

SOCIAL MEDIA: ARE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OVERWHELMED BY THE NEGATIVE?

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ABSTRACT

The construct of social media is relatively new in terms of the Internet, World Wide Web, and Communication. In less than ten years social media went from something that no-one ever heard of, to something that many cannot live without. It has challenged both the traditional business marketing and interpersonal communication models. It is an evolving form of communication that has been adopted by the young and the old, individuals and organizations, education and entertainment. As social media is being adopted unintended consequences have become visible. This paper discusses the roots of social media; some of the major reasons individuals and business use it, and some of its problems. The paper also suggests some possible solutions on how to manage social media.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Internet has gradually grown from being a tool used mainly by scientists and academics to one of consumer and commerce use. This is not because of a radical change in web technologies but rather the results of cumulative changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the Web (Wikipedia, Sockel, and Falk, 2010). Social networks are a byproduct of the way end users utilize the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW).

There is no doubt that social media has changed the way some businesses and people communicate. Many businesses and individuals espouse social media's virtues, to include ease of use, and expansiveness. But is this type of communication really beneficial or are the unintended consequences overwhelming it. Social media's roots are in the Internet and the World Wide Web. While the Internet had its humble beginning in the United States, it has developed into global phenomenon that is not limited to any one country, region or language. The social aspects of the Internet are well known. The public is tuned in to the scale and extent of the beneficial, as well as harmful sides of online content.

The popularity of social media has become a modern day phenomenon. People use social media for entertainment, escape, work, keeping up with friends, job searches, research, shopping, dating, and general communication. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogs, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Wikipedia are some of the more popular social media channels.

What differentiates a social networking site from the run of the mill typical Web site? CareerBuilder (2009) indicates that a typical website is controlled by a small group of individuals (sometimes just one person) with centralized control, for the purpose of simply pushing information out and perhaps doing commerce. Social networking sites typically invite users to contribute to the content. Much of this content can come from the public. Users become active members by contributing content, thus giving them a stake in the success of the site.

Originally Web sites were statically designed, providing little opportunity of interaction beyond clicking an "icon" to follow a hyperlink. However, modern software components on the WWW work together beyond a simple point-and-click interface. The WWW has evolved into a medium where web site contents are presented using animation, multimedia, and dynamic generation of customized features. These features are found in traditional media but they also exhibit a unique form of user interfaces. For example, video demonstrations on the WWW approach the level of interactivity of traditional TV's, but with the aid of screen capture devices or software tools, users are able to extract certain frames of video sequences for other purposes. The captured video frames can be easily stored and duplicated. This synergy which was not seen in the past has contributed to the popularity of social media and to Web 2.0.

The term Web 2.0 describes the range of user-controlled publishing and networking websites that have emerged over the past 5 years, allowing people greater connectivity, autonomy, and voice in online activities. With this newer approach, there is a "blurring of the boundaries between Web users and producers, consumption and participation, authority and amateurism, play and work, data and the network, reality and virtual-reality" (Zimmer, 2008, p 1).

The nature of these increasingly interactive participative environments enriches the users' experience and contributes to Web 2.0 ecology which includes social networking, media sharing, site manipulation, data add-ons, web mash-ups (where the term mash-up means the mixing of at least two different services from disparate, and sometimes competing Web sites), conversational arenas, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, blogs, wikis, and other collaborative editing sites (Crook, 2008).

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, in their book *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*, describe social networking as a "social trend in which people use

technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations” (Li and Bernoff, 2008).

CareerBuilder (2009) further indicates that users are central to the social media concept and its success. These users are often the creators and the drivers of the platform content. Social media is not a one-way street. Organizations that understand how to interact with users on a personal level are often greatly rewarded. Companies are realizing that their online content can't compete with the various social media offerings out there. The candy maker Skittles is one example.

Schroeder (2009) writes few have taken it so far as candy maker Skittles, which replaced its entire homepage with its Twitter stream. The only thing that's left is a widget-like navigation console in the upper left part of the screen. Instead of pointing you to some company statement, it sends you to the Skittles entry on other popular social destinations: Wikipedia, YouTube, and Flickr. Additionally, according to “Simply Measured” and based on Interbrand's Top 100 Best Global Brands, a year after Google began letting organizations create brand profiles on its Google+ site - the top 100 brands have accumulated more than 23 million fans. While an impressive feat, the “top 100 club” still trails Skittles candy online fans Wasserman (2012).

POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Facebook

Facebook on their webpage (<http://www.facebook.com/peering/>) indicates that they are “a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, families and co-workers.” They further state that they develop technologies that facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world social connections. Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with people they know in a trusted environment. As the second most trafficked Web site in the world, Facebook claims to have more than 900 million active users, of which 50% of them log on to Facebook in any given day.

Moreover, Facebook claims that there are more than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) shared each month (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php>, 2010).

