2018
All reactions other than Like are growing, as people gradually adopt the other reactions. But the adoption is not even: we see a clear trend of Love and Haha growing faster than Angry, Sad, and Wow.

We are wary of drawing too many conclusions from simple emojis—even nine billion of them. The same political content, for instance, could generate Like, Love, or Angry reactions depending on the audience of the page to which it was posted. Still, the behavior we’re seeing does seem to refute the idea that people are becoming more “angry” in their social interactions.

“Love” consistently beat out all the other emotions except for the default choice of “Like.”

**THE VERDICT:**

Given today’s political climate and the narrative around social platforms, we were both surprised and pleased to see that Love and Haha outrank Angry in the world of Facebook reactions.

But will “Likes” disappear?

Instagram and Facebook have both made news as they experiment with removing Like counts for individual posts. They are testing whether removing the counts will reduce the “popularity contest” of posts, and the associated negative feelings from people who are worried their posts are not popular enough.

These tests have thus far been limited to a handful of countries, and seem to only affect Reactions to individual posts (not Likes of Pages).

The tests as currently reported allow the post creator to still see the metrics; they just aren’t displayed for all to see.

It’s not clear how far Instagram and Facebook will take these tests (or whether other platforms such as Twitter might follow); regardless, the impact on high-volume publishers would appear to be minimal—especially for those with strong brand awareness.
Socialflow, What We Do, And The Methodology Behind This Paper

SocialFlow provides a social distribution and monetization platform that is purpose-built for media companies. Our technology enables the world’s most successful publishers to easily distribute engaging social content, while providing them monetization opportunities across multiple social networks.

Our publishing software is used by tens of thousands of journalists across the world and extends the reach and engagement of editorial content and stories to social networks and other third-party platforms, mostly on mobile devices.

That forms the basis of this analysis, which included 75 million organic social posts. Twitter and Facebook made up the vast majority of the posts, but we were also able to draw material conclusions from Instagram and LinkedIn. Apple News was excluded from these analyses because of small sample sizes.

Post Counts and Statistics by Platform

The breakdown of the posts included in our study is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts Included In This Analysis</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Posts</td>
<td>34.5 million</td>
<td>37.7 million</td>
<td>570 thousand</td>
<td>354 thousand</td>
<td>1.83 million</td>
<td>75.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>902 billion</td>
<td>92.3 billion¹</td>
<td>752 billion¹</td>
<td>285 million¹</td>
<td>27.9 million¹</td>
<td>1.747 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clicks</td>
<td>12.0 billion</td>
<td>3.70 billion</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>38.2 million</td>
<td>2.39 million</td>
<td>15.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagements</td>
<td>6.63 billion</td>
<td>2.18 billion</td>
<td>5.14 billion</td>
<td>11.0 million</td>
<td>6.94 million</td>
<td>14.0 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Study builds on the conclusions of the first three installments of this Benchmark Report, which can be found on SocialFlow’s website under the section “Resources.”
Defining “Media Companies”

We talk in this white paper about Media Companies, which is an increasingly ambiguous term. For purposes of the data in this White Paper, we think of media companies as those who create significant quantities of content that is then published to social networks. This includes Magazine Media, Newspapers, Television, Radio, and Web Publishers. Because they do not typically fall into the category of “high volume publishers,” our data set generally does not include significant content from media companies who sell or license content, such as movie studios or music labels.

End Notes

1 Estimated Reach is calculated to provide an “apples to apples” comparison across platforms that do not use the same metrics. It is calculated by comparing engagement-per-post for Facebook (where both engagement and reach are known) to engagement-per-post metrics for other platforms (where reach is unknown). We then solve for the unknown. In the case of Twitter we use a direct ratio; for Instagram we discount engagement-per-post by 90% because the engagement rate in Instagram is so much higher. There are obvious limits to this approach, but it’s a helpful way to try to quantify the overall reach, and thus impact, of what media companies are publishing to multiple platforms.

2 The Facebook News Tab has not launched as of the publication date of this paper, but details about Facebook’s plans have been widely reported. Given the heavy news concentration of SocialFlow’s subscriber base, we will be paying close attention to this new Facebook offering.

3 Much has been written about the downside of “habit forming” behaviors, and we certainly agree that platforms share an obligation to mitigate the negatives associated with their products. Also, as you can see from our study of Facebook Reactions in Section 8, surprising conclusions can be drawn from the data.