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Throwing light on 2016 in social media

Social media influencers tell NIKHIL VARMA how 2016 unfolded on the many platforms that drive the Internet

2016 has been quite a dramatic year, thanks to events such as the Brexit vote and the victory of Donald Trump in the election to the presidency of the United States. The conflicts in the Middle East, which struck the West with a wave of terror attacks, and the refugee crisis garnering eyeballs in the social media sphere as well. Closer home, political discussions, garnered more attention, as did Arnab Goswami's sudden decision to leave Times Now. Twitter and Facebook, grappled with the spectre of fake news. Snapchat emerged as the new place to be, even as people above 25 years tried to understand how it works. We ask popular figures online about the year gone by and their expectations from social media in 2017.

Tinu Cherian, digital media professional and social media enthusiast

What has been the most innovative social media site of 2016?

Snapchat would qualify as one of the most innovative this year.

What are the events and trends that define 2016 on social media?

Politics and current affairs continue to drive major conversations on social media. Social media is no longer just for young people anymore; it is fast becoming everyone's digital identity and driving citizen journalism.

Who, according to you, is the social media person of the year?

In the Indian context, it would have to be Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Internationally, the US election received a lot of attention on social media and the US President-elect would win hands down.

How do you see social media sites looking ahead to 2017 and beyond?

Twitter and Facebook will continue to survive for a few more years. We will see new players emerging in the future. Live streaming of videos is an emerging trend that will be an interesting thing to watch out for.

Noopur Raval, Affiliate at Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University

What has been the most innovative social media site of 2016?

I'd say Snapchat has cer-



tainly been a game changer and it has become apparent in 2016. From a company that was mocked for what seems like a silly product — sending photos and videos that disappear — to a company whose interface design has changed the way all tech products design their interfaces (for example, Instagram now has “your story” which is like Snapchat but also all photo and video products, including WhatsApp's photo sharing, have text and emoji overlays).

What are the events and trends that define 2016 on social media?

Given that most of the companies we identify and use as ‘social media’ are U.S. com-



panies, the American presidential election has certainly been a massive media event. It has forced companies like Reddit, Facebook and Twitter to admit that issues such as fake news, trolling and misogyny are very serious challenges to online communication. In that sense, we are over the moment of celebrating social media's role in helping freedom of expression and are wondering how to make communication more meaningful online.

Who, according to you, is the social media person/event of the year?

Trump, without a doubt. **How do you see social media sites looking ahead to 2017 and beyond?**

At this point, it's very hard to predict. Facebook has a fake news problem and Twitter has a cyber bullying problem, but both of them will continue to

grow and be relevant to any social media strategy in the near future. I think more niche networks like Snapchat will continue to push the boundaries in terms of new ideas like AI, augmented reality and devices. Interesting times ahead.

V. Shakti, tech blogger and disability rights activist

What has been the most innovative social media site of 2016?

Snapchat takes the cake there. It is a very new and extremely young network that has thrived and grown on innovation and creativity. It has quickly unseated the other networks in terms of engagement and user base growth. Even brands are flocking to the network and trying to cash

Krish Ashok, techie and blogger

What has been the most innovative social media site of 2016?

In terms of innovation, Snapchat. **What are the events and trends that define 2016 on social media?**

2016 has been a huge inflection point for social media. The election of Trump and Brexit comprehensively proved that no mainstream institution had the pulse of the people. Social media echo chambers allowed the free and easy dissemination of both real and fake news, leading to a peak political polarisation of the population in many parts of the world.

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in on the highly active and creative user base there.

What are the events and trends that define 2016 on social media?

Sadly, while there were many positive things that defined social media in 2016, I would say that 2016 has been a terrible year that saw the rise of mindless trolling and endless ideological struggle. In India, it was even more pronounced than the rest of the world. The right and the left were constantly at each other's throats and meaningless tussles became the order of the day. There is massive pressure to take sides either way, and even families weren't spared of systematic abuse.

Who, according to you, is the social media person of the year?

The average social media user, who is neither left or right, but is parked firmly in the centre.

How do you see social media sites looking ahead to 2017 and beyond?

More photos, more videos, and we will see the paradigm shift to teensy writing and aggressive video sharing. Effectively giving us the attention span of a goldfish.

App-solutely

Where's the party tonight?



FOR A GOOD TIME Apps for the party hunters

RANJANI RAJENDRA

Hello Vino

It's time to ring in the New Year and what better way to do so than a great party. It could either be one of those parties with great music and unlimited drinks at a hotel, replete with a DJ and dance floor, a quieter one at home with friends and some great drinking games as you count down the seconds to New Year, or a cosy family get-together. But it still requires some amount of planning and organising. So, here are a few apps to help you decide on the menu, décor, games, music or even choose the most happening party in town.

Happitoo

Be it looking for happy hours at the neighbourhood bar or the most happening New Year's party in town, Happitoo is a great option. With over 8,000 nightspots across the country, the app helps you explore the nightlife options in your city. It even segregates events in various categories, such as theme nights, happy hours, romantic places, buffets, after hours etc. All you've got to do is browse through the list of events in your town, select and see if there's a great deal you can snag. As the app's slogan goes, it's where the night begins.