Twitter

According to Twitter.com/about, Twitter is a real-time information network powered by people all around the world that lets them share information. Twitter tries to answer a simple question

“what’s happening now?” It does this by allowing users to send and receive very short messages called “tweets.” A tweet can be a maximum of 140 characters.

Twitter was launched in 2008 as a free micro-blogging site that enables users to maintain a web log (blog). Its popularity has grown exponentially - they now have more than 17 million registered users.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a free professional networking site that enables members to post resumes, recommendations from friends, and connect with other industry professionals. With over 53 million members in over 200 countries and territories around the world LinkedIn is a powerful resource for those that need help with employment. According to a LinkedIn site search (conducted July 29, 2009) it was found that five percent of U.S. users were recruiters, headhunters, or HR professionals.

Blogs

Wikipedia (2012) at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog> indicates that the term blog was derived from the phrase "weblog" in 1999. A blog can be viewed as a multiuser or a participatory diary. Blogs have at least one “owner,” but may have many contributors and commentators supplying site content. Typical metrics (i.e., success) is measured by the number of (unique) readers, by the site’s ability to generate meaningful reader comments, and links from other blogs and Web sites.

According to Wright and Hinson (2008), quoting from a 2004 *BusinessWeek* article, companies such as Microsoft, Dell and Sun have encouraged their employees to blog. They indicate that:

- Blogs and diaries can be a seductive way to lure customers into conversations
- Blogs are sticky - readers check back several times a day
- Blogs are efficient. Posted questions get instant, mass feedback
- Blogs for the most part are free
- Blogs let employees know exactly what customers want
- Blogs can humanize faceless behemoths

In recent times the popularity of Blogs has fallen among teens and young adults, not only are they not posting - they are also not commenting. By comparison the adult Internet blogging use has remain steady with one in ten maintaining some form of online journal (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr, 2010).

USERS

The Internet has become popular with just about every age group. According to a Pew Internet and American Life Project on a typical day 43% of online adults use social networking. Their report indicates that social networking sites are “most popular with women and young adults under the age 30.” They further indicate “no significant differences in the use of social networking sites based on race, ethnicity, household income, education level or geographical location” (Madden and Zickuhr, 2011).

It should also be no surprise that adolescents are for the most part more comfortable with new technology. Many are introduced to this technology early in elementary school, and through regular use of the home computer. This group is not afraid of the technology, because for the most part, they grew up with it, and to them it is not work related. The familiarity with the equipment as entertainment, allows this group to be comfortable with it.

Adolescents are skilled at creating and publishing new media content; contributing to creations such as artworks, audio, video, photographic products, and creative writing postings. Researchers have found that their increasing usage is altering their social identities, styles of learning, and information exchange around the world (Facer, Furlong, Furlong, and Sutherland, 2003).

Another Pew Internet & American Life Project Report shows 65% of all adult Internet users also engage in social media. It is not just younger adults, seniors are testing the waters too. Many “Baby Boomers” are making a trip to the social media pool part of their daily routine. In 2011, “Boomers” increased their usage of social media by 60%. According to a study by Hallmark and Nielsen “Boomers” account for \$230 billion dollars in U.S. sales, which is over half (55%) of total sales per year. Further, a report by CBS News postulates that boomers are engaging in social media out of a desire to connect with their kids and grandkids. Not only is Facebook a great place to reconnect with old friends, it is an ideal place to show Mom and Dad the weekend festivities with the kids. It is no wonder businesses are targeting Boomers.

WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES

O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) state that surfing social media Web sites has become among the most common activity of today's children and adolescents. Accessing these sites consistently can lead to a new phenomenon called “Facebook depression,” which is defined as depression that develops when users (specifically preteens and teens) spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression (p. 22-27). While not typical, the potential for harmful side effects is there.

Education

Education has evolved from the earliest times. Schools in the late 1800s and early 1900s were designed to teach rote memorization activities, thus preparing farmers to adapt to an urban environment and for the factory age. Today, highly developed schools provide advanced digital tools with the idea that they are giving their students a leg up for college and beyond. Computer proficiency and social networking skills may well be the key to acquiring future high-paying jobs and global competitiveness.

The educational use of social media can be a very positive endeavor. Social Media/Web 2.0 technologies are currently very popular among young people, and to view them purely as destructive technologies loses a great opportunity to capitalize on their potential for learning. Neither complacency, about students' interactions out of school, nor alarm about the dangers of such interactions, are appropriate ways to view this phenomenon. A more complete picture is needed to locate the emerging dangers in the context of patterns of usage across technologies. Evidence indicates there is a growing use of Web 2.0 technologies in formal schooling. Crook (2008) identified 11 categories of possible educational Web 2.0 activity, such as media sharing, blogging, and collaborative editing.

The National School Boards Association (2007) reported that almost 60 percent of students who use social networking talk about education topics online, and surprisingly, more than 50 percent talk specifically about schoolwork. Yet the vast majority of school districts have stringent rules against nearly all forms of social networking during the school day even though students and parents report few problem behaviors online (Deube, 2009).

Many inventive and creative teachers are using Web 2.0 tools in both traditional and online settings, for example, podcasting using teacher or student-created material (Schuck, Aubusson, and Kearney, 2010), blogging to develop verbal and visual literacy (Freedman, 2006; Huffaker, 2005) and RSS feeds to aid information literacy (Evans, 2006).

John Ragsdale, V.P. of Technology Research at Technology Service Industry Associates, suggests that school systems have generally been cautious about using social technologies in the classroom. Many schools are banning social web-spaces out of concern for the safety of their charges, fear of complaints, and legal consequences. Hull and Schultz (2001) urge researchers to help bridge the vast gulfs that separate and continue to widen between children and youth who succeed in school and those who do not by seeking a collaborative understanding of the relationship between formal classroom learning and the informal learning that flourishes in a range of settings outside school.

Europe

One of the most significant drivers of behavioral change in Europe has been the rapid rise in popularity in social networking sites. A UK survey conducted in June 2006 of over a thousand 11- to 16-year-olds and parents (NCH, 2006) found that 33% of the young people regularly used the Internet for blogging. Within this group 79% said they used Instant Messaging regularly (Schuck, Aubusson, and Kearney, 2010).

In the UK, almost three quarters (72%) of children have visited a social networking site and more than half of these set up their own profile (Ward, 2008). Withers' (2008) indicates that the attraction to these sites lie in the fact that they are easy, free, and fun to use. Social media/networks are based on openness and sharing. By their very nature, these type of sites demand self-disclosure. In order to 'exist' users must "write themselves into being" (Boyd, 2006).

In another study conducted in Europe (UK), 653 parents, 653 children (aged 5-17 years from the same household), and 279 non-parents were surveyed. The report's key findings are:

- The Internet is used and valued by everyone; children, parents, and the non-parent adults
- Almost two-thirds of the population is online
- Nearly all (99%) children aged 8-17 indicated that they use the Internet
- 80% of households with children have home Internet access (vs. 57% without children)
- Average Internet usage (12-15-year-olds) has increased from 7.1 hours/week in 2005 to 13.8 hours/week in 2007
- Internet use (and importance) increases with a child's age in terms of both hours of use and in its status as the medium the child would miss the most
- Overall, 16% of children have a computer with Internet access in their bedroom (UK Parliament OFCOM report, 2008)

These findings are significant because they point to the potential emergence of considerably large populations submerging themselves within the Internet and on social networking sites.

Social Media

Thanks to the global popularity of social networking, an estimated 900 million people have personal online profiles; friends, prospective employers and enemies alike are able to access photographs, videos and blogs that may have been long forgotten with a few simple clicks of a mouse (Taylor, 2010). One of the main uses of social media has been to enable individuals to keep contact with a variety of friends and family whether local or long distance.

Social media has made it easy for both the sender and receiver. To broadcast a message the sender only needs to post a note, add pictures, video, and/or audio to his/her personal page on a supporting service such as Facebook or Twitter. In most cases the person's friends and family are alerted to the new contents by the service. Then the intended contacts (receivers) merely have to log on to the service to be brought up to date in a semi-secure fashion.

Dating

The creation of online profiles is a prerequisite to joining just about any social media site. A natural extension of creating a profile is that it provides an online environment for people to communicate and exchange personal information for a variety of reasons - one being dating. While online dating intentions can vary from looking for a one time date, to short-term relationships, to long-term relationships, social media can help with the process (Garrett, 2008; Kricke, 2008).

Computers were used for match-making/dating long before the Internet with its ability to effectively and efficiently communicate with clients. A group of Stanford University students in 1959 developed the "nation's first foray into computers in love" for a class project in a mathematics course (Gillmor, 2007, p. 74). Early endeavors with computer dating failed because the communication medium of the Internet was not available, and the machines were not powerful enough to handle data loads from many users. Enter the new era, with powerful machines and the Internet, online dating became viable.

Finkel, et al. (2012) indicates that online dating is fundamentally different from its offline conventional dating counterpart by three key services: Access, Matching, and Communication (see Ahuvia & Adelman, 1992):

- Access refers to users' ability to assess romantic partners they might be unlikely to meet
- Matching refers to a site's use of a math based algorithms to select potential partners
- Communication refers to the possible use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to interact with potential partners via the dating site before meeting face-to-face.

Finkel, et al. (2012) believe that the "ways in which online dating sites implement these services has fundamentally altered the dating landscape in both the acquaintance process and the compatibility matching process." They point out that, rather than meeting potential partners, getting an impression of them and their mannerisms, and then slowly learning various facts about them - online dating reverses the "Access" process. The user learns a broad range of facts about potential partners before deciding whether to meet them.

Recognizing the unique properties numerous Web sites have risen to provide services to people seeking romantic relationships. To which millions of seekers use these sites, often paying substantial fees for the privilege. To attract customers online dating sites typically emphasize two aspects of the services they offer; they indicate their services are unique and cannot be duplicated, and their services are superior to traditional dating offline. Online dating sites indicate that the services their site offers “deliver more than just dates”, instead it promises connections to “singles who have been prescreened on . . . scientific predictors of relationship success” (eHarmony.com, 2012, under section labeled, “Start Dating with eHarmony”). In the end, they indicate that they have access to knowledge unavailable to the layperson.

The decline of the dating site industry has been attributed, at least in some part, to the rise of social networking sites. These sites excel by emulating the best parts of meeting someone new, especially, when you share a friend, you get a few glimpses into their world. If dating sites have managed to digitize the awkward process of a blind date, Facebook has digitized the thrill of an invite to your cool friend's house party where you just might meet someone new (Smalera, 2010).

Voice

Social networks by their very nature gives a voice to those that otherwise might not have one. The technology necessary for a blogger or an artist to spread their word, poetry, or song . . . is straight forward and inexpensive. Social media has led to new avenues and new industries where individuals are self-publishing. At one time musicians were tied to recording companies to publish, market, handle the legal aspects, do their bookings, handle logistics, hire stage hands, ticketing, and selling their material. Singing groups like *Metalica* helped turn the industry on its head by introducing the concept of self-publishing to the music industry. The self-published construct has led to support industries where every aspect of the process can be done by the band or outsource in piecemeal approach. In the end self-publishing using social media has led to the creation of cottage industries for graphic artists, consultants, and authors - many writing, “How to” articles and books.

Furthermore, social networking provides a voice and relief to a large number of people who are for the most part are tied to their home because of disabilities, illness, distance, and/or finances. They use the Web as a surrogate to connect with friends and family. Social networks provide a convenient affordable way for them to share memories, pictures, and thoughts. This is especially true in the time of a down economy, where some do not have a job, nor the finances or desire to mingle with the crowd at the local mall.

Additionally, not everything always goes the way the constituents would like and sometimes they want a venue to vent their anger and frustration, social media serves this group as well. Falk and Sockel (2002) indicate that “unhappy people are almost guaranteed to find some

community on the Internet where their opinions will be supported.” Sometimes, the individual wants a stronger voice and because it has a low cost and low effort level, they choose to create dedicated gripe web sites or new chat rooms or additional "threads" in a newsgroup at a sponsoring site.

Philanthropic

The rise of social networks also allows philanthropic organizations to harness its power. Social networks can successfully connect otherwise fragmented industries and small organizations without the resources needed to reach a broader audience of interested and passionate users. Users benefit by interacting with a like minded community and finding a channel for their energy, as well as a cause.

Donors and volunteers are switching from direct mail to the Internet and social media to get the word out and for fund raising (Silverman, 2007). They're sending Web-based fund-raising pitches to their friends and families, encouraging them, in turn, to forward the appeals to their own contacts. It is not just enthusiasts, a growing number of charities are launching profiles on popular social networking sites, hoping that young people will link up to the pages. They are also encouraging bloggers to promote their causes to help raise thousands of dollars in small donations from readers.

Marketing

Social Media is no longer about chatting with friends. It's about driving business. These Social Networks are not just limited to personal contacts, they can play an important role for an organization as part of their routine business practices. CareerBuilder (2009) points out that ... nearly every type of organization from grocery stores, to alumni associations are finding a way to market their business, products, and services using social networking sites or what is now most commonly referred to as simply social media. Basically, by encouraging interaction among users, these sites create an interactive experience that users do not get from a typical Web site.

Companies worldwide are struggling with how to incorporate the strengths of the emerging landscape of social technologies into their organizational strategies. There are benefits for companies to be had from a solid understanding of social media that are impossible to ignore. Regardless of the organization's focus whether it is in marketing, advertising, public relations or interactive, there are distinct competitive advantages for both individuals and businesses if they have a better understanding of the social web.

Social media can help organizations with several key challenges such as loyalty and retention. It is obvious that the longer the customers maintains relationships with a company the more value they generate (Reichheld, 1996). As such, loyalty is considered a critical factor to determine customer value (Berger and Nasr, 1998; Rosset et al., 2002; Maicas et al., 2006). In the end, it behooves companies to create mechanisms to enhance brand loyalty (Casalo et al., 2007; Royo and Casamassima, 2011).

The traditional marketing is evolving as social media is being incorporated to enhance communication, increase awareness, and to generate leads (Hensel & Deis, 2010). Social media provides low cost capability and ease of obtaining data input from users via the Internet. In additionally, social media can build credibility, and increase the number of connections (Das, 2009). While the initial process of developing customized applications and processes can be costly and time consuming, it will pay off over time because of the valuable information that marketers can use to target specific market areas. The data makes it easier for organizations to create and enhance lines of business, augment selling opportunities, and receive employment recommendations (Das, 2009).

John Lewis, President of Consumer North America, pointed out that the augmented use of social media has permitted firms to more efficiently reach out, and that firms should increasingly use social media, to insure the even distribution of the three major advertising avenues: Television, Mobile, Internet (Garcia, 2009).

Falls and Deckers (2012, p. 1) state that “no single subject has exploded into society and the business world the way social media marketing has.” They indicate prior to 2008 few people could accurately describe it and there were no set of rules or best practices on how to benefit from it. In the business realm, small businesses were willing to try it because they needed any advantage they could get. According to Falls and Deckers (p. 9), “social media reached its peak of expectations in 2009 and early 2010. Facebook exploded into the hundreds of millions of members and early corporate social media adopters such as Dell began sharing sales data from social programs. Companies’ marketing managers worked themselves into a frenzy, trying to grab the social media’s reins and hang on for the ride.”

Falls and Deckers report that there are seven things social media marketing can do for a business:

- 1) Enhance Branding, Awareness, and its Perception
- 2) Protect Brand Reputation
- 3) Enhance Public Relations
- 4) Build Community
- 5) Enhance Customer Service
- 6) Facilitate Research Development
- 7) Drive Leads and Sales

Jody Nimetz (2007), author of *Marketing Jive*, basically agrees with Falls and Deckers but adds a few additional items in her five major uses for businesses and social media list:

- 1) Create Brand Awareness
- 2) Online Reputation Management Tool
- 3) Recruiting
- 4) Learn about New Technologies and Competitors
- 5) Lead Generation

Charlene. Li (Odden 2009) offers more advice on how to incorporate social media into a business she states:

- 1) Never forget that the groundswell is about person-to-person activity. You are not speaking as “the company”, but as a person. Most companies don’t know how to do this, and it takes a lot of practice to find that voice and feel comfortable with it.
- 2) Be a good listener. All companies say they listen to their customers, but do they really LISTEN and let people know that they are listening?
- 3) Be patient. This takes a long time because you are going to be transforming your company, one person at a time.
- 4) Be opportunistic. Start small with the people who are most passionate about building relationships with customers.
- 5) Be flexible. You never know what’s going to happen so you have to constantly adjust your thinking and learn.
- 6) Be collaborative. You need people from up and down the management chain to buy-in.
- 7) Most importantly, be humble. Remember that you are not as powerful as the groundswell. If you forget this, they will let you know.

Not to be out done, even government agencies have begun using social networking sites. These social networking tools serve as a quick and easy way for the government to get the opinion of the public and the keep the public updated on their activity.

As part of this marketing process some organizations scour the Internet for both positive and negative comments and act upon them. Their attitude is, if someone is willing to dedicate the time, effort, and expense to create a site to attack them, the issues may be a real concern. In this regards Gripe sites can act as a positive indicator on how an organization addresses its customers concerns. An example would be Dunkin Donuts. An unhappy customer created a Gripe site because the chain didn't carry his favorite type of low-fat coffee creamer. Within the page he invited others to post complaints about anything Dunkin Donuts related. Ultimately Dunkin Donuts found value in this forum and used the web site information to its own advantage. The site became so beneficial and popular that Dunkin Donuts eventually bought the site in 1998 (Hearn, 2000).

Other organizations, medical for instance, have adopted social networking as a means to manage institutional information, disseminate peer to peer knowledge and to highlight individual physicians and institutions. The advantage of using a dedicated medical social networking site is that all the members are screened against the state licensing board's list of practitioners (Gjorgjevska and Donev, 2010). This use social networking extends to pharmaceutical companies who spend approximately "32 percent of their marketing dollars" attempting to influence the opinion leaders of social networks (Sniki, 2008).

The marketing aspect of social media has developed additional creative ways to sell products and services. Some sites, like YouTube, use sponsorships by placing advertisements on popular videos. Others like Facebook mine the information posted on the various pages and direct the advertisements to the user. Major video game studios have extended their social media marketing of their products to be included in an online, as well as local of version of games. These efforts are massive and have been credited with helping to break down barriers: On-line gamers meet and cooperate together in virtual worlds with people all over the globe from China, Russia, Japan, Italy ... providing an interesting opportunity to learn about each other's cultures and perhaps have a positive impact on future international relations and commerce.

False Profiles

Credibility on the Internet can also be an issue. It has been reported numerous times that fake profiles have been set up by individuals. One of the most famous cases is the mother who set up a profile to attack her daughter's rival. Other cases involve setting up fake Facebook pages that claim to represent business, or government issues.

While Facebook policy requests people to use their real identities (in fact the site is built on that premise) other sites such as Twitter allow aliases. Sengupta (2012) writes that "fakery is all over the Internet. Twitter which allows pseudonymous is rife with fake followers, and has been used to spread false rumors."

The fakery problem on Facebook comes in many shapes. False profiles are easy to create; hundreds can pop up simultaneously, sometimes with the help of robots. Fake Facebook friends and likes are sold on the web like trinkets in a bazaar (p.1).

Social Media Consequences

While social media marketing can help businesses it also has a down side. Major corporations like Facebook's social networking site are very complicated. A lot of the users are not aware of

the unintended consequences of some of the features. The “likes” feature has been used by some groups to attack the profile owner. In the recent political season, employees have been terminated based on using the like feature for specific politicians on Facebook (Matyszczyk, 2012). In another instance on one of the rating sites YELP, a restaurant owner’s overall business rating was lowered by individuals because he gave the President of the United States an affectionate “bear hug.” It was found that the individuals that gave negative feedback, which caused the restaurant ranking to be lowered, had never visited his business and lived in other states (Jackson, 2012). The trend of abuse continues with employers accessing potential employees’ Facebook pages to search for reasons not to hire them (Hill, 2012). Other employers monitor their employee web page content and postings to make sure negative things are not written about their companies (Eddy, 2012). While not every organization uses the social network site in this manner. The precedent has been set.

The content of social media has become an issue with some platform service providers. Many platform providers have decided that as the host of the data that they have legitimate rights to it. In this regard, providers have felt that they have the right to take some of the data, massaged it, aggregated it, and market it as an alternate revenue stream. Consequently, many providers are coming under increased scrutiny over their privacy policies and data sharing practices. While collecting data from the members of these sites may be good for a company, the collecting of this data may not be good for the consumer. The selling and using of this data can be very annoying to the profile creators to say the least. For the most part, on these types of sites if a profile creator writes they like something or asks questions about a product or service they are inundated with ads from that product category. In response individual users try to adjust the settings in their profile to filter out unwanted solicitations but because of the complicated settings and the ever changing policies they are always playing catch up.

The anonymity of the posters can also become an issue. Posting comments, opinions and beliefs take on a whole new life when the poster does not have to worry about being identified. In some cases these postings are inappropriate. The fact that posting can be anonymous has led to many using this technology for unintended purposes. One of the inappropriate uses of this technology is for lurkers (anonymous viewers) to inundate a site with spam messages if they don’t agree with the content. Another inappropriate use is posting false reviews - in effect turning the review sites in to gripe sites.

Livingstone (2008) noted “it is commonly held that at best, social networking is time wasting and socially isolating, and at worst it allows pedophiles to groom children or permits teenagers to conjure suicide pacts while parents think they are doing their homework” (p. 461). Consequently, in all likelihood there are millions of teenagers and young adults who, in a very short period of time (five to ten years) will find that there is so much embarrassing stuff about them online that they cannot successfully obtain employment.

The inherent cavalier behavior of the young has caused a host of web based issues (Withers, 2008). The nature of risk has changed from viruses and such, to an assortment of web-based sexual abuse and cyber-bullying (Liebert, 2008; Turvey, 2006). Another concern is the easily accessed links to sites promoting unhealthy lifestyles and conditions, such as anorexia, extreme groups, and unethical practices: cheating, plagiarism, and breaches of copyright (Albion and Maddux, 2007).

A different concern is ‘To Much Information’ (TMI). In the process of building a digital identity by sharing information about themselves oftentimes young and/or inexperienced individuals disclose not only too much information, but the wrong type of information as well. It is not uncommon for them to supply an incredible amount of Personal Identification Information (PII); including their: name, address (location), birthday, image, e-mail, screen names, instant messenger addresses, local and mobile phone numbers, and information concerning likes and dislikes about a variety of areas: sports, music, television, films, books and so on. Lenhart and Madden, (2007) write that one in 20 (5%) of teenagers with social networking profiles disclose their full names, photos of themselves and the town where they live.

While all this information may not be necessary children wanting to be part of something larger add information to profiles in the hopes that it will make them more popular. Although this behavior can be detrimental to the user, it is optimal for marketers, and as a result it can cause serious problems. In the nature of exploring, it is not uncommon for teenagers (and sometimes those that who should know better) to tell and show too much in photos.

Withers’ (2008) writes that in adolescent users’ profiles on social networking sites in the U.S.:

- 79% have included photos of themselves
- 66% photos of their friends
- 49% the name of their school
- 40% their instant message screen name

This type of information according to Osterman Research Inc. (2010) leads to the statement “the Web is a Dangerous Place... there has been an enormous increase in malicious Web-borne content, including user generated content posted to traditionally good Web sites, email messages that contain links to dangerous or newly compromised Web sites, attachments that are little more than stage-one down-loaders of malicious code from the Web . . .” (p. 3).

One of the main uses of social media has been to enable individuals to keep contact with a variety of friends and family whether local or long distance. Once a user updates their personal page all of their contacts are notified. If anyone of the contacts responds a message is sent back to group and the cycle continues. The fact that the same message is sent out to everyone can be problematic for a few reasons. A majority of the users seem to forget that every message that is sent out is not fit for consumption by all contacts. This issue alone has led to countless

disagreements, and has destroyed relationships with friends and family. The sending of one message to everyone has also disclosed information to acquaintances that many would think is private - including real time location, political beliefs, medical history, and likes and dislikes. Another issue is the erosion of interpersonal contact. Instead of taking the time to call or visit with someone, a generic message is sent. Relationships evolve and so do people. Keeping contact in this fashion tends to lead to a sense of isolation for some individuals. A lot of these issues allow businesses and acquaintances the opportunity to take advantage of the situation, some for marketing purposes and others for unscrupulous reasons.

Privacy Issues

Some people say that privacy is a thing of the past, to that end they point out that there are many web sites dedicated to erasing privacy. Some of these sites are devoted to posting embarrassing photos of well-known celebrities, as well as people of notoriety. Even security experts such as the head of British foreign intelligence and the former director of the CIA have suffered potential embarrassment through social networking activity. The future queen of England, Kate Middleton, has also had embarrassing photos of her posted on social networking sites.

Governments are also not immune. The U.S. government has had hundreds of thousands (251,287) of supposedly secure diplomatic cables leaked by an organization named WikiLeaks. The whole episode has been referred to as, "Cablegate." According to WikiLeaks, they began releasing documents on November 28, 2010. Cablegate is said to be the largest set of confidential documents ever to be released into the public domain. The documents gave an unprecedented insight into US Government foreign activities (Wikipedia, 2012).

A person does not have to be famous to have their privacy violated. Blumberg and Eckersley (2009) point out that "when you leave your home you sacrifice some privacy." Someone might see you enter the clinic on Market Street, or notice that you and your secretary left the Hilton Gardens Inn together. Furthermore, even in the world of ten years ago, all of this information could be obtained by people who didn't like you or didn't trust you. Another technology that has been developed by organizations (as well as governments) are computer systems created for the explicit purpose of capturing movements of individuals across public spaces. These systems have a huge upside (as well as a downside). Organizations using location-based digital services can subvert individuals' mobile geocentric devices (cell phones, iPads, laptops...) thus, enabling store owners to broadcast sales to the public as they walk by or perhaps send selective advertisements tailored to a specific individual. Fortunately or unfortunately, this localization software can make it easy to track individuals. Such software allows groups and individuals to track members, employees, parishioners, and children... to find out if they were at school or work? Were they visiting bars and clubs over lunch? Who are they eating with? Did they visit with a competitor, a hospital, a doctor's office, an abortion clinic, or attend an anti-government rally?

SUGGESTIONS

To alleviate problems associated with social networking from a user prospective many things should be considered. Debra Littlejohn Shinder (2009) makes the following ten suggestions when posting to a social networking site:

- 1) Where are you? What are you here for? The first thing to consider is the nature of the social networking site(s) you're using. Some sites are geared toward professional and business relationships, while others are more purely social.
- 2) Who's in the audience? Social networking is generally (but not exclusively) a form of communication. The first rule of writing is to know your audience; because that determines not only what you say but also how you say it.
- 3) Do you dare mix business with pleasure? One of the biggest dangers of social networking comes when you mix your audiences - having business associates on the same account as personal friends can get complicated quickly.
- 4) It's not just what you post that can get you in trouble, your friends posts and responses may be able to seen by some or all visitors to your page (including embarrassing photos they post on their own sites that "tag" (identify) you as one of the subjects.
- 5) A picture is worth a thousand words, and can be a thousand times more embarrassing
- 6) Sensitive subjects can come back to bite you
- 7) Avoid the perils of 'Posting Under the Influence' (PUI)
- 8) Be ready to reject a friendship request or "unfriend" someone
- 9) Are you familiar with the site's settings and options? One of the most important things you can do when you start using a social networking site is to completely familiarize yourself with how it works and the settings and options you can configure.
- 10) Should you use a pseudonym? One might wonder if the best way to avoid problems is to create a fake persona. But, besides sidestepping the whole purpose of social networking - getting to know people and letting them know you - it is also a violation of the Terms of Service of most social networking sites.

Be smart and don't post information that can be used against you. Sites such as Foursquare encourage users to send messages detailing current location. What's more, many individuals have used social networking sites to broadcast location while on vacation / trips. While letting friends and other users know where you are and how much fun you are having through social networking has become for some the go-to form of communication, it has the potential to create problems.

On the website - <http://PleaseRobMe.com> – it is suggested that individuals using an online restaurant reservation system (such as Foursquare and Twitter) that allows patrons to "check in" are in affect publically broadcasting the users are not home (Anthony Bettini of McAfee, 2010).

Additionally, if you allow people that work with you to have access to your social media they can also view your habits, thoughts and location.

- Your employer doesn't need to know whether, where, or how often, or you go to church.
- Your co-workers don't need to know how late you work or where you shop.
- Your sister's ex-boyfriend doesn't need know when she spends time with her new beau.
- Competitors don't need to know who your salespeople are talking to.

Posting resumes on career sites can also be risky. The Career News online publication (2010) warns users should not to be “too splashy” when it comes to posting a resume on a public site. Users should keep in mind that their profile can be seen by everyone, including the users’ current boss. Career News warns individuals should use discretion at all times and not to do job-hunting from work. Most companies monitor the sites employees visit, as well as their email.

Password security can also be problematic. Having a secure password system decreases the odds of someone not only stealing your data but also changing your profile. Passwords are only as secure as the people using them. Unfortunately, people can remember only so many things at one time. Organizations tell users that they should not use the same passwords for more than one account (“the Keys of the Kingdom” scenario – if someone gets access to one password they can get into everything). They also state that the passwords have to be changed every 45 days, be significantly different than the previous and the last three versions of the passwords can’t be reused. The organization then says remember the password to sign onto your personal computer, the network, the project databases, and email. With just these four application areas, that’s 12 passwords that the user must remember not counting his/her own personal ones. Is it any wonder that passwords are written down and are notoriously susceptible to compromise?

Users should create a system to generate specific passwords for different sites. A simple way to do this is to use a common root word within the pass code and surround it with letters and numbers that are particular to that site.

Clean up your profile. According to Becky Worley (2012) “a study from Microsoft Research indicates that 70% of online recruiters have nixed candidates because of search results that come up around their names.” Becky Worley, of *upgrade your life*, goes on to suggest a few things that you can do to clean up your online reputation:

- 1) Hide and Delete - delete all questionable posts on all social networks you are affiliated with. In addition, take control of your privacy settings and make sure your posts are only shared with trusted friends. Also go through and make sure there are no references to what you listen to, watch, and read. Next, if your friends have posted pictures that are questionable (with you in them) untag yourself or request that they be taken down.

- 2) Bury the Bad Stuff - once things are created on the Internet a lot of times you can't control them and they can't be removed. To counter act any negative results or reviews post positive or neutral information that is more current.

CONCLUSION

Various aspects of social media have been present since the Internet first came into being. The Internet is a tool that is mostly used for communication. Information is either gathered or distributed among its users, by its users. By its definition social media has taken all the separate ways individuals have collected data and dispensed information and combined them into one source, utilizing a new type of delivery system.

Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The term social networking for some is used interchangeably with social media. In actuality the term social networking is "the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals" (Rouse, Margaret, 2006). For the most part the users of major sites or players in social media (Facebook, Twitter) combine both the aspects of social networking and social media. The extraordinary range of the Internet allows these users to fulfill many purposes that in the past would have been accessed from different sources. Some of the general functions that in the past have been controlled by dedicated sites and have now been supplanted/enhanced by social networking include dating, marketing, email, job searches, voyeurism, communication, and vanity. These social media sites in effect create super profiles of its users.

Many individuals and companies have embraced the social media phenomena. According to recent data, some 34% of the 7 billion people on our planet now have access to the Internet (InternetWorldStats.com, 2012). The Internet provides entrance worldwide to over two billion people and as such offers unprecedented opportunities for businesses, as well as the relationship-seeker to extend their personal social networks. This technology erases the proximity factor that has limited business and personal relationships in the past. Further, this technology facilitates nearly instantaneous communication via multiple channels (i.e., text, voice, image, and video).

Erick Qualman (2009) points out that social media is not a fad but a basic shift in the way people and organizations conduct themselves:

- Gen Y outnumber Baby Boomers - 96% of them have joined a social network
- Social media has overtaken porn as the #1 activity on the Web
- 1 out of 8 couples married in the U.S. last year met via social media

- In 2009 a US Department of Education study revealed that on average, online students out performed those receiving face-to-face instruction
- Generation Y and Z consider e-mail passé -in 2009 Boston College stopped distributing e-mail addresses to incoming freshmen
- What happens in Vegas stays on YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook...
- There are over 200 million blogs
- Wikipedia has over 13 million articles...
 - some studies show it's more accurate than Encyclopedia Britannica...
 - 78% of these articles are non-English
- 25% of Americans in the past month said they watched a short video...on their phone

Like it or not, social networking / social media technologies have changed the way we work and interact. They have crept into a large percentage of organizations, offering users new ways to collaborate and communicate. These Web 2.0 technologies utilized through social media allow users generate web content: blogs, wikis, social networking sites and RSS feeds. While social media can yield enormous benefits, such as increasing reach, and building and enhancing customer loyalty, it also has downsides including creating security risks, data mining for questionable purposes and the loss of personal contact. As various groups embrace this technology and find new uses for it (some dubious) the question remains, do the negative aspects out way the positive? Every person and business needs to decide this question for themselves.

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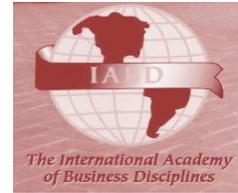
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