

Understanding Social Media

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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

In the past five years, since the first edition of this book was published, *Social Media* has grown significantly in terms of **variety, availability, penetration and utilisation**. The naysayers and the skeptics have eaten a humble pie as increasingly more platforms have moved from desktops to mobile phones making it possible to stay connected on the go. Global statistics reveal that while the average daily time spent online in 2012 was about 1 hour and 15 minutes, it is now close to 2 hours, out of which 45 per cent is consumed being on social media and micro blogging sites.

Social media is dynamic; ever changing and growing. While new platforms are being added regularly with different concepts, the existing ones are continuously innovating and tweaking themselves to stay relevant. There is consolidation taking place as well with regular acquisitions of new age platforms by the behemoths. Such is the pace of development in the social media arena, that even now new elements of social media jump out of nowhere and take people by surprise leaving them wondering where it came from.

The emergence of social media began in the early days of Internet when people started sharing information and communicating with each other. It was just that the earlier platforms were more “technology” intensive and required some expertise to use and hence the number of people using these platforms was limited. Over a period of time as the technology matured, platforms were developed where regular users, without any technological background, could also use the services. This was a turning point in the history of Internet, making the Internet technology all inclusive, where people were no longer silent spectators to the content being dished out to them. Now they could create their own content, share it with others, respond to people, and collaborate with them and more. This user interaction is what gave impetus to the development of social media, as we know it today.

Contrary to the general perception of social media being restricted to networking websites like Facebook & Twitter, the social media encompasses all the services that facilitate creation, sharing and exchange of user-generated content. These include but are not restricted to Internet forums, groups, blogs, micro blogs, networking sites, social bookmarking sites, wikis, podcasts, content communities for articles, video/photo sharing sites, Q & A sites, review sites etc. Each type of social media has its own benefits and there is something for everyone. Unfortunately, people tend to partake in the most popular websites and expect them to fulfill all their needs instead of settling for a service that best serves their needs. If one has focused objectives and knows exactly what is required, s/he would certainly find a social media platform that will meet his/her particular needs.

The social media also drove a **social change**. Social media *empowered* the people to express their thoughts and opinions and share them with others. To add to this newfound power, people realised that they were not speaking in a vacuum; a highly responsive audience, who took part in the conversation and put across their own points of view, heard their voices. This started a social shift towards power coming back to the masses. Now one didn't have to suffer at the hands of the powerful, or be thrust upon with unacceptable quality of products or services or spend their lives waiting for justice or for resolution of issues. One had the choice to come on to the social media, and give their side of the story and demand what they rightfully deserved.

As time passed by, people realised that it was not only their petty issues which the social media could sort out, but by working together they could also influence decision-making. In their own right, each individual was turning into an *influencer* within their network, some more than the others. They now made a difference whether it was a simple recommendation on a product or something bigger like enlistment of support for a public cause. They are now being recognised and known as "*Social Influencers*". The concept of online petitions has also come into being where a group of people can sign petitions online to proclaim their support to the specific cause and in turn the petition can be submitted online or by email to the responsible agency/person. Many countries in the world recognise these online petitions. In fact, the US White House website itself facilitates creation, promotion and submission of online petitions.

The realisation also soon dawned upon the powers that be, like politicians, corporate houses, media companies and public figures. It is more likely that they learnt it the harder way by actually feeling the shift in the public opinion or the reducing returns on the traditional marketing/promoting methods and understood that the social media was way too powerful and effective for them to ignore. Some embraced the social media and used it effectively to align themselves or their businesses to consumer needs. Some others misunderstood the social media completely and came out hurting worse than before. However, one thing that is clear is, irrespective of whether the public figures, businesses and the likes chose to be on Social Media, the public at large is, and they will talk and interact and not being on social media is akin to closing one's eyes to reality.

There has been a significant push by the corporates to utilise the features of social media platforms to facilitate engagement, empowerment and collaboration between the staff internally. The **Enterprise Social Networking (ESN)** platforms facilitate this need, while maintaining privacy of the content. IBM's Connections, Microsoft's Yammer are examples of such ESNs. Similarly, audio-video conferencing platforms are being used by enterprises to allow people to have meetings online. Citrix Go To Meeting, Cisco Webex, Microsoft Skype for business, etc are in vogue amongst the businesses and corporate establishments.

Social media has a character of its own; there is nothing that can be assumed or taken for granted. There is no “*one hat fits all*” kind of a solution. Yes, there are certain aspects of handling social media that apply to everyone, but they can at best be termed as guidelines or best practices. Otherwise, *social media management* is a learning process. Ultimately, it all boils down to understanding the social media, gathering relevant information and then analysing it to tweak your activity, be it online or offline.

In this book, we will discover how the social media has transformed over the years, what benefits it brings to individuals and businesses and why social media management is important. We will also discuss some tools, which are useful to manage your social media activities.

1 WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

The term *Social Media* needs no explanation, as we are quite sure that by now everyone, young and old alike, has heard of it, knows of it and is utilising it in some form or another. But for those who don't, "social media is any media or platform that allows one to be *social*, or get social online by creating/sharing content, news, photos, videos etc. with other people." **Social Media** has become an inevitable part of our daily life, and like it or not, it's here to stay. In fact, the number of mentions in social media is quoted nowadays to highlight the importance of the issues and the public support or otherwise to the issue. All organisations/institutions of all types now have a social media presence since they have become aware of the enormous power, reach and potential of this medium.

1.1 DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA

There are hundreds of definitions for the term *social media* as it continues to evolve and its use expands with changing times. The term "social media" is usually used in a broad context to encompass a wide variety of internet sites or types of platforms and applications used by media devices like smartphones, tablets, computers/laptops or other connected devices. Thus, the term can be confusing to many.

If we separate the two terms: the term "social" refers to interacting with other people and sharing or receiving information, while the term "media" refers to the main means of mass communication, which in the traditional sense includes TV, Radio and Newspapers collectively. But, in the term "social media" the media refers to "web-based" communication tools that are used to enable people to share content or converse with each other.

Thus, "*All web-based applications which allow for creation / exchange of user-generated content and enable interaction between the users can be classified as "Social Media". These could be in the form of Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Twitter, Google+), Blogs, Internet forums, Bookmarking sites, Online community sites, Q & A sites and Mobile messaging, Chat apps etc.*"

In order to help you to identify social media, let's look at some of its common features:

1. These are web-based applications
2. Users can create their own profiles and exist as independent entities on such platforms.
3. It facilitates the individual users to connect with other users independently or in groups/communities based on common interests, activities, beliefs etc by providing an highly interactive platform
4. The platform is driven mainly by the user generated content like text, photos or videos and sharing of the same for information, co-creation, discussions or collaboration

Definitions of Social Media.

1. According to the **Merriam-Webster dictionary** online, Social Media is defined as *"forms of electronic communications (as web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)."*
2. According to **Wikinvest**, *"Social media describes websites that allow users to share content, media, etc. Common examples are the popular social networking sites like Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, etc. Social media also includes YouTube, Photobucket, Flickr, and other sites aimed at photo and video sharing. News aggregation and online reference sources, examples of which are Digg and Wikipedia, are also counted in the social media bucket. Micro-blogging sites such as twitter can also be included as social media."*
3. The **web dictionary** defines social media (noun) simply as, *"websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking."*
4. According to **Wikipedia** – *"Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks."*
5. *"Social media are web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information."* webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/social-media.htm
6. *"Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media."* whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media
7. *"Social Media is a term used to describe a variety of Web-based platforms, applications and technologies that enable people to socially interact with one another online. Some examples of social media sites and applications include Facebook, YouTube, Del.icio.us, Twitter, Digg, blogs and other sites that have content based on user participation and user-generated content (UGC)."* webopedia.com

8. "Primarily internet or cellular phone based applications and tools to share information among people. Social media includes popular networking websites, like Facebook and Twitter; as well as bookmarking sites like Reddit. It involves blogging and forums and any aspect of an interactive presence which allows individuals the ability to engage in conversations with one another, often as a discussion over a particular blog post, news article, or event." businessdictionary.com
9. "Social Media is the future of communication, a countless array of internet based tools and platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos, audio, video, and information in general increasingly fluid among internet users. Social Media has relevance not only for regular internet users, but business as well." socialmediadefined.com/what-is-social-media/

1.2 TOP SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

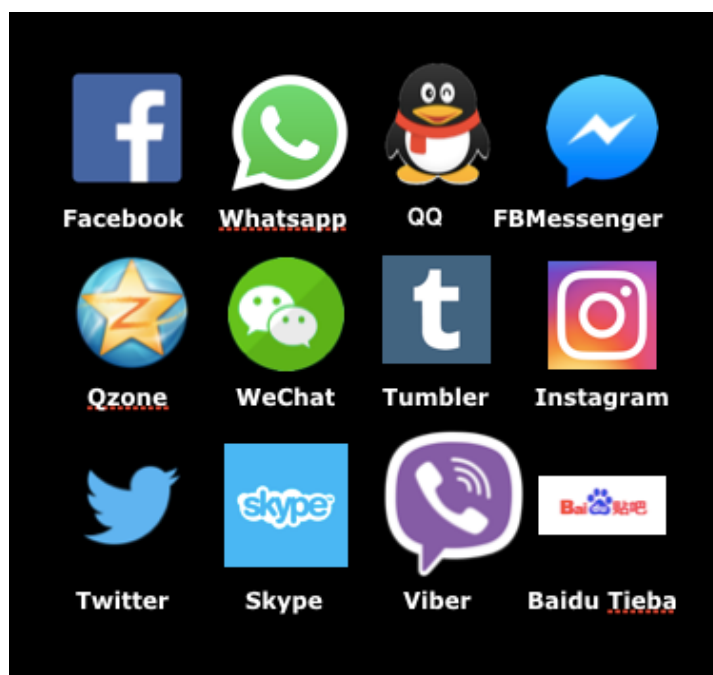


Figure 1.1 Popular Social Media Icons of 2016

Listed below are the **top 20 global social media tools** as of **January 2016**, ranked by the amount of active users in descending order:

1. Facebook
2. WhatsApp*
3. QQ*
4. FB Messenger*
5. Qzone

6. WeChat*
7. Tumblr
8. Instagram
9. Twitter
10. Skype*
11. Baidu Tieba
12. Viber*
13. Sina Weibo
14. Line*
15. Snapchat*
16. Yy
17. Vkontakte
18. Pinterest
19. BBM*
20. LinkedIn

*Chat app/Messenger/VOIP

2 THE CHANGING FACE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Before we go any further with understanding what the social media is all about, let's take a quick look at the history and evolution of social media from its very beginning to the present day.

2.1 THE PHREAKING ERA (1950S–EARLY '90S)

It may come as a surprise to you when we tell you that the social media evolved from the manipulations of the basic telecommunications systems sometime in the late 1950s. We all have used our cell phones, sometime or the other, to give missed calls in order to get a call back that is free of charge. The more sophisticated approach involves calling a mobile via Skype, which is now a perfectly mainstream, acceptable pursuit. This evolution of the phone from a simple static device to a dynamic force of nature started with the advent of “*phreaking*”; a slang term coined to describe a culture of people who studied, explored and experimented with telecommunications systems in their spare time. Today, as the telephone networks have become computerised, phreaking has got closely linked to *Computer Hacking*.

Of course, nobody knows the exact details of the origin of phreaking but there is an interesting story that is apparently the cause for the start and spread of this practice. A “*7-year-old blind boy, armed with a heightened pitch sensitivity, whistled into a phone at precisely 2600 hertz and accidentally cracked the network's security code. The boy, Joe Engressia, would later go on to meet John Draper, a Vietnam-vet turned pirate radio operator who built the first phreaking tools, known as “blue boxes”, in the late '60s.*”

The exploits of Engressia and Draper spread like wildfire through various media sources available then (magazines and newspapers) which caused two tech-obsessed high-school kids to track them down so that they could also learn how to build similar devices. Those kids, namely *Steve Wozniak* and *Steve Jobs*, would later go on to found *Apple*, which would eventually release the iPhone.

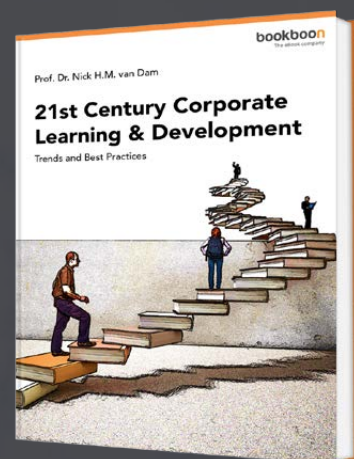


Figure 2.1: The blue box built by Steve Wozniak, on display at the Computer History Museum
Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

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These pranksters and hackers were probably the earliest social media explorers who went on to build “boxes” that were homemade electronic devices, which could generate tones allowing them to make free calls and gain access to the backend of the telephone system.

In this manner, hacked corporate voice mail systems called *Codelines* were used to produce the first real “blogs/podcasts”. Comments and information were left as a voice mail using this system and the phreak would respond with the next update.

2.2 BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS (BBS'S) – (1979–1995)

```

OpenTelegard/2 BBS Login
Enter your login name or 'NEW' to signup.
Username: SYSOP
Password: %%%%%%%%%%
You have logged 233/1440 minutes today.
You have made 3 connections today
Current time is Sat Nov 06 10:21:27 -0600 2010
Your session will expire on: Sun Nov 07 05:28:27 -0700 2010.
You have 1,207 minutes remaining.

Welcome, SYSOP. You have entered Telegard/2 BBS
(Another Installation of OpenTelegard/2)

This is the Message of the Day (motd.ftl)

                                Main Menu

A) Automessage      B) BBS Lists        C) Chat Rooms
F) File Areas       G) Goodbye          H) Call History
I) Information      M) Msgs Areas      P) Page Sysop
T) Timebank         U) User Account    ?) Help

[1206 min] Select: █

```

Figure 2.2: Bulletin Boards Systems (BBS's) **Image Source:** Wikimedia Commons

The first **BBS** or the electronic **Bulletin Board System** was developed by Ward Christensen and opened to the public in the year 1979. These bulletin board systems were small servers that were powered by personal computers and attached to a modem, where one person at a time could dial in and get access. The user had to login to perform functions like uploading or downloading software, exchanging messages with others through email or public message boards. These were used as a medium for social discussions on message boards, for community-contributed file downloads and also online games. The early BBS's had no colours or graphics but with the advent of the MS-DOS 3.0 (ANSI), which was the predecessor to HTML, one could make colours and online artwork.