PitchIn

If it's a house party you are planning, chances are you're also looking for a couple of the guests to pitch in with either a couple of dishes or logistics. But this also means crazy amounts of texting or calls to coordinate. PitchIn is then the perfect app to help you with all that planning and executing.

The app makes it easy to split up to-do lists and send or receive notifications as and when tasks are commissioned or completed. If it's the sort of party that involves sharing costs, the app also sends payment reminders to contributors.

Throwing a party and wondering what kind of wine to serve? Hello Vino is like having your very own personal sommelier with a thorough wine database at your fingertips. The app helps you with suggestions of some fine wines you might want to buy for the party and the right kind of wine to pair with the food you are serving. It's the perfect way to show off your taste in fine wine in front of all your guests.

Heads Up!

What's a cosy party at home without a round of drinking games? Heads Up! from Ellen DeGeneres' stable is great game for a night of merriment and laughter. It's also the perfect way to keep the party from getting dull. Simply indulge in a game of charades with cues from the app and watch your friends try to work their way through embarrassing gestures. The app has 18 themed decks to choose from.

Flo

If there's a party, there's got to be music. But don't worry, you don't have to spend hours putting together a playlist. Flo lets you and nine other friends create a master playlist via your cloud music accounts. This way, you can crowdsource your music and cater to everyone's musical sensibilities at the party.

Simply sync your playlists and connect to the speaker to keep up the tempo of your party.

The author is staff writer with the MetroPlus



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...Space, time and the startup

From page 1

WittyFeed

How many of us regularly look up BuzzFeed's pages for quirky content and listicles? At least one-third of one's Facebook newsfeed is filled with links to the website's stories. But a close second to this popular content generator happens to be an Indian company called WittyFeed. Ranked second this year after BuzzFeed in terms of content generation, the website was launched by three students of SRM College, who are now based out of Indore.

For Vinay Singhal, Parveen Singhal and Shashank Vaishnav, WittyFeed is a journey of trials and tribulations, after a string of entrepreneurial failures. Facing bankruptcy, the trio had given itself all of six months to make WittyFeed work. “And it finally broke even in its seventh month. Ever since, we've only been



PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

growing from strength to strength,” says Vinay, the CEO of the company. “Before WittyFeed clicked, we'd been bankrupt eight times in six years. When we set up this company, we'd borrowed heavily and went in prepared to incur losses for at least six months,” adds Vaishnav, CTO.

Fortunately, the tide turned, and today, WittyFeed enjoys its moment in the sun. According to Vinay, the company is essentially a platform for content creators, distributors and consumers. “Honestly though, while to the world we are a content company, to us we are a tech

company. Our focus is on building tech offerings for the content business — in a way we act as a content ecosystem,” he says.

With several players in the segment, WittyFeed manages to stay on top of its game by dint of sheer numbers. It has over 15,000 influencers across the world and is sure to get news first.

Another factor that sets it apart is work culture. The company makes it a point to hire inexperienced people. A typical job interview at WittyFeed could last up to six hours and has no fixed format. “It's quite like a Roadies interview, you could say,” laughs Parveen, the COO. “Qualifications don't matter to us. Our interviews are our way of gauging how passionate an individual is, how keen to learn he/she is and how loyal.” In fact, their head of design used to be a door-to-door salesman. “Whatever he learnt was on the job, and today he's the best we have,” he says.

RANJANI RAJENDRA

Ather Energy

While trudging on traffic-clogged roads as auto rickshaws emit toxic fumes, have you wondered about getting a vehicle that will not only reduce the carbon footprint but will provide you with a durable commute choice? Ather Energy is coming up with solutions that, in the long term, will make your commute pollution-free and smart.

Early this year, the firm created by IIT Madras graduates Tarun Mehta and Swapnil Jain in a small engineering lab in 2013 launched the prototype of the S340, the country's first electric smart scooter. The firm has been in the news recently after receiving funding from Binny's Flipkart and a Rs. 205 crore infusion by Hero MotoCorp. Tiger Global, the firm that holds a major stake in Flipkart, is also among the early investors for the bike.

Mehta says, “When we



and aggressive use. We have also developed a mobile app that will allow for configuring ride preferences.” He adds, “The touchscreen dashboard contains a system that monitors rider behaviour and is equipped with an indicator showing how much distance can be travelled on the remaining charge. It also has Google Maps integration and a slot for a SIM card.”

Mehta adds, “Our focus is on good engineering. We have spent almost a year understanding what building an electric bike entails. We have got the systems and processes in place. The key is to keep things simple. We are creating a new industry. I feel that if you complicate something like electric bikes, it will never become a mass product. We hope that as more people get the bike, electric bikes will also turn mainstream, much like how smartphones took over the market in the last five years.”

One of the major issues that electric vehicles face in

India is the lack of charging stations. Mehta says that Ather is working on solutions to overcome this situation. “We are working to create charging stations in public and private places. Customers will be able to charge the vehicle at home or the workstation. In addition, we are working to set up charging stations in shopping malls and corporate offices, apartments and other commercial places. We also plan to set up public charging stations in partnership with Government agencies.”

He says, “We did not look for experience alone while setting up a team. We focussed on specific skills. We got many people with a background in the automobile sector. We want to create something that is not very complicated. Easy use would mean that the product becomes more popular. We do not want to stop with just an electric bike. We want to be the frontrunners in a new industry by itself.”

NIKHIL VARMA