Usenet conceived by Jim Ellis and Tom Truscott in 1979 and established in 1980, was the most widely used Internet discussion system. Here the users could read and post messages to one or more categories, called *newsgroups*. Usenet differed from the BBS' in that there was no central server or dedicated administrator but a distributed network of various local servers that communicate with each other. Users post and read messages on the local servers. Usenet resembled the BBS in many respects and is the precursor to the various Internet forums being used today.

Bulletin Board Systems were in many ways a precursor to the modern form of the **World Wide Web, Social Network Services** and other aspects of the Internet. And as the use of the Internet became more widespread in the mid to late 1990s, traditional BBS's rapidly faded in popularity. Today, Internet forums occupy much of the same social and technological space as BBS's did, and the term BBS is often used to refer to any online forum or message board.

2.3 COMMERCIAL ONLINE SERVICES (1979–2001)

The term *Commercial Online Services* in the early days referred to a commercial computer communication service in which the paid members could dial via a computer modem, the service's private computer network and access various services and information resources such a bulletin boards, downloadable files and programs, news articles, chat rooms, and electronic mail services.

The first commercial online services to go live in the year 1979 were **CompuServe** and **The Source**, which were owned by large corporate companies. These online services utilised text-based interfaces and menus and allowed their users to use email, chat, news, financial and stock information, bulletin boards, special interest groups (SIG) and forums.

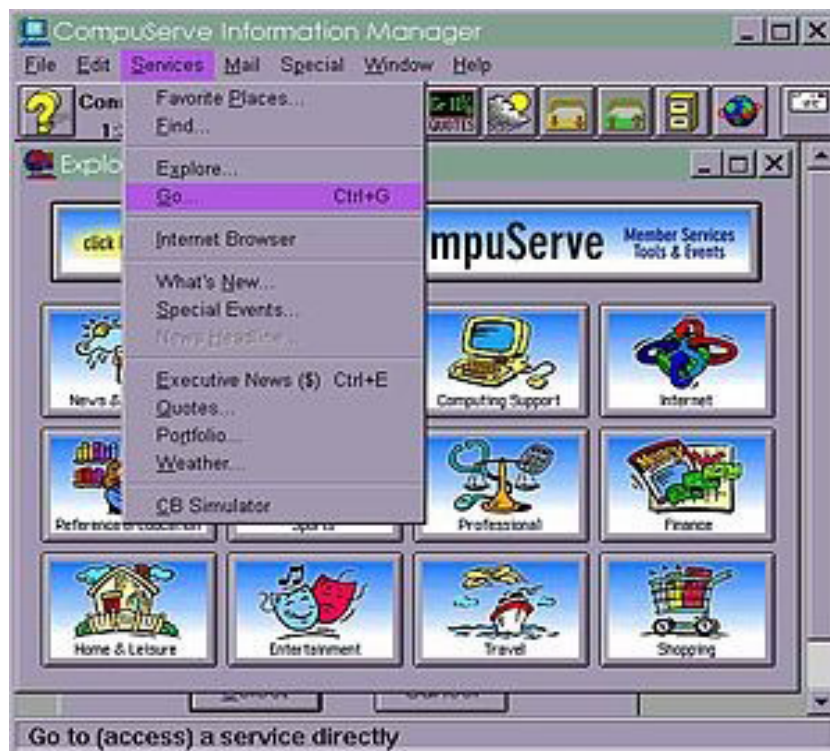


Figure 2.3: CompuServe Information Manager
Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

Another company called **Prodigy Communications Corporation** claimed that it was the first consumer online service and cited its graphical user interface and basic architecture as differentiation from **CompuServe**, which started in 1979 and used a command line interface. Like CompuServe, it also offered its subscribers access to a broad range of networked services. Prodigy launched nationwide in 1990 and it became the second largest online service provider with 465,000 subscribers as compared to 600,000 subscribers of CompuServe. Its popularity grew due to its colour interface and lower cost.

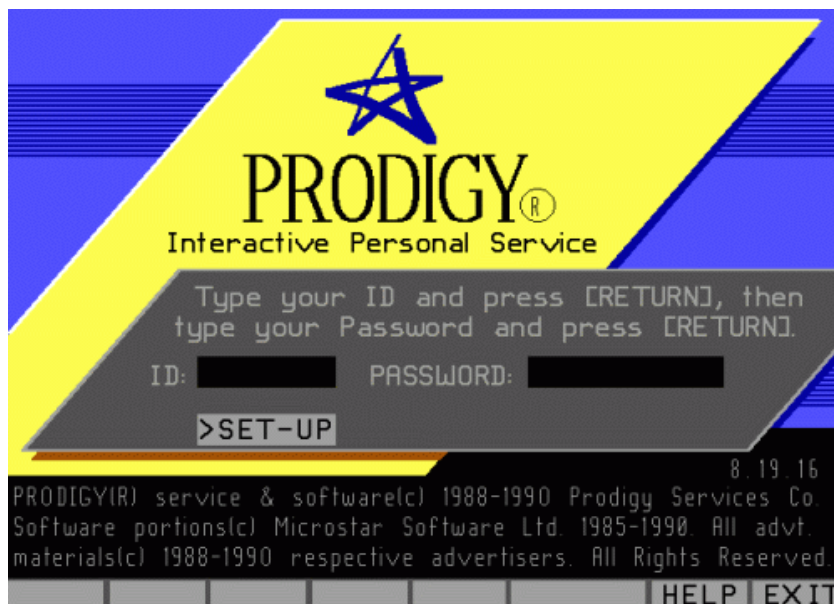


Figure 2.4: Sign-in Screen for Prodigy Service

Image Source: http://www.search.com/reference/Prodigy_%28ISP%29

CompuServe and **Prodigy** were the first large scale corporate attempts to get an interactive, “social” online experience to the masses. Although CompuServe was infamous for its high cost, it was the first to offer an online chat system called the **CB Simulator**, in 1980.

Later it was **America Online (AOL)**, founded in 1983 that became popular with the American masses for its *online software suite (AOL)* that allowed its customers to access the world’s largest “walled garden” online community and eventually reach out to the Internet as a whole. AOL had over 30 million members worldwide, at its prime.

2.4 THE WORLD WIDE WEB (WWW) – 1991

Although the Internet had existed as a network since the late 1960s, the **World Wide Web (WWW)** became publicly available only on 6th August 1991. In the early ’90s Internet access was available only to those who had legitimate University/Government/Military connections. But in the mid ’90s many private Internet service providers (ISP) came into being in the major metro areas of the United States, which gave millions of home computer users the opportunity to enjoy unfiltered and unlimited online services.

2.5 IRC, ICQ AND INSTANT MESSENGER (1983–1996)

We can see that as the long distance communication systems advanced in technology from a simple telephone to discussions or chatting using computers, people became more and more interested in getting real-time news that was instant and direct from the source or people concerned. Thus the **Internet Relay Chat (IRC)** that was created in August 1983, by Jarkko Oikarinen, became instantly popular amongst the masses. It was then that people started using the **hash tags (#)** and the **at-signs (@)** and began “tweeting” their real-time status updates that is now a popular phenomenon on the micro-blogging site Twitter. The people used IRC to share links, files and to keep in touch with their global network, much the same way as Twitter is being used today.

The IRC was probably the origin to the concept of the **Instant Messaging system called ICQ** that was developed by four Israeli technologists in the year 1996 for the desktop computers. This technology was quickly bought over by the AOL, which became a mainstream hit with the people as the IM technology helped develop the *emotional icons* of the social media with the *Avatars*, which are expressive images used to represent oneself. This is when the **abbreviations (A/S/L – Age/Sex/Location)** and the **emoticons** became the common and popular “*computer lingo*” (language used by the people to express themselves on computers).

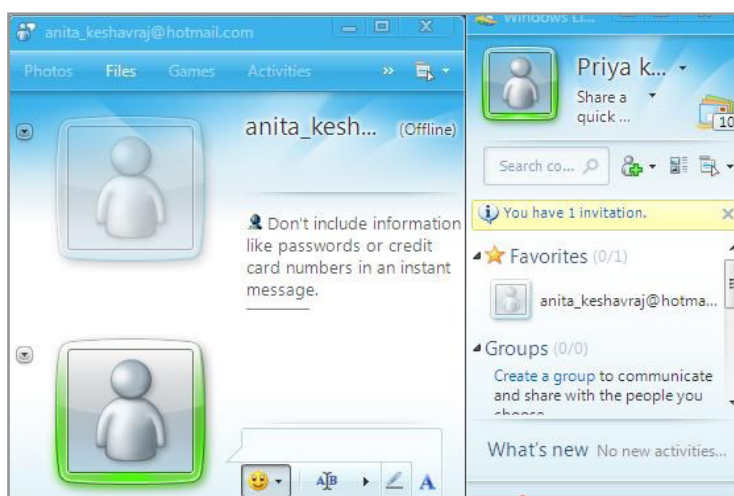


Figure 2.5: Windows Live Messenger (IM) (Screenshot)

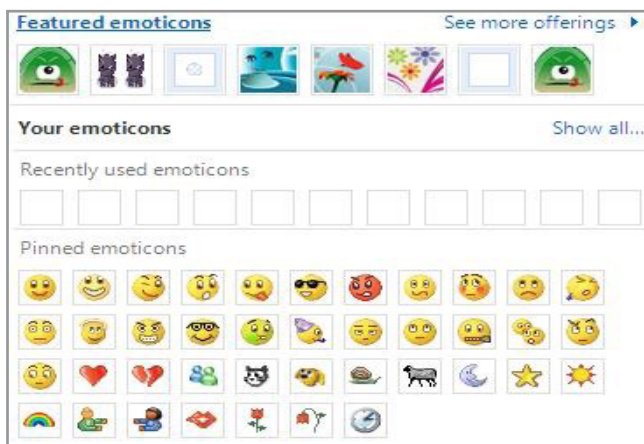


Figure 2.6: Featured Emoticons for Use in Windows Live Messenger (Screenshot)

Much later, the **Instant Messenger** feature got incorporated into various email clients like MSN Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail and the social networking platforms, so that it became easier to chat with the friends on the contact list, in real-time and in private. A few years back, the IM was born again in a new avatar, this time as a social messaging platform, discussed later in the chapter.

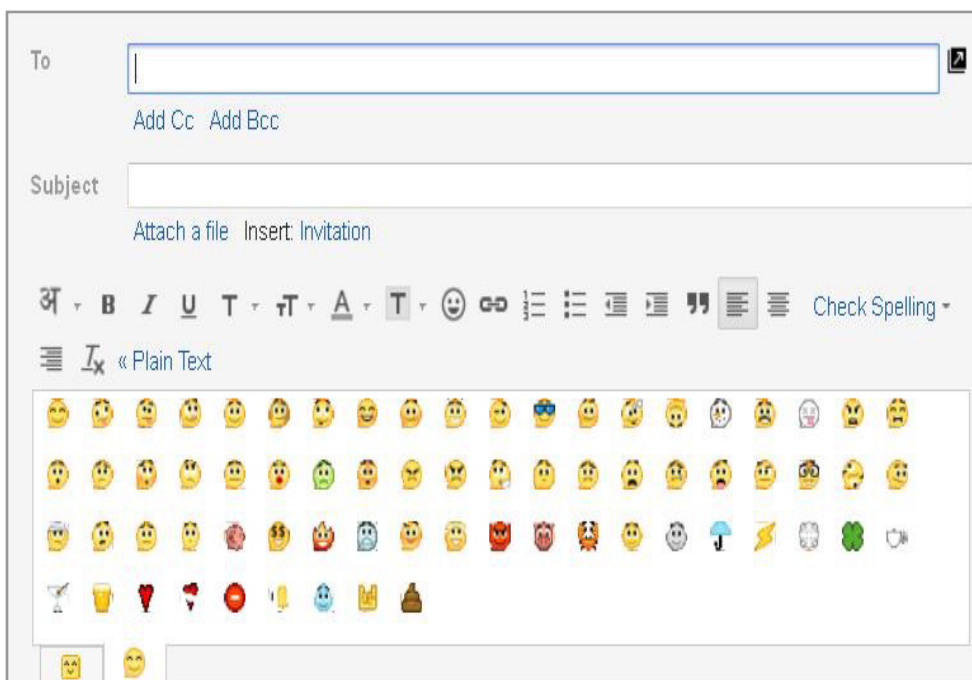


Figure 2.7: Emoticons Used in Gmail Client (Screenshot)

2.6 PEER-TO-PEER (P2P), BITTORRENT-“SOCIAL” MEDIA SHARING (1999)

The “social” media sharing concept had begun in earnest as people were now sharing links, files, photos etc via different media platforms like email, forums, chatting or instant messenger. The people could now easily upload or download files to and from the Internet sites. Thus, the “**file sharing**” application like the **Peer-to-Peer (P2P)** was developed by **Napster** and went live in June 1999. This P2P file sharing application allowed users easy and fast download of music albums in the MP3 format, which could be instantly burned onto a CD. Napster made it relatively easy for music enthusiasts to download copies of songs that were otherwise difficult to obtain, like older songs, unreleased recordings, and songs from concert bootleg recordings. It became so popular that at its peak there were 25 million users and 80 million songs, but the system never once crashed.

The P2P applications brought about a drastic shift in the distribution of power from the music record companies to the consumers. Thus music began to flow freely across the Internet at an astonishing pace through the years 1999–2000, until it was declared illegal. Napster was then forced to do away with all the copyrighted content.

Napster’s place was quickly taken over by other competing P2P applications like the **Limewire**, until the **BitTorrent** technology (a peer-to-peer file sharing protocol) arrived that provided a legal, centralised way to share files without being blocked.

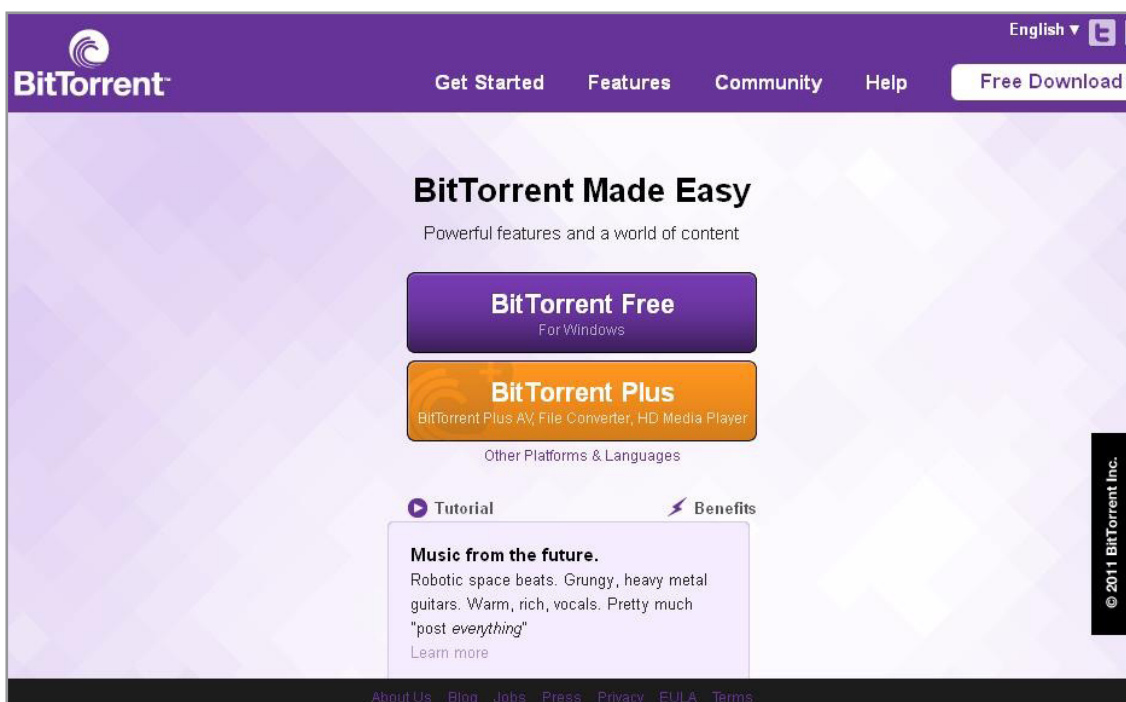


Figure 2.8: Home Page of BitTorrent (P2P File-Sharing Software Site) (Screenshot)

Today, without a doubt, BitTorrent is the most recognisable software for downloading large amounts (any kind) of data from the Internet. BitTorrent clients like µTorrent, BitComet, qBitTorrent, Tixati, Deluge etc are used to implement the VitTorrent protocol on the computers connected to the internet.

Ultimately it was a website, very aptly called, “**The Pirate Bay**” that became a cult online destination for any kind of *social* media distribution. The Pirate Bay provides an index of the digital content of entertainment like music, videos, movies, software etc. Other Torrent indexes include ExtraTorrent, TorrentDownloads etc. Such sites have raised concerns about copyright infringement and piracy, even though the BitTorrent protocol itself is perfectly legal. Despite legal actions and blocking of content from these sites, the usage of the protocol to share, upload/download files continues.



Figure 2.9: The Pirate Bay Home Page (Screenshot)

2.7 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (1997–2016)

By and by it became quite clear from the way the Internet was being used by the people that they loved to network, share content, upload or download files and share them online with friends and also liked to keep in touch with the updated news and whereabouts of their contacts. Thus the concept of **social networking** took shape in the form of several websites that offered such *networking* features.

Initially, social networking sites tried to connect people who were connected to each other from their early school days with sites like **Classmates.com**, which proved to be a really good way for people to have a virtual reunion and therefore became quite popular in the US. However, the early users could not create profiles, but were successful in locating long-lost buddies and the site has managed to register more than 40 million accounts today.

Another site that sprung up in 1997 called **SixDegrees.com** did not share a similar kind of success, but was one of the very first sites to allow users to create profiles, invite friends, organise groups and also be able to surf other user profiles. The site was based on the theory that no person is separated from another by more than six degrees.

It was in 2002 that the social networking scene really hit the Internet with the launch of a site called **Friendster**. This site also used the similar concept of degree of separation like the now defunct SixDegrees.com and refined it to a **Circle of Friends** (that displayed the pathways connecting two people). The concept promoted the idea of a rich online community that could exist only if there were common bonds between people and the site went on to ensure that there were plenty of ways to discover those bonds. The site became hugely popular and an instant hit boasting of more than 115 million registered users and still remains a force in Asia and a near-necessity in the Philippines. Today, Friendster.com has been re-invented to become an online fun virtual gaming community and forums site intended for teenagers and adults. A year later, in 2003, other social networking sites like **LinkedIn**, **MySpace** and **Facebook** were introduced.

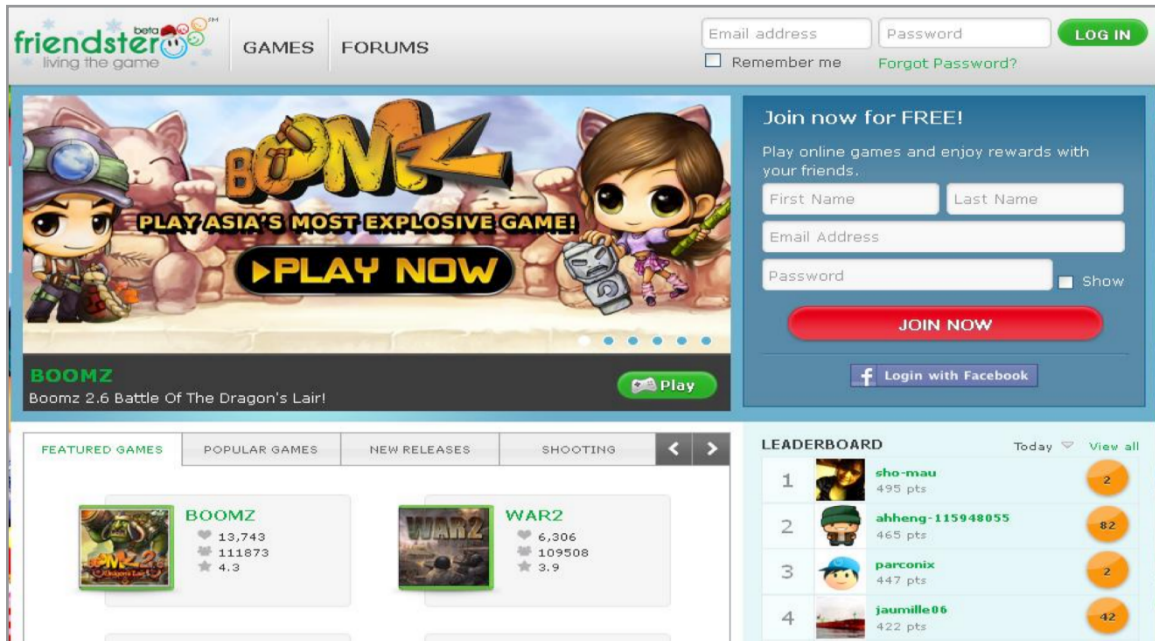


Figure 2.10: Home Page of friendster.com (Screenshot)



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LinkedIn became a serious and sober networking site for professionals and business people who wished to connect with other professionals. Today, the site has more than 433 million users (2016) and is still growing. Its geographical reach is over 200 countries and territories.



MySpace was founded by Specific Media LLC and pop star Justin Timberlake in 2003 and became a hit in the US. News Corporation later acquired it in July 2005 for \$580 million. MySpace was the most visited social networking site in the world from July 2005 till early 2008 and even surpassed Google in the year 2006. It had over 33.1 million unique U.S. visitors in August 2011. However, in 2008, Facebook overtook MySpace in the number of unique worldwide visitors.



Facebook was launched in the year 2004 as a social networking service and website, founded by Mark Zuckerberg and a few of his colleagues. The website's membership was initially limited to only students of Harvard University, but was later expanded to include other colleges in Boston area, the Ivy League and Stanford University. Much later, in 2006, it was finally opened to the general public for people of all age groups above 13 years. The site, for obvious reasons, became a huge hit among the college going crowd and by March 31, 2016 has more than 1.65 billion monthly active users.

Facebook allowed users to create individual profiles, add or invite friends, exchange messages, join other communities of like-minded people or form groups of their own based on common interests, which could be categorised by school, college or workplace. It has clearly become the most popular social networking site that has affected the social life and activity of people in various ways.

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook has evolved in many ways making it much more user-friendly, accessible and a fun place to connect with long-lost friends or even strangers with common interests. By incorporating special pages called **fan-pages** and **business pages** for celebrities and businesses, Facebook has opened out new marketing strategies by providing an excellent platform to interact directly with customers and also to get more sales and traffic to their respective official business websites or personal pages, in the case of celebrities. The company began working on mobile solutions in 2006 and integrated its services with the mobile phone companies making it easily accessible via the smart phones so that people could now update their status on the go.

Facebook introduced the Facebook messenger service, which provided text and voice communication in August 2011. Integrated with its web-based chat feature it allowed users to chat with friends both on mobile and on main website. On April 27, 2015, Facebook introduced video calling in the Facebook Messenger app.



Figure 2.11: Facebook New Timeline (Screenshot)

Over the years, Facebook has been taking over other successful companies to increase its command or reach over the social media. Some of the major acquisitions were **FriendFeed** (Social networking aggregator in 2009), **Gowalla** (Location Based service in 2011), **Instagram** (Photo sharing in 2012), **Whatsapp** (Mobile instant messaging in 2014) and **Oculus VR** (Virtual Reality technology in 2014).



Google has been trying to join the social networking scene with projects like the **Google Wave**, **Buzz** and **Talk**, but these didn't really kick off with the masses. Google has now come out with the **Google Plus (Google +)**, which is quite similar to Facebook with a few more features like **circles of friends** and acquaintances or followers. Here too one can add/invite friends or even follow strangers who share common interests or hobbies among the other networking features like sharing content and photos, sending messages, collaborating events, and the **Plus button** (similar to **Like** button on Facebook).

Google+ has evolved and opened its doors for business pages, which has been welcomed with open arms. Google+ did manage to get more than 20 million unique visitors in just a matter of three weeks since its release in June 2011. It had over 25 million registered users by August 2011. Google+ potentially had over 391 million active users in 2015, bringing it closer to Instagram and larger than Twitter. Google+ has now become a serious competitor for Facebook and both are now trying hard to be in the number one spot.

In response to their competitor, Facebook has made quite a few changes to its look and added many more new features, the latest being the **Timeline**, which showcases the individual's entire timeline of activities right from birth to present day, based on the data collected. It has also integrated places on the maps and photos, which show up on the timeline. (Figure 2.11)

Google+ on the other hand is not far behind, as they have also integrated **Google Photos** with the Google+ account and one can also update their location using the maps feature.

Google too has made some **major acquisitions** over the years to keep itself as number one on the computer world scenario. Some of the important acquisitions are **Pyra Labs** (Weblog software in 2003), **Applied Semantics** (Online advertising in 2003), **Genius Labs** (Blogging in 2003), **Android** (Mobile software in 2005), **YouTube** (Video Sharing in 2006), **Feedburner** (Web Feed in 2007) and **Waze** (GPS Navigation Software in 2013) among many others across diverse platforms.

2.8 SOCIAL BOOKMARKING (1996–2003)

According to Wikipedia, “*Social bookmarking is a method for Internet users to organise, store, manage and search for bookmarks of resources online. Unlike file sharing, the resources themselves aren't shared, merely bookmarks that reference them.*”

The concept of online bookmarking goes back to April 1996 with a site called **itList**. In the next three years many more competitive online bookmarking services were offered by sites like **Backflip**, **Blink**, **Clip2**, **ClickMarks**, **HotLinks** and others. These sites allowed users to **organise** their bookmarks into folders and some even provided a browser button for ease in saving bookmarks.

It was **Delicious**, founded in 2003, which pioneered *tagging* and coined the term *social bookmarking*. Thereafter, many more popular social bookmarking sites like **Digg**, **Reddit** and **Stumbleupon** cropped up.

Most social bookmarking services use tags to organise their bookmarks and enable viewing of bookmarks associated with a chosen tag. They also provide web feeds for their lists of bookmarks, including lists organised by tags, which allows subscribers to become aware of new bookmarks as they are saved, shared, and tagged by other users.

2.9 BLOGS (1994–1999)

A *Blog* is a contraction of the term **Web Log**. A log, as we all know, is the written record of events/messages in a chronological order. It is like a journal or diary wherein people record events, experiences and observations. Therefore, we can describe a *blog* as a journal, which is available on the web. Technically, a blog can be defined as the chronological arrangement of a collection of text, data, images and other media objects recorded and retrievable through a web browser. Originally, blogs started out as static websites but over the years they gradually evolved to include many advanced features making them much more conversational and interactive in nature.

Although digital communities existed before the blogs in the form of Usenet, Internet forums, email lists and Bulletin Board systems, Justin Hall, who began his blog, *Justin's Home page* in January 1994, is credited as the first blogger. Justin's Home Page, which later became *Links from the underground*, had links and reviews of websites in existence at that time. In 1996 Justin Hall began writing an online journal, which had dated entries, each entry linked through an index.

The term weblog was coined and first used by Jorn Barger in 1997. In 1999, Peter Merholz, playing with the term used *We Blog* on his blog and the term **Blog** stuck.

Most early blogs were websites, which were being manually updated by the person maintaining the blog and knowledge of web technologies was essential if someone wanted to blog. However the developments in technology made it feasible for the non-technical people also to blog and that was the turning point in the history of blogs.



Figure 2.12: Blogs (Image Source: Internet)

In the early days, the blogs were nothing but a form of a personal diary or journal that was easy to maintain and log daily. This was made possible due to the fact that the blogging platforms were freely available with free hosting and domain facilities, creating a blog was easy, and did not require any special technical skill or knowledge to post content. Therefore, anyone could open as many blogs as they wished, using the free templates provided, and maintain them very easily. It was a breeze to post content of any kind without too many hassles.

As the Internet evolved, so did the blog; making it a very powerful social medium through which you could get your voice heard. Any individual could express strong opinions, suggestions and even provide useful up-to-date information through blogs. Even more attractive feature of a blog was the fact that one could interact directly with its readers in the form of comments that could be posted below the posts.

Blogs were an easy way to target specific audiences and also could be optimised, by virtue of the content posted, for it to be found on search engines. Another advantage of the blogs was that it was a comprehensive service, which offered a variety of tools and gadgets that made it versatile and user friendly. Thus blogs have evolved into a powerful social media tool that just cannot be ignored today.

2.10 REAL-TIME & LOCATION-BASED SOCIAL NETWORKING (2008 ONWARDS)

As the communications and Internet technology advanced, the web trend started moving away from the static **pages** to *real-time streams* of status updates as people wanted information that was hot and happening **now**.



Perhaps the best example of such a site is the micro-blogging site **Twitter**, which was created by Jack Dorsey in March 2006. Twitter allowed its users to send and read text-based posts of upto 140 characters, known as **tweets** in real-time, which gained worldwide popularity with over 310 million monthly active users as of March 31, 2016, out of which there are 83 percent active users on mobiles. It is described as the **SMS** of the Internet.



Figure 2.13: Twitter Home Page (Screenshot)

The major acquisitions by Twitter over the years are **TweetDeck** (Web and Desktop Client in 2011), **Posterous** (Blogging Platform in 2012), **Vine** (Video sharing service in 2012), **Periscope app** (Live video streaming in 2015) and **Magic Pony Technology** (Advanced Video Upscaling, Compression and Enhancement in 2016).

The smartphones technology and functionality allowed its users to login to social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and location-based sites like **BrightKite** and update their statuses in real-time from any location. In this manner, they could **check-in** at public places and be seen by other networking members who were physically close by. BrightKite is currently no longer available as they seem to be updating their website. Other similar location-based sites are **Foursquare** and **Gowalla** (bought by Facebook in 2011).

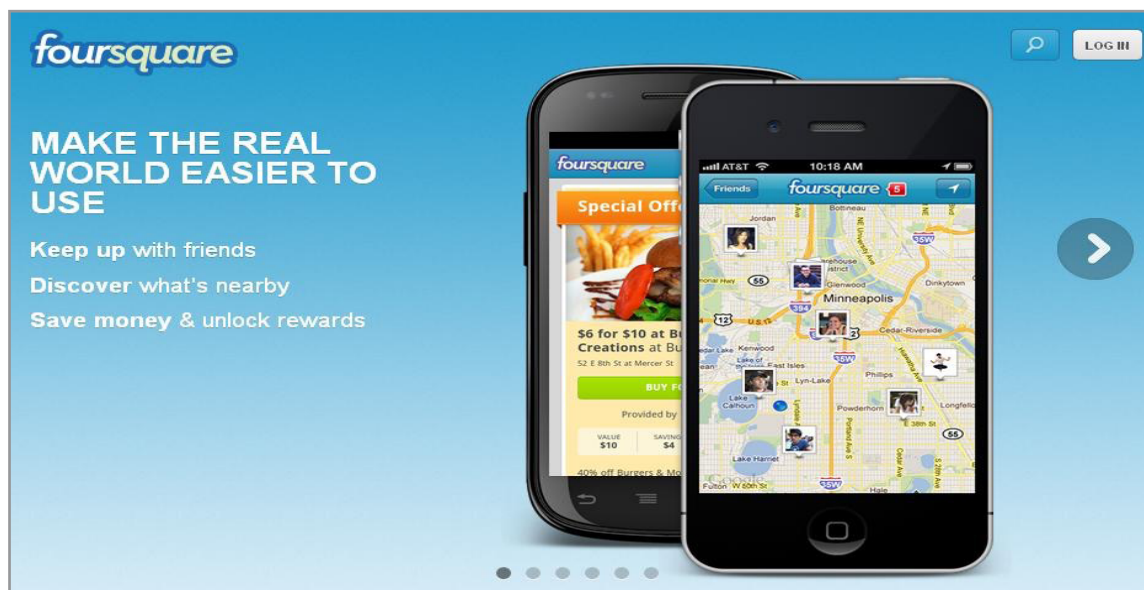


Figure 2.14: Location-Based Networking Site, Foursquare (Screenshot)

2.11 THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORK (2006)

Having seen the success of the public social networking sites and the voluntary engagement of individuals on such platforms, enterprises wondered if such platforms could help them achieve their age-old goals of connect, engage, collaborate and having a community of the executive, employees and subject matter experts on a common platform.

Hitherto, email and intranets were the means to connect employees with each other; the definitive restriction being that only those who were explicitly marked in the emails got the message, thereby leaving it to the initiator to decide who needs that information. It did not open up the communications to a larger audience and precluded interaction.

In the early days, before the internal social media applications started taking shape, employees would often independently use the public social media to interact with co-workers. However, due to the potential of information leakage, the usage of public sites for work related interactions was largely stopped, even though the public platforms continued to be used for customer facing, marketing and after sales activities.

The concerns around security along with the necessity of employees to interact brought forth the implementation of private networks, proprietary or open-source, implemented on company servers and accessible through intranets. IBM and Microsoft had internal blogging communities in the early 2000s. IBM had also started their own internal collaboration project called **Beehive** (now SocialBlue), as did Hewlett-Packard with **WaterCooler**. In recent years, Enterprise Social Networking Software have been developed which can be either hosted on business servers or on the cloud with strong restriction of access to company employees only. Examples include **Connections** from IBM, **Yammer** by Microsoft, **Socialcast** by VMWare and **Tibbr** by TIBCO Software.

An Enterprise Social Network (ESN) in broad terms is an internal and private social network enabling internal communications within a business, while bringing the power of social networks to work towards enhancing collaboration, knowledge sharing and productivity. Akin to the public social networking platforms, a typical ESN would permit one to post status updates, comment on other posts, chat with other users or groups, upload/download files or simply follow/observe the activity on the network.

The ESNs also have the capability of being integrated with the existing ERPs, CRMs and business applications to make the experience more seamless.

2.12 EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MESSAGING (2014)

Modern instant messaging and SMS gained prominence in early and mid-1990s. While SMS (Short Messaging Service) allowed users to send text messages over the telephony network without internet connection, the instant messaging enabled similar functionality via the web. The history of instant messaging dates back to the ICQ era (**See 2.5 IRC, ICQ and Instant Messaging**).

Till the year 2009, despite the instant messengers being available on various mail clients and social networking sites, SMS was still the king of messaging and mobile texting was the key mode of personal communications globally. It did not have any competition and was cheaper than talking on phone. However, in mid-2000 the smartphones began to take over the mobile sphere and offered higher speed internet and Wi-Fi connectivity. This led to a replication of instant messenger on to the mobile devices. The SMS retained its monopoly over messaging till 2012, but in 2013 the social messaging overtook the SMS usage.

The social messaging or the chat applications run on the smartphones and use internet for connectivity. The social messaging apps like **Whatsapp, Kik, WeChat, SnapChat** etc are free to download and use (besides the charges for internet usage) and hence become the preferred form of communication over the alternatives available on phone i.e. SMS and call, both of which are paid services. The non-intrusive nature of social messaging coupled with feasibility of group chats, and file sharing took it to the dominant position. Chat apps have now become multimedia hubs where users can easily share videos, photos, stickers, games, articles, live streams, and more.

The messaging apps have the inherent advantage over the social networking platforms in the way one connects to others. While most SNSs have a ‘*many-to-many*’ connections and activity feed is generally very cluttered and visible to all, the messaging apps offer more privacy and ease of jumping from one group to another or maybe jump off the grid completely without having to leave the app. It is no wonder that sometime in 2015, the number of monthly users on top 4 messaging apps exceeded the number of monthly users on the top 4 social networking sites.

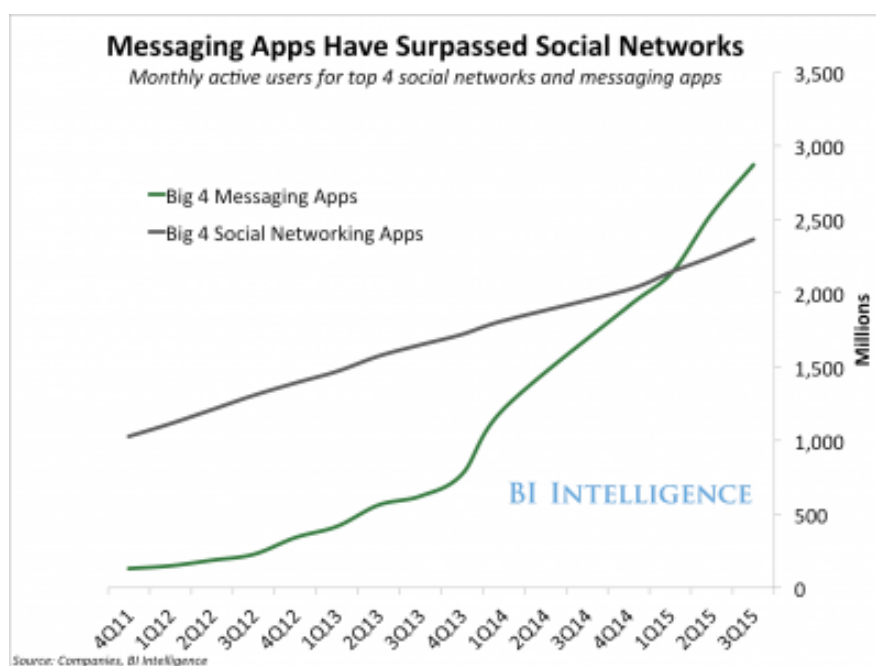


Figure 2.15 A graph depicts the popularity of messaging apps

Business Insider Intelligence released an infographic in April 2016 titled “**Messaging Apps Have Caught Up to Social Networks,**” indicating that major chat apps (**WeChat, Viber, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger**) had more combined monthly active users than the top social networks (**Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram**). See figure 2.15.

As on date there are more than 100 social messaging services and the platforms continue to add new features with the obvious objective of attracting/retaining users and thus the leader position. The next step for these platforms is obviously to monetize the massive user base that they have and we are seeing that happening, though it is still at a very nascent stage. While the current leader WhatsApp has still kept it simple by restricting the monetization efforts to subscription fees, others like **WeChat**, **LINE** and **Kakao** have started implementing their revenue generation strategies by resorting to online purchases, gaming, business subscriptions, online payments etc.

Facebook’s acquisition of **WhatsApp** and that of **Viber** by Rakuten and the **LINE IPO** this year are clear indicators that social messaging is the future and has sufficient revenue generating potential.

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2.13 SOCIAL LIVE STREAMING AND SOCIAL VIRTUAL REALITY (2014–2016)

Online video services have been around for a long time. Think YouTube. The service has been around for years and its one billion users still lap up around 5 billion video views every day. Facebook has started in-line video, videos which can be seen in the same frame and is claiming around 8 billion video views daily, the same number reported by Snapchat. It is clear that video is huge. But why live streaming, one may ask. There are two factors driving it; one, as explained above that an average adult spends about an hour daily, watching video online. An increased rate of publishing will go a long way to feed the appetite of viewers. The second factor is the concept of immediacy as people want to be close to the action and see things as they happen rather than seeing recorded videos that no longer excites one, as it used to earlier. Live streaming meets both these criteria and lets one see events as they unfold.

The concept of live streaming is not new though. It has been happening since mid-2000. There were some events, seminars (webinars), talk shows etc which were being streamed online. There were also many sites streaming live games from NFL, NBA and Soccer, though most of them may have been illegal, in a way.

In 2015, Social Media Networks like Facebook and Twitter took over various **Live Video Streaming platforms** with Twitter developing **Periscope**, and Facebook starting its own version of **Live Social/Status updates**. Periscope is a platform in which influential figures could hold sessions wherein one could debate, start a conversation with fans or simply hold Q and A session that could be compared to a certain web platform (Google Hangouts!). There are other live streaming platforms like **Meerkat Blab** and **Katchme** which have come on their own.

This year, Twitter has taken a leap and has signed up with major sporting leagues like; **MLB** (Major League Baseball), **NFL** (National Football League), **NHL** (National Hockey League) and **NBA** (National Basketball League) to stream games/programs live. Twitter has also tied up with news channels for live streaming programs. Similarly, Facebook has also started their live streaming channel though it was restricted, till very recently, to celebrities only. The platform is now open to everyone.

Twitch is another **Live Streaming platform** exclusively for gamers. It is another example of how various gamers can get through to their audience in real time and can interact with people much more easily, thereby, incorporating parts of social media into their platform. However, people playing games online or simply watching others playing was not enough, hence came **virtual reality**.



Figure 2.16 vTime – Virtual-Reality Sociable Network

Facebook acquired **Oculus VR in 2014** and has been exploring on how it can use the technology in its own area of expertise – Social Media. Facebook calls this **Social VR** and uses an **Oculus Rift headset** to jump inside 360-degree photos and videos to be virtually present in places where one has never been and be able to click selfies within that virtual photo, not just of self, but also be able to meet up with friends and click selfies with them as well. Facebook demonstrated their virtual reality ideas during the Oculus connect, which is the annual developer conference for the Virtual Reality Company.

Starship, a UK based company has come out with **vTime**, which they have dubbed as the world's first **Virtual-Reality Sociable Network**. vTime allows the users to use their Smartphone in conjunction with a virtual reality headset to socialize with friends and family in an ever-growing library of amazing virtual environments. Users can choose their avatars, tinker with them to define themselves i.e. change hair colour, clothes etc and then choose the environments they want to socialize in. What's more, if you have a 360 enabled camera you can even socialize within your own 360 photographs. See figure 2.16.

Since its launch in December 2015, vTime has already been downloaded by hundreds of thousands of individuals across 195 countries. Working over 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi, the free app is currently out on **Gear VR**, **Google Cardboard (for Android)**, and **Oculus Rift (DK2 and CV1)**. Completely cross platform, vTime will be available on all major VR platforms soon, with support for **iOS**, **Daydream**, **PlayStation VR** and **HTC Vive** coming soon.

2.14 AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Augmented Reality (AR) has been around for many years. The superimposed images on the live telecast video of sports are an example of what AR is. While **Virtual Reality** replaces the real world with a virtual world, AR only enhances the real world environment in real time.

AR came into the mainstream in 2012 when **Niantic Inc** (an internal startup within Google), which was exploring into ideas of games that could actually get people out of their house and make people go to places/landmarks, with the use of maps and GPS, came up with Ingress. **Ingress** was an invite only game for the first few months and was released to public in 2013. The game utilised the mechanism available in handheld devices to track your location. The gameplay comprised of two competing factions capturing 'Portals' to create and setup control fields. The game superimposed objects on map and required the players to be physically close to the objects in order to interact with them. Ingress was big on concept but small on scale. Niantic wanted to go big and in 2015, it spun out of Google to form an independent entity and partnered with Nintendo and The Pokémon Company eventually resulting in the inception of a *Global Phenomena* known as **Pokémon GO**.

Pokémon GO (July 2016) used the same formula as Ingress, but in a more planned out manner. It utilised the concept of catching Pokémon in the outside world by wandering out of your homes and hunting for them, like the original game demanded. Players can create their own avatar, which is displayed on the map indicating the player's current geographical location and the avatar moves on the map as the player moves. Features like Pokéstops, and Pokémon Gyms are superimposed on the map, which players can visit to get eggs, berries, potions etc. As with Ingress, the game requires players to physically travel to play and the items from Pokémon world were rendered along with the live world picture through the camera.

While gaming has taken the lead in breathing a fresh life into AR, other social media platforms are exploring integration of AR. The technology now exists for devices to recognize real world objects and accordingly provide information to the user. Imagine pointing your device at an object in a shopping store and immediately getting information like specifications, price and maybe even see a promotional video. You could easily be looking at the garden in front of your house and see an earlier video of your child playing around superimposed on the same setting.

Some social networking sites already use AR to allow users to leave messages, photographs, etc at locations for others to find. **Snapchat** and **TeePeedU** are already having an AR component on their networks. Eventually, the aim is to seamlessly integrate the real and digital world.

3 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

In the previous two chapters we tried to understand the term “Social Media” in all its glory, and saw the many broad definitions that exist to try and explain what it truly means. We also learned a little bit about the history of the various aspects of social media and how it evolved over the years with changes in technology, to become what it is today.

Social media has impacted us in more ways than one, not just on an individual level, but also the society, the way we do business and politics. The way we connect to each other, have conversations online, conduct business, maintain relationships or simply gather information and interact with others has changed drastically, thus affecting our social behavioral patterns. Social media can have a strong influence on a person/group/or community through the dissemination of information via social networking channels, thereby having the power to influence the way people think or act or react to a stimulus.

As you can see, from the previous chapter, that social media exists in various types and forms. There are social networking sites, bookmarking sites, dating sites, photo sites, video sites, blogging platforms, micro-blogging platforms, discussion forums, Q&A sites etc. So how does one try to classify them? How do these sites affect us as an individual, as groups or as society? How do we interact on these sites and how do we use them effectively for conducting business? What impact do social media have on corporate and their business strategies? These and many other such relevant questions need to be answered.

Over the years many studies were conducted to try to classify and understand the social media, its functionality and characteristics with respect to the social behavior of people who used them.

3.1 CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Kaplan and Haenlein classified the social media into six different types based on their media research and published it in an article in **Business Horizons** (2010). They classified the social media as:

1. Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
2. Blogs and Microblogs (e.g. Twitter)
3. Content Communities (e.g. Youtube)
4. Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook)
5. Virtual Game Worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)
6. Virtual Social Worlds (e.g. Second Life)

3.2 HONEYCOMB FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTIONALITY

Kietzmann et al. (2011) studied the social media activities on the Internet and found that the behavior of the consumers on the Internet had changed from simply expending content, reading it, watching it, buying and selling products or services to now take a more active part by utilizing various platforms like content sharing sites, blogs, social networking sites and wikis – to create, modify, share and discuss Internet content. According to their article, this represents the social media phenomenon, which now has the capability to significantly impact a firm's reputation, its sales and even survival for that matter.

In spite of this phenomenon, many executives are still ignoring this form of social media simply because they do not understand it, or the various forms it can take, and even how to engage with it and learn.



Figure 3.1: Definition of Each Functionality

Thus, to help the organisations to engage with, know and understand the social media better, they came up with a honeycomb framework (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) that defines the social media by using seven functional building blocks, namely: **Identity, Conversations, Sharing, Presence, Relationships, Reputation, and Groups.**

Using this honeycomb framework they have tried to explain the implications that each block can have for how firms should engage with the social media. The figure shows how different social media activities are defined by the extent to which they focus on some or all of these blocks. For example – **LinkedIn** focuses primarily on Identity, Reputation and Relationships, whereas **Youtube** focuses primarily on Sharing, Conversations, Groups and Reputation.

In this manner, one can study the focus of each social media platform to be able to understand it better and be able to use and engage it in the right manner to get the maximum leverage out of it.

Kietzmann et al., in the article published in *Business Horizons*, have explained in detail how the framework can be used to compare and contrast the functionalities and implications of different social media activities and also presented guidelines for how firms should develop strategies for monitoring, understanding, and responding to the different social media activities. (Refer to original article: *Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P., & Silvestre, B.S. 2011. Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media. Business Horizons, 54, 241–251.*)

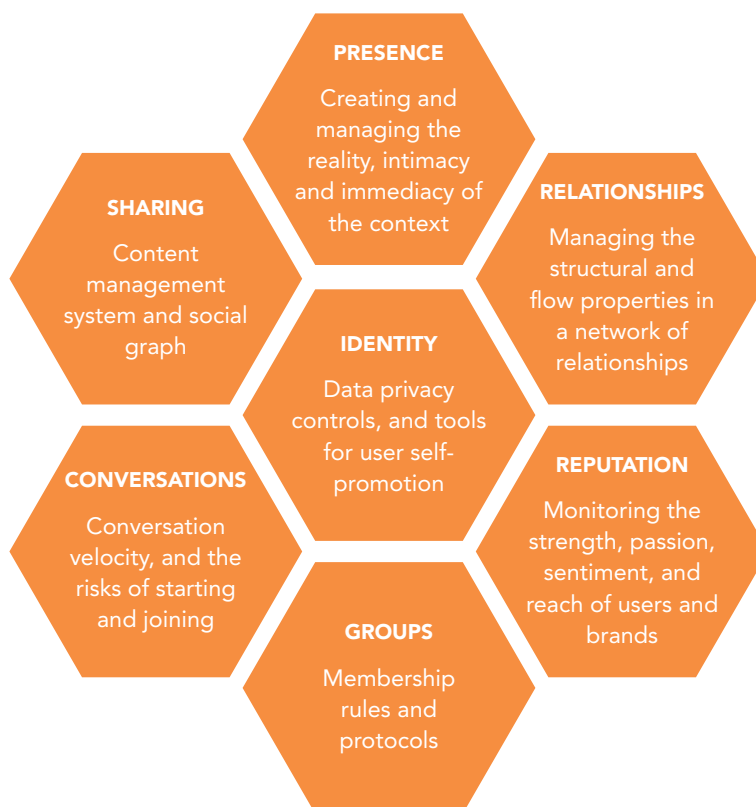


Figure 3.2: Examples of Each Functionality

3.3 THE CONVERSATION PRISM 4.0 (TCP) BY BRIAN SOLIS

Brian Solis (a principal analyst at Altimeter Group), an anthropologist, a digital analyst and a futurist developed the **Conversation Prism (TCP)** in 2008, which is a visual map of the **social media landscape**. His study in digital ethnography is an on-going one that tracks dominant and promising social networks and organises them by how they are used in everyday life.

Brian partnered with Jesse Thomas of JESS3 to bring a unique perspective to the social media ecosystem. Their collective effort in creative design and thoughtful approach helped to make the Conversation Prism the standard illustration for all things social media. As of 2013, the **Conversation Prism** has gone through four different versions with the **version 4.0** marketing the most significant change since 2009.



Figure 3.3 The Conversation Prism Version 4.0 by Brian Solis & Jess3
Image Source: conversationprism.com

So why was it called a **Prism** instead of a colour wheel? He defined it as a *Prism* in the traditional sense of the word, as a prism disperses white light into a spectrum of colours. In this case, the **white light** is the focused stream of conversations that are often grouped, but not separated by **voice, context, source, or outcome**. This beam of dialogue is blasted into a spectrum of discernible light to **see, hear, learn and adapt**. Thus, he has literally brought “conversations to light.”

As can be seen in figure 3.3, the centre of this Conversation Prism comprises of four concentric **halos**, with “**You**” being **Halo 1**. That is the centre of all conversations, with **Brand You**. The idea here is that you should explore all the social networks and opportunities that would work best for you (your brand) so that you can gain or introduce value. Here, **Value** could be defined in terms of not just traditional ROI, but in terms of the brand resonance or equity, relationships, leadership, intelligence etc.

Halo 2: Vision. Purpose. Value. Commitment. Transparency

Once you have successfully identified the role that you wish to play in social media, you will need a meaningful engagement within those social networks to bring about effective results. Focusing on this aspect in the **Halo 2** are **five pillars**:

What is your **vision** for social media, the **purpose** or reason for being social and if it can be justified logically against other investment opportunities? What is the **value** you intend to deliver and how will you assess and communicate this value towards the social interactions and relationships that are involved here? However, it is also imperative to understand the level of **commitment** that would be necessary to provide and gain value as you scale, so you need to be careful before investing in social media. With the advance in technology, the networks and nodes of doing business are becoming more human and information is readily available at our fingertips thereby bringing in more **transparency** in all that we do or say.

Halo 3: Brand, Lines of business and Corporate Functions

Social is a way of conducting business functions today, be it **HR, Sales and Marketing, Communications, Brand Development, Service or Community**. All these functions are essential to mature business perspective from a command and control mentality to that of engagement and openness.

Halo 4: Always Be Improving (ABI) – Listen. Learn. Adapt.

The last of the four concentric circles in the Conversation Prism reminds us of the importance of **listening** in a conversation, and in doing so being able to **learn** and **adapt** so as to improve all that we do inside or outside the company, thus, being in the “**Always Be Improving**” (ABI) mode.

Therefore, each of the concentric circles is designed to work together, to help you improve strategies and results to improve the way you work, how you build relationships with employees and customers, the ability to create and improve better products, services and experiences, and overall, the role you play and the stature you earn as a result. (Source: briansolis.com/2013/07/you-are-at-the-center-of-the-conversation-prism)

3.4 SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE 2016 BY FRED CAVAZZA

To understand the social media even better, **Fred Cavazza** (Web Consultant and French Blogger) creates an infographic each year (from 2008) to illustrate effectively the different social media platforms that are being used most, their diversity and their uses. Fred Cavazza describes the social media as a rich ecosystem that is perpetually evolving. In the previous edition of this book, we had covered the 2011 version of the social media landscape.

For the past four years Fred Cavazza used a circle to represent the social media landscape, but it started showing its limitations due to the continuous rise in social messaging platforms. This is the reason why he switched to a hexagon for the 2016 version, in order to integrate messaging and collaborating services. See Figure 3.5.

Fred Cavazza defines social media as – “*a set of online services to publish and share content, to exchange messages of any type, to host conversations, to collaborate and allow individuals and groups to gather for personal or professional purposes.*” This definition is illustrated by this 6 poles diagram (figure 3.4):

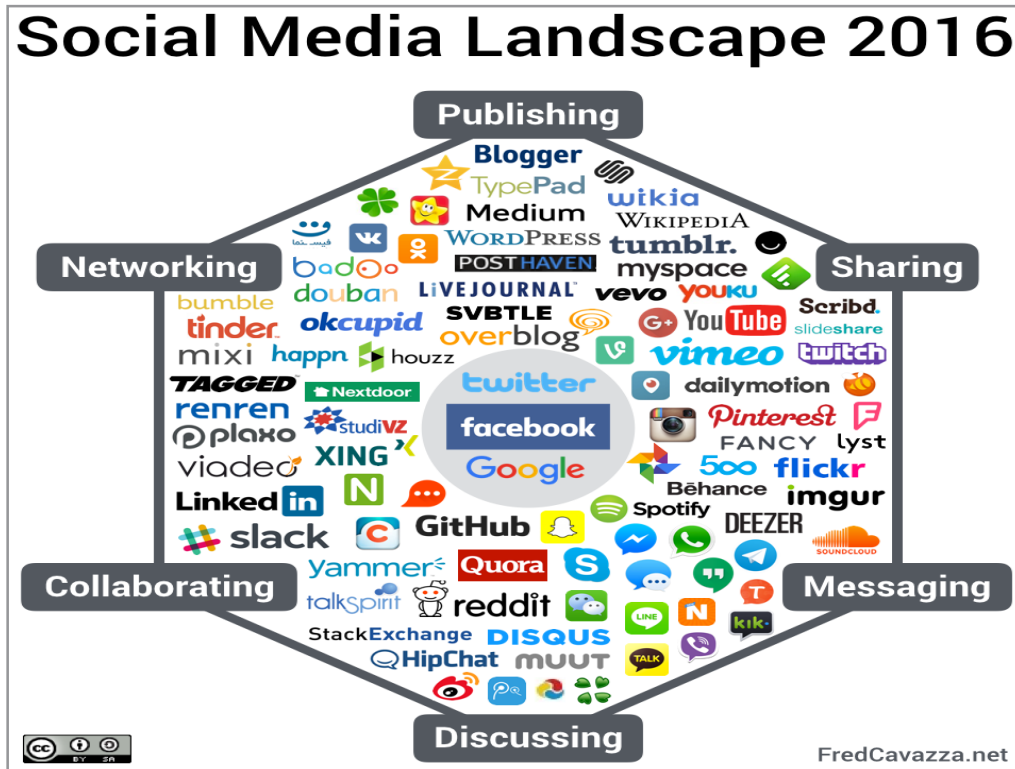


Figure 3.4 Social Media Landscape 2016 by Fred Cavazza
 Image Source: FredCavazza.net

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Facebook, Twitter and Google form the centre of this ecosystem as three dominant players and multiple services orbiting around them, because they appeal to a particular audience (ex: Snapchat for teens) or a particular service (ex: Twitch for live gaming). According to Fred Cavazza, this ecosystem can be broken down to 6 main usages: **(quoted below verbatim, with permission, from <http://www.fredcavazza.net/2016/04/23/social-media-landscape-2016>)**

- **Publishing** – with blog platforms (*WordPress, Blogger, TypePad, Medium, PostHaven, Live Journal, Subtle, Over-Blog, SquareSpace*), wikis (*Wikipedia, Wikia*) and hybrid publishing / sharing services like *Tumblr on MySpace*.
- **Sharing** – with video platforms (*YouTube, Vevo, Vimeo, Vine, Dailymotion, China's YouKu* and new live streaming services like **Twitch** and **Periscope**), document platforms (*SlideShare, Scribd*), photo platforms (*Instagram, Flickr, Imgur, 500px*), picture platforms (*Pinterest, Fancy, Lyst, Ello, Behance*), music platforms (*Spotify, Deezer, SoundCloud*), links platforms (*Delicious, Scoop.it*) and places platforms (*Foursquare, Swarm*)
- **Messaging Platforms** – from western companies (*WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, iMessage, Hangouts, Telegram, Skype, SnapChat, Kik, Viber, Tango*) and asian ones (*WeChat, Line, KakaoTalk, Nimbuzz*)
- **Conversation platforms** – (*Github, Quora, Reddit, 4chan, Disqus, Muut*), and there asian equivalents (*Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, Tieba Baidu*)
- **Professional Communcation Tools** – (*Slack, HipChat, Chime, TalkSpirit, Caliber*) and collaboration ones (*Yammer, Chatter*)
- **Professional social networks** – (*LinkedIn, Viadeo, Xing, Plaxo*), niche social networks (*Ning, Nextdoor, Houzz*), western and eastern mainstream social networks (*Tagged, StudiVZ, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facenama*) as well as asian one (*Qzone, RenRen, Mixi, Kaixin001, Douban, Pengyou*), and last but not least, dating services (*Badoo, OKcupid, Tinder, Bumble, Happn*).

As you can see, this diagram is stacked with numerous services from all over the world. Yes indeed, China is a particular market, but it is important to remind you that social media is not only about Facebook or Google, there are many local players. The most notable fact is the relentless rise of social messaging platforms, especially the ones owned by Facebook (Messenger and WhatsApp process **60 billion messages** a day, three times more than SMS). **(Source: <https://fredcavazza.net/2016/04/23/social-media-landscape-2016>)**



Figure 3.5 Illustrates the Limitations of the Shape in Previous Four Years Infographics

Image Source: fredcavazza.net

4 BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INDIVIDUALS

The social media has come a long way, as you have seen in the preceding chapters. The way people communicate with each other and hold conversations is on a completely different level than what it was, say, a decade ago. There is no way you can deny it anymore.

The Internet, web and mobile technologies have made it possible for people and businesses to have a wider reach due to its global nature, and therefore, both – individuals and businesses for their respective benefits; can use the social media effectively.

For individuals the benefits are largely experiential and the social media is an avenue to keep connected with their network, communicate and gather information.

- **Personal Use:** Individuals can use the social media for personal reasons, which may be for keeping in touch with the latest technology, news, gossip, and happenings around the world or in their own locality. Social media is also fast replacing the traditional means of communications. In this day and age, it would be hard to find a person who does not use the e-mail facility to send messages to friends/colleagues and/or for official purposes or use the social media for collaboration.

Similarly, people also use the chat or instant message feature that's in-built in most email clients to talk to people in real-time. One can also make phone calls directly using Skype or other e-mail clients like Gmail, video call on WhatsApp (latest feature) and also have conference calls.

Individuals can use the social media to keep in touch with their various hobbies, like music, movies, sports, gaming etc. Social media not only allows one to find other people with similar interests but also allows for easy upload and download of media files with the help of media sites like BitTorrent. Social media users can also indulge in social gaming i.e. online gaming activities, in real-time with friends or strangers and challenge them.

- **Explore Your Creativity:** The social media is available in many forms, as explained in the previous chapter. People can use this media to explore their own creativity, for example, a person who loves to write can create their own blogs and explore their writing talents. Blogs are the best way for individuals to express themselves, their views and opinions on any and all subjects. In this manner, a person can establish their expertise in their particular niche subject by using the blog effectively. There are several other writing platforms that allow people to submit content on their site and reward them in different ways. Due to the very nature of social media it is easy to reach a large audience and find an interested readership.

Similarly, one can use photo-sharing sites to upload and store their personal photos with all their privacy intact or selectively share it with others. Most photo sharing websites incorporate photo editing tools which can be used to edit/enhance the photos for personal use. There are also video sites that allow you to upload your videos and edit them to create new videos or films, and earn revenue too.

As you can see, the Internet is a rich medium today, and so one can easily find something to suit his/her interests or hobbies that would help you to be more creative and in the process learn more about it.

- **Social Interaction:** Human beings love to socialise and interact with each other. The social media enables people to interact with each other using the highly accessible and scalable communication techniques that are available today, in the form of websites and the mobile phones.

The various social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc work on the principle of social interaction. A person can add/invite more friends or colleagues into their network and connect, share, and communicate with them in real-time or send messages. Using these networking sites is very easy as they are free to register with and one can easily locate long-lost friends and keep in touch with them. One can also interact with strangers who have similar interests and make new friends with people from all around the world, which also include many dating sites.

People use these networking sites along with popular social messaging apps, like Whatsapp, these days for their daily conversations today. Thus it has become very easy for people to get feedback, information or advice regarding products/services or companies from their friends in their network. Therefore, any individual has the power to *influence* others in his/her network, which has been termed as “*Social Influence*”.

- **Get Empowered:** The social media has succeeded in putting the power back into the consumer's hands. As mentioned in the paragraph above, any individual can have a “*social influence*” by virtue of his/her social interactions on the web or via mobile technologies.

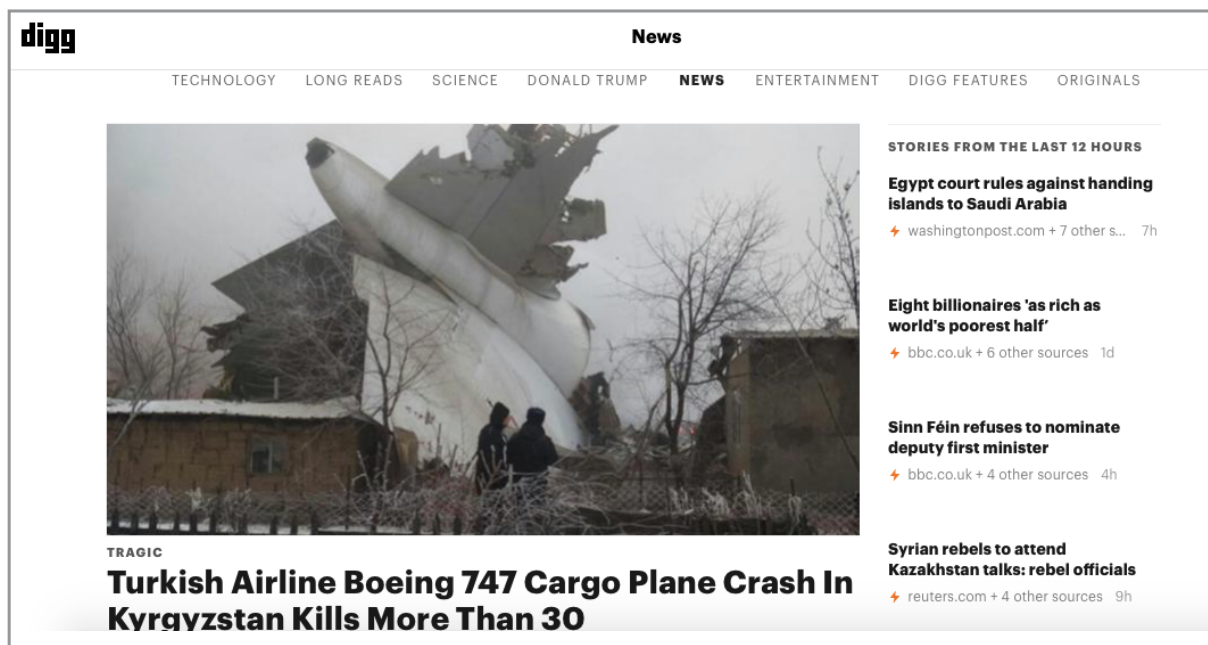


Figure 4.1: Top Stories in Digg (Social Bookmarking Site) (Screenshot)

Most people share the experiences that they had with any product/service/holidays etc with their friends or families. And since most conversations, these days, take place on the social networking sites, many more people within the network get to hear of it as well. If the experiences were bad, the whole network is made aware of it. Thus, it is very easy for a single person to impact the reputation of a company or brand online.

The social networking sites also allow “*tagging*” and “*sharing*” of content among groups or within your own network of friends or lists, which may cause it to become **viral** in a matter of minutes. It is the fastest way to spread any content on the social media. Thus, photos that are tagged, or links/videos that are shared on networking sites can become viral on the Internet. And once that happens, there is no way to stop its spread!

Similarly, people can also share links/web pages/videos or any other content on the various **bookmarking sites**. The best example of a bookmarking site is probably **Digg** and its impact on the Internet. When a person likes a particular article or news, they can Digg it to share it with others. Thus when the same article or news gets “Dugg” by many people, it is pushed to the top of the site as the “**top story**” and will be read by all who see it. Therefore, bookmarking sites also have a major role in causing content to become **viral**.

Social media platforms are now integrating multiple facets in a single location. One can now **create and manage events, order services, buy products** or even **make payments** from the platform of their choice.

Thus, the social media is **empowering** the people to “*act, speak and be heard*”!

5 BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESSES

The reality of individuals getting closely connected with each other through the social media (as seen above) cannot be ignored by any business, whether it is a large corporation or an SME. Customer has always been a king and businesses are constantly trying to reach out and seek attention of their consumers for new leads, feedback, research and service. Ever since social media has become the new destination for millions of people, it is the perfect platform for businesses to carry out or support some of their business functions online.

Today, more than 90 percent of the adult online population is using social media, which includes many of your customers who are networking with others. No business can ignore social media anymore. If you are, you are not only losing an opportunity to enhance your business, but your absence may also be causing damage to your brand and reputation. Social influence has always played a major role in the buying decisions of customers. But now more and more people are relying on the social media online to seek referrals and recommendations from others, asking / answering questions and sharing their experiences. It is not only the big multi-national or national brands, the phenomenon can be seen taking place at the local level; theatres, restaurants, etc, are all being discussed on the social media.

Businesses usually refer to the social media as a consumer-generated media (CGM). Social media can be differentiated from industrial or traditional media like magazines, newspapers, television and film, as they are relatively inexpensive, easily accessible and enable anyone (private individuals) to publish or access information.

The social media has some inherent properties which make it much more powerful than the traditional media.

- **Accessibility:** The social media is easily accessible and takes minimal or no costs to use. Social media is easy to use and does not require any special skills, knowledge to use. It is absolutely simple to connect with others and be a part of communities. Therefore anyone with online access can use the Social Media to initiate or participate in the conversations. In a sense, everyone is now empowered to speak up.
- **Speed:** The content that you create on the social media is available to everyone in your network/forum/community as soon as you publish it. You can communicate with your audience without any external factor affecting the delivery of your message. The responses are also near instantaneous and thus you can have a dialogue, which is almost in real-time.

- **Interactivity:** Social media affords a two way or multiple communication channels. Users can interact with each other; ask questions, discuss products/services, share opinions and anything else they might be interested in doing.
- **Longevity/volatility:** Social media content remains accessible for a long time, maybe forever, because of the nature of the medium. In addition to this the content can be edited/updated anytime. So, if a user likes a particular product and says so in the social media, it is not a permanent positive vote for the product; the user can always go back and change his opinion anytime.
- **Reach:** The Internet offers an unlimited reach to all content available. Anyone can access it from anywhere and anyone can reach, potentially, everyone. Social media offers the same facility to all the users who can share anything with anyone they like.

Social media has opened up new avenues for people to engage with each other and with the content available on the Internet. The social interaction of the yore, severely restricted by various boundaries, has now been taken online, opening up a world of new possibilities. The popularity of Smart phones has added yet another very lucrative avenue for all businesses to engage directly with their target audiences via the mobile messaging apps and has helped to improve their marketing strategies remarkably.

Social media offers opportunities to a business to connect and engage with its customers, build long lasting valuable relationships, generate new leads, build awareness, educate people and above all manage reputation.

There are hosts of benefits, for businesses, of participating in the social media. Non-participation on the other hand could be eating away your market share and reputation. Given below are some of the principle benefits of social media for businesses. They are as follows:-

- **Online Branding:** Every business wants to be known as a brand, which is, in effect, its “*identity*” that may be represented by a *name*, *logo*, *colour schemes* or the *tag line*. But, the term “*branding*” goes much beyond just these and is in fact a culmination of the individual “*identity*” of the business, how it differs from its competitors and why a buyer should come to it.

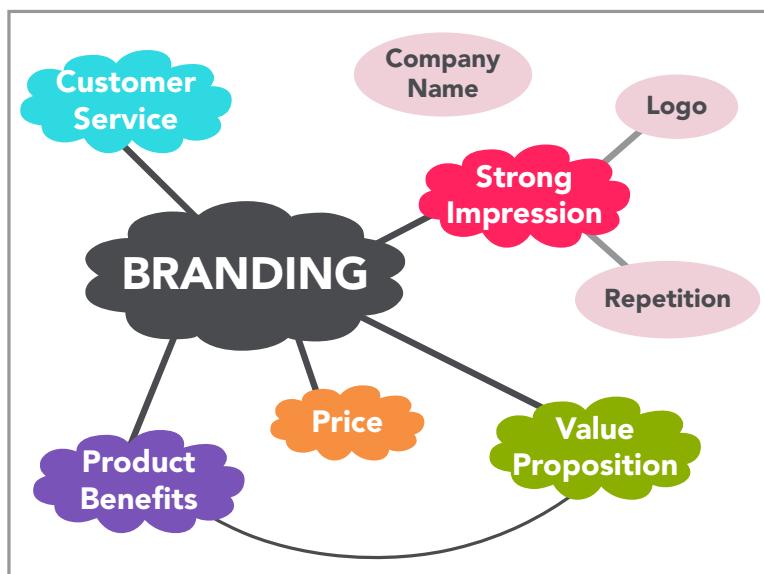


Figure 5.1: Branding (Image Source: Internet)

Developing a brand online can be done by incorporating the name, logo, colour schemes and tagline in the company website or blog prominently and also using the same “identity” repeatedly on all other profile pages that the business may have on any other social media or wherever else it’s possible.

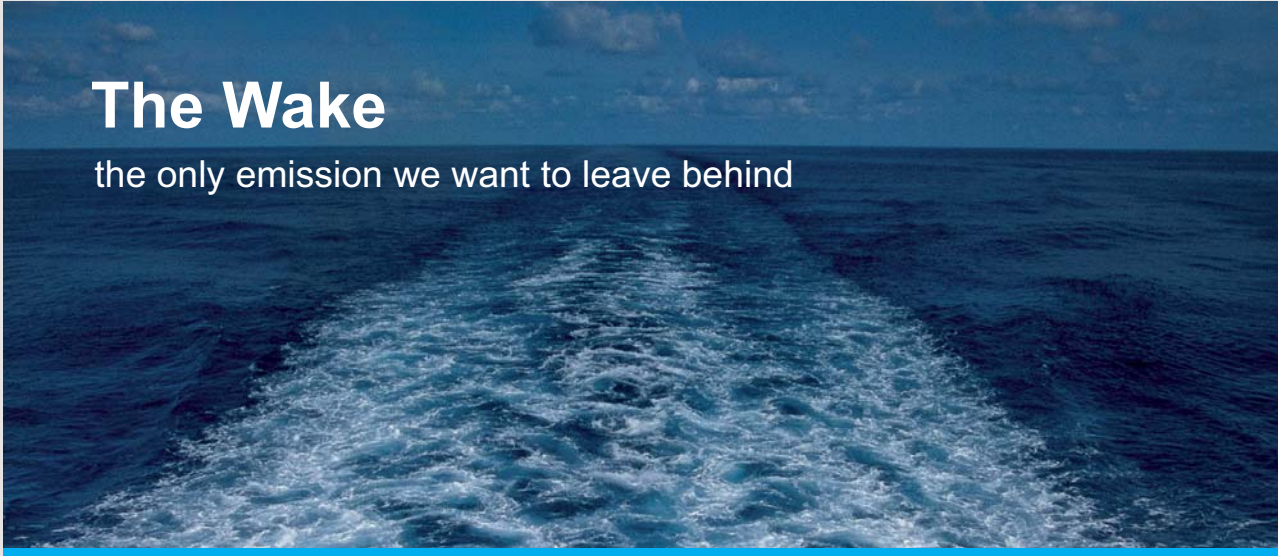
The main aim or goal to establish branding online for any business is to remain “visible” to people and to have an active online presence. Therefore, by establishing your online presence in the social media (in the form of profile pages on networking sites) and keeping your fans/followers updated/engaged you are creating visibility for your brand and can reach newer markets and customers.

To remain visible, it is essential for the business to take part in conversations in the social media, interact with the people directly and engage with them. Establish expertise in your field by imparting knowledge, educating or making people aware of your brand value by taking part in discussion groups/forums or Q&A sites or write about your products and services on your blog etc.

Branding also requires that you use “your own voice” everywhere consistently, so that people can identify you and your brand. It is all about delivering your message clearly to the people, establishing credibility for what you say or do, connecting emotionally with your target audience, motivating the buyer and generating loyal customers. The social media provides a very good platform for all businesses (big or small) to network and reach out to their target audience, connect with them directly and generate trust by listening to what they have to say.

The social media can be used effectively by the businesses to create a strong and lasting impression upon the minds of the people to make it memorable. In the end, how people perceive your brand is more important than what *you* think it is, and if they like your brand they will keep coming back to it!

- **Marketing:** Social Media Marketing is the way businesses and non-profit organisations use the social media effectively to build relationships through trust, useful content, helpfulness and authority.



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Figure 5.2: Social Media Marketing (Image Source: Internet)

The social media has become a platform that is easily accessible to the people with Internet connection at home and offices. Therefore, it is the ideal platform that can be used by all businesses to reach out to their target audience for marketing, advertising, selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing and sales promotion. The explosion of mobile apps now facilitates immediacy in connecting with the consumer.

The social media has grown and evolved to impact and change the way organizations communicate in today's scenario. The emergence of the Web 2.0 on the Internet provided a set of tools that allowed people to build, collaborate, share, connect and interact with individuals and businesses online.

Thus, businesses can effectively use social media marketing programs that centre on efforts to create content (e.g. Business Blogs) that attracts attention and readership and encourages the readers to share it with their social networks on the various networking sites or even social bookmarking sites.

By networking and engaging with the customers on various social media platforms (e.g. comments on your blogs, Facebook, Twitter etc.), you can influence them, promote products/services and give wider exposure to your business. You can also use the discussions to get the word out on new products/developments and create a buzz.

The social media is probably the most inexpensive and effective tool for all the integrated marketing and advertising campaigns for a business online. Being able to reach a target audience directly and also have a global reach at the same time makes the marketing and advertising strategies much more focused; to give a better ROI than the traditional means, improve the sales, increase the customer base and also generate inbound leads.

The major social media marketing platforms used by businesses (big or small) are Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter and Blogs. When speaking of social media marketing, the reach and effectiveness of **mobile marketing**, that includes location-based marketing, cannot be ignored. Mobile marketing is a trend that's hot and happening in the social media landscape.

- **Building Relationships:** For a business to be successful it needs satisfied customers, and for a customer to be satisfied they need good customer care and service. A satisfied customer is a loyal customer. So how can a business provide good customer service, care or support?

The answer lies in *communication* and *Listening*. What better way to communicate directly with customers than the social media? Businesses can use the social media to build long lasting relationships with customers by engaging them at a level comfortable to them, answering queries, understanding their problems and helping them out. They can use the social media as an effective communications tool to provide support, care and service to customers directly at their fingertips.

Using the various social media tools available, businesses can send soft-sell messages or newsletters directly to their prospects or customers via email, direct mail, phone calls or even face-to-face communication. Offering special discounts, rewards/freebies and sponsored events will help to build better relationships with your customers online. Many platforms are now working on the option of selling directly from the platforms.

Offering good customer service is the key point in building good relationships, trust and generating loyalty. And the best way to do that is by *listening* rather than talking. The social media offers a good platform for the customers to talk about their experiences with a particular service or product, and so it would do well for businesses to start *listening* to these conversations that happen online.

Customers need to feel that they have a relationship with the firm and that they are important for the business, they need to feel connected so that if they have a complaint or a problem, they would know who to call or where to go. Customers would feel more comfortable if they could approach a particular person with their problems (human touch) rather than having to go through faceless call centres or sending mails to unknown entities (in the name of the company).

Businesses can offer customer services or support from their own blogs or website thereby encouraging them to interact directly with the staff or customer care personal to address their grievances, if any, rather than voicing them out on a public platform. The best way to do is by encouraging customers to leave a feedback on the site via forms/surveys/polls etc.

- **Word-of-Mouth / Networking:** Social Media is the new *Word-of-Mouth*. Since people are all inter-connected with each other, a small mention in any of your audience's profile goes a long way in spreading the word about your business/product. Let your customers become your marketing agents.

The social networking sites have made it easier for people to spread news, gossip, information etc like wild fire. Thus businesses can use this tool effectively to spread the word about its own products/services by encouraging people to "like" its page, share its content or talk about it (as mentioned in the above segment on social media marketing). The best place to start the ball rolling is through your own list of family and friends.

Businesses can open profile pages on various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Blogs, LinkedIn and YouTube (just to name a few) and spread the word about their presence on these sites to gather more fans or followers.

Social media allows you to leverage your network to the benefit of your business. You can find and connect with the new people in your line of business i.e. vendors, suppliers and contractors, and start a mutually beneficial relationship.

- **Online Reputation Management:** *"The practice of monitoring the Internet reputation of a person, brand or business, with the goal of suppressing negative mentions entirely or pushing them lower on search engine results pages to decrease their visibility is known as online reputation management (ORM)."*

In order to do this, one has to keep track of what is being written about the client or business on the Internet and then offset the negativity by tackling the source directly and addressing the issue (suppress sentiments) or promote positive and neutral content by utilizing sophisticated offline and online techniques.

Ever since people got the power to express themselves freely on the Internet via the social media, it has increased the amount of user-generated content on the Internet thereby affecting the search engine results in a more meaningful way for businesses. Thus any negative sentiments expressed on the Internet may show up higher on the search result pages causing harm to the reputation of the business that's been mentioned.

Businesses can use online promotions through new content creation, get involved in the social web sphere via the blogs, forums and social networking, promote existing positive content and build social profiles in order to manage their online reputation and help to keep it positive.

However, the best way for any business to manage its online reputation is by using the various social *monitoring* and *listening* tools that are available online to keep a check on what's being said about the company, brand and products or services. **(Refer to Chapter 7 on Social Media Management Tools).**



Figure 5.3: Online Reputation Management (People Are Talking, Are You Listening?)
(Image Source: Internet)

- **Community Building:** A company or business can use the social media to build a community around its products/business. Vibrant communities create loyalty and encourage discussions, which can contribute towards business development and improvement.

A community is basically a closely-knit group of people who form around a common interest. There are many social media platforms that allow people to form communities or groups or even forums like for example Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and other community oriented sites.

Social media like blogs and social networking sites helps a business to engage with its customers and create a community around its brand. One can also use online chat rooms, discussion groups and online events to build a community. Building communities helps the business by providing them with a highly targeted group of customers to whom they can market their products or services. It makes the customers feel involved with the brand and therefore will be more likely to return to your site.

However, communities need not only be of prospective customers or existing ones, a community can be of professionals from the same field or different fields as well. Taking part in such communities also helps in expanding your business reach, establishing yourself as an expert in your field and getting new business or partnerships.

- **Lending a Human Face to the Business:** More and more customers are sick of the marketing jargon and are not comfortable dealing with faceless businesses. People like to deal with people and participation in social media helps to lend a face to your business.

There are many other benefits of using the social media for business and one simply cannot ignore it anymore. *If you are not online, you are not in line!*

6 SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Ask people what social media is and in all likelihood you will get the answer, “**Facebook and Twitter**”. These are the folks who have not really understood the social media and are in all probability using the said platforms for their personal use. They are not really concerned about meeting any goals or objectives and their participation on social media is more for simple entertainment or communications with their contacts. Therefore, if one was to suggest the concept of social media management to them, they would wonder why anyone would need it, they are doing pretty fine by themselves, aren't they?

We have already explained the social media and how individuals and businesses can use it effectively, for their benefit. As we have explained earlier, people use the social media to listen, interact, engage and collaborate with each other. In order to do this, there are many social venues existing and more cropping up all over the Internet and if one wants to take part on multiple platforms it becomes very time consuming and labor-intensive process to effectively **track, converse, monitor** and **manage** the activity on all platforms.



Figure 6.1: Social Media

Being active on social media does not mean just opening profile pages on various networks. The effective management of the social media, especially for businesses, includes **engagement, monitoring** and **measurement** of the **social media metrics**. All this requires time, effort and knowledge and that is the reason businesses either do not get into social media or fail at it.

A big company may have the resources, time, knowledge and money to dedicate a whole team towards managing their social media endeavours online, but many small or medium business enterprises do not have that kind of resources or even the know-how and therefore have to rely on an outside source, in this case a “*social media management company*” to take care of all or part of its social media campaigns online.

Therefore, **Social Media Management** involves the management of entire or part of the social media campaign for the business, which may include developing the social media strategy, implementing and monitoring it on a daily basis while also measuring and analysing the effects of the activities and generating reports.

6.1 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT SOCIAL MEDIA

With so many options existing out there, one needs to carefully identify which all social media platforms to use. This will largely depend on the purpose of using the social media and platform where target audience is. For an individual if all of his/her friends were on, let's say, platform A, it does not make sense to put in much effort on other platforms, unless one is looking for new friends or people with similar interests.

Similarly, for businesses the selection would again depend on where their target consumers are. For a local brand it would make sense to identify the social media most prevalent in the locality and concentrate the efforts on that platform. Then there are social media that are media specific, like those for video and photos. Therefore, depending on the nature of the business and the content that it can produce, you may like to consider those media in addition to the networking websites. One could also use the various social media infographics or the Honey Comb Framework, as discussed in the earlier chapter (Understanding Social Media), to identify the relevant platforms according to the business needs for effective social media strategy.

6.2 PROFILE CREATION

After identifying the suitable platforms, one needs to create profiles on them. Your profile is what introduces you on the site and hence it should be developed carefully. Also remember that most social media make the user profiles searchable by regular search engines and hence if your profile describes you or your business well the people searching for information on the Internet will see you.

All the relevant details should be provided in the profile. On most sites, the profile page can be customized to reflect the company's brand, logo, colour schemes etc. Relevant keywords should be used to describe the business or profession, wherever indicated. A business can also provide its contact details and add a location map, if possible. In short, if a profile page looks interesting and can provide all the necessary information and important details about the business, then it is likely to come up in the search engines and attract new users to the page.

6.3 EXPANDING THE NETWORK

Once a business has jumped onto the social media bandwagon, it needs to expand its social and business network. To start with, it is a good idea to get friends/ family and existing consumers onboard. Each one of them will have a network of their own and the moment they step into yours all the others in their network are alerted about your presence. The expanded network thus will help in delivering your message to a larger audience. If you create sufficiently interesting content/updates they might even consider connecting with you or your business.

Besides the above, one can also expand his network by taking active part in interest groups/ forums. Be a part of discussions in your area of interest, comment on other people's views, show your expertise in the subject and make new friends. If you do a good job here you will find people more inclined to connect with you. The idea here is to build a community around your business and the more people you have talking about your brand the more visibility and reach your business gets.

6.4 ENGAGEMENT

After developing a network and gathering a fan following, it is important to engage these followers in discussions or conversations. They are following you or your business for a reason. Therefore, the business needs to create interesting content, respond to its followers, take care of their concerns, offer advice, educate them or just thank them, but don't spam them. They need to know that you care. It would be wise to remember that they have chosen to connect with you and can easily choose to do otherwise. For this reason, try not to become active on too many social networks since handling the engagement might get too difficult and you will not be able to focus on any platform.

6.5 MONITORING AND ANALYSIS

Whether you know it or not people are already talking about you or your business in various social media. This will only increase further when you make your presence visible online. It is up to you to find out what people are saying about your business and respond to them or take corrective action to prevent a negative sentiment from brewing and spreading. *Listening* to your consumers can give you deep insights not only about them but also about your business or products. Again, depending on the social media goals, listening on the social media helps to keep track of conversations, assist in customer service, marketing, finding sentiment about the brand or products, consumer demographics and the primary influencers in your network.

Social media monitoring can give you an amazing amount of information, which actually can easily overwhelm you if your objectives are not clear. This information needs to be analysed to extract actionable information that can assist in improving some process of your business.

All the above and more can be accomplished with the use of several sophisticated **social media tools** that are available online to help you **track, monitor, engage, access** and **analyse** the social media efforts and are discussed in the next chapter.

6.6 WHY BUSINESSES NEED SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Most businesses and companies do not have a clear strategic picture of their social media endeavours or campaigns. They make the mistake of building their strategy around the various social media platforms rather than focusing on their own business objectives and goals. Developing a good social media strategy right at the beginning will go a long way for any business in terms of ROI and bringing value to it. The questions that need to be answered are: how much are you willing to invest or can invest in the social media activities (both in terms of money as well as time) and how does that relate to the business value? How best does the social media strategy align with your business and other marketing strategies?

It's very important to get the answers to these questions and understand the objectives and goals of the business or company before starting off any social media activity like opening a Facebook or a Twitter account without any concrete plans or strategy in place to measure success or understand what you want to achieve from it.

Having a social media strategy in place is the need of the hour for any business today, helping to build a foundation towards better handling of the social media platforms in the right manner to suit the individual business and its values, and also helps to achieve the unique objectives and ensure maximum ROI.

In order to create a comprehensive and successful social media strategy, the business should first establish who their demographic audience is that they are trying to reach and to identify a clear way to measure the success. Understand the objectives of the social media strategy and be prepared for a long-term commitment, as it takes consistent effort and time to get results from online campaigns.

Think clearly what your business wants to use social media for – brand awareness, drive more leads, drive sales, promote products, and improve customer relations or customer services. All these can be achieved by careful planning, expertise and experience.

The different social media have their own unique and **specific tools** or **metrics** that can be used to measure the results or level of interaction that takes place on that platform. For example, the **number of “likes”** on Facebook, or **number of followers** on Twitter or **percentage of females** versus males in your community can be tracked over time to measure your progress and the impact of your social media campaign on your bottom line.

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The different social media platforms should be analysed and conversations tracked so that you can identify business relevant topics as well as potential crises and issues. The end result should put your brand in a position to establish who your audiences are, where they are online and define your objectives to maximize engagement with them.

In order to find and identify the most relevant platform to your business, monitor the different sites to see where your brand name is being mentioned, where your competitors are, and use specific keywords to identify and understand what your target audience is using and which will offer you the greatest opportunities for your business. The sites can include anything from Facebook to blogs or forums. So be prepared to go anywhere.

Once a business has identified and chosen the relevant platforms to further its social media activities, it will have to then define how to **manage engagement** with the customers on the different channels. Each platform will require different content or means and ways to engage the customer in an effective manner. Therefore, a careful strategy needs to be developed around content creation in all sites or platforms along with its frequency of posting. The content should be the voice of the business, should reflect brand values and guidelines, which takes time, effort and resources but is crucial to build an active and engaged community.

A continuous **open communication** between the business and its customers has become very vital for any business today. Therefore, **plan, engage, listen and manage** any negative comments/feedback or criticism in a timely and effective manner so as to maintain your credibility and reputation online. Social media provides many tools to accurately track and monitor the performance of your business online. Therefore, it's wise to use these findings to optimise the program and ensure that your social media activity is performing as effectively as it possibly can. This not only leads to social media success but is also vital in contributing to the overall objectives of your business.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT TOOLS

In the previous chapter we talked about social media management and how businesses and/or individuals are required to have a proper strategy in place to manage their social presence and interactions on various social platforms to target their specific audiences or customers online. This is easier said than done, as the number of networking platforms and websites has leapfrogged in the last couple of years with more coming up regularly. Some of the websites have consolidated their position worldwide while others have their strongholds in specific regions. It goes without saying that an individual or a business cannot possibly have a presence on all the websites and will have to carefully choose the platforms for establishing its online presence.

Thus, managing one's social media presence, even though it might only be on a couple of platforms, is a tough task. Consider this, more than **60 hours** of video is uploaded **every minute** on YouTube, there are more than **350,000 tweets** per minute or **500 million tweets per day** on Twitter and Facebook has **1.18 billion daily active** users on average for September 2016 with more than **55 million status updates** per day. One can imagine how difficult it would be to sift through the content for relevant data or information and then respond to the same. Then there is the question of measuring the effectiveness of the social media efforts. And these are only three platforms we are talking about here. Imagine handling multiple social media accounts of businesses or entrepreneurs, especially if you are running an agency. One will need to create content, schedule the status updates on all account profiles, share the content, engage with the followers, also manage the responses to them or handle critics and negative reviews to manage the brand value and reputation of the business. The job is never ending!

Therefore, social media management is not just about posting content and or updating status to the relevant platforms each day, one also needs to then **monitor** and **analyse** the data from these social media platforms to gauge the response and effectiveness of the efforts by generating daily reports in the form of relevant statistics. Fortunately, help is at hand and there are many professional online tools available, which can assist in the management of social media activity.

In this chapter we will discuss a few **social media management tools**, which are available for **engagement, monitoring/analysis** and **listening**. While some of these tools are specific to a single function, others carry out some or all the functions. Therefore, you can carefully choose the ones that best fit your needs or budget.

7.1 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

If you have many social media profiles to be managed then it becomes quite cumbersome to post updates on individual platforms and also to follow the updates of your connections. **Social Media Engagement Tools** or **Account Management Tools** come in handy in such a scenario. The online services provide a single dashboard with all your profiles integrated so that you can monitor all the conversations and respond to them from a single place, rather than individually monitoring all the profiles. Given below are few examples of such **Social Media Engagement Tools**.

Hootsuite: Considered as one of the best enterprise level social media management tool used by over 10 million professionals. It is ideal for **professionals, entrepreneurs, small businesses, teams, independent consultants** and also **large enterprises** with sophisticated requirements. Using Hootsuite one can manage upto 10–50 social profiles or more, get real-time analytics and also manage auto content scheduling. The service provides an integrated dashboard for monitoring updates, creating and scheduling own updates, track click-throughs and also assigns tasks amongst multiple team members. This is a paid service and therefore there are different pricing plans for professional, team, business and enterprise. Thus, it is not only a great social engagement tool but also serves as a **monitoring, analytical** and **listening tool**. Figure 7.1 below shows the various features that is offered by Hootsuite.



Figure 7.1 Features of Hootsuite (Screenshot)

Buffer: A social media management tool that allows you to post content simultaneously to multiple social accounts like **Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest and Instagram**, from one simple dashboard, effortlessly. It can be effectively used by both individuals and businesses. With Buffer you can schedule your content at the best possible times throughout the day, and this can be easily done from a web browser extension or android apps or even on iOS so you can post even on the go from anywhere, anytime. While it does offer a **free** service, you can get more features added if you upgrade to a **paid service**. With a **free Buffer account**, you can connect **one profile or page per network**, whereas if you upgrade to an **Awesome Plan** you can connect upto **12 profiles**.



Figure 7.2 Buffer Home Page (Screenshot)

Buffer also provides an upgraded analytics function so that all the clicks, retweets, mentions, reach and favorites are tracked for you for free.

TweetDeck: Like the above tools, TweetDeck is also a social media dashboard application that offers more flexibility and a host of features to help advanced users to get the most of Twitter.

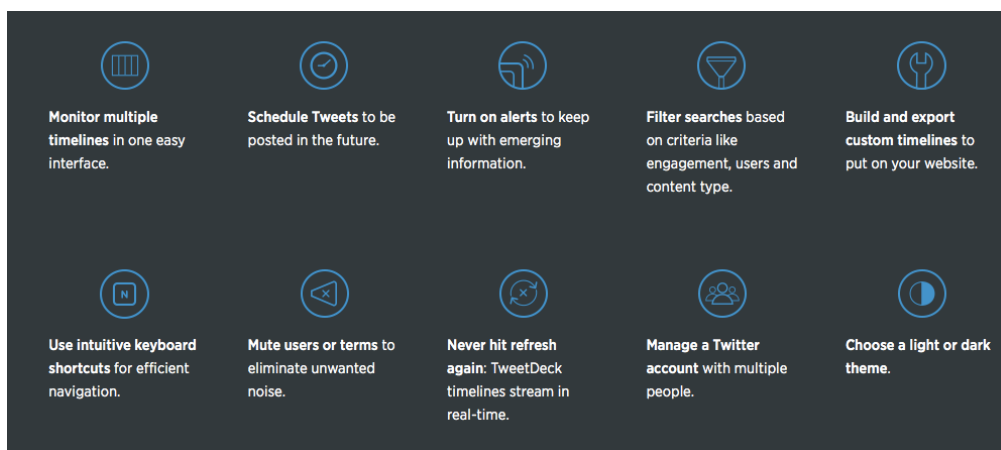


Figure 7.3 Features of TweetDeck (Screenshot)

It allows for **real-time tracking, organising** and **engagement** and is a real favorite among social networkers. Its key features (see figure 7.3) are that it simplifies twitter functionality by tracking and organising multiple twitter accounts. It also integrates with other social networking sites like **Facebook, Google Buzz, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Foursquare**, in one simple interface right on your desktop with the social media desktop application.

- Schedule Tweets
- Monitoring Tools
- Notification Alerts
- Support for Twitter lists
- LinkedIn column
- Auto-Updated Lists

It can be used by **Freelancers, Large Enterprises, Mid-Size Business, Non Profits** and **Small Businesses**. Almost everyone can use this tool effectively as it is **Free** for all, (**Freemium**), whereas, its competitors like **Tweepi, SocialFlow** and **OktoPost** charge a fee for their use.

Apart from the social media engagement tools mentioned above there are many more like **IFTT (If This Then That), Social Oomph, CrowdBooster, SproutSocial** and **Everypost**, etc.

7.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING AND ANALYSIS TOOLS

Also known as the **social media listening tools**, these tools are like search engines but for social media. Using these tools one can keep a track of the **brand mentions, consumer sentiment** across the various social media platforms. It is essential for a business or even an individual to be aware of how others perceive them and take corrective action for the negative sentiment being created. **Free and paid tools** are available for **social media monitoring**. Most of the tools work on keyword monitoring and the number of keywords one can monitor may vary depending on the service chosen. The tools may have features to **analyse, measure, display and report** on the information gathered.

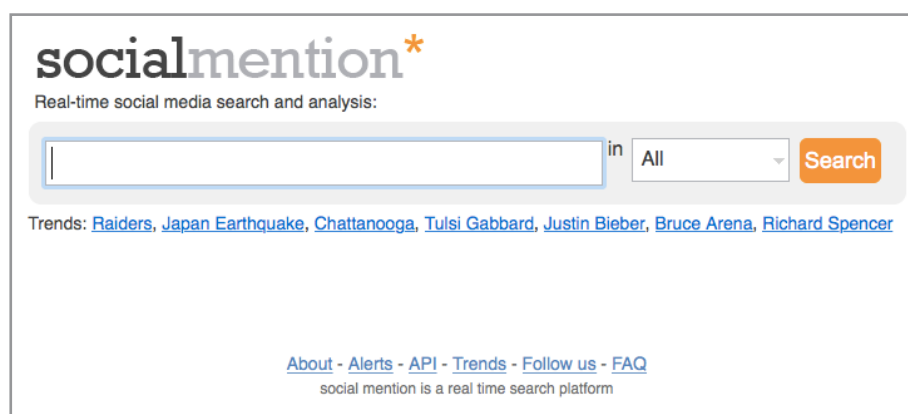


Figure 7.4 Social Mention Search Home Page (Screenshot)

Social Mention (Free): Social mention is a social media **search and analysis platform** that aggregates user-generated content into a single stream. Social Mention monitors **more than 100 social media platforms** and one can use it to track and measure what people are saying about you or your business in **real-time**. Figure 7.4.

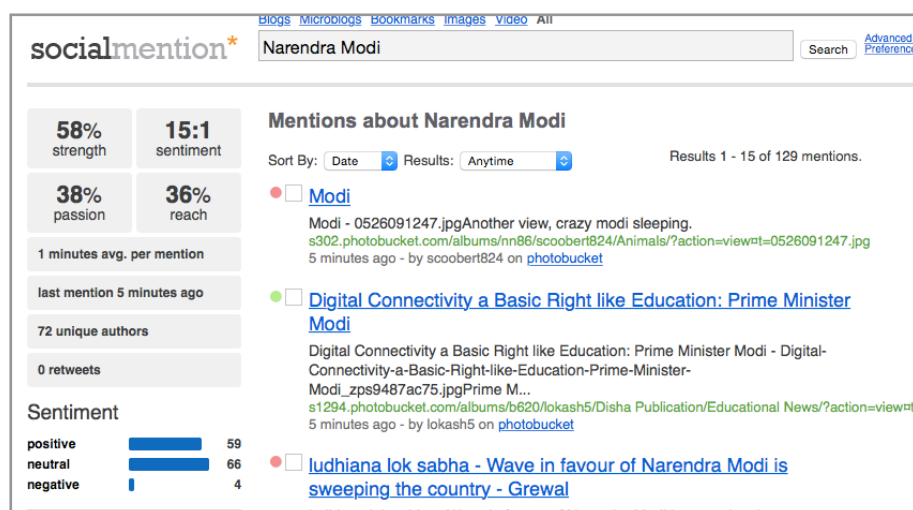


Figure 7.5: Social Mention Results Page (Screenshot)

In addition to the stream of mentions of the selected keyword, Social Mention also provides analysis in terms of the **strength, reach, sentiment and passion**. One can also choose to create, receive email alerts for the selected keywords. There are some filters available which can help in deeper analysis by filtering the content by **keywords, hashtags, sources and users**. For a **free platform**, Social Mention does give a lot of information. Figure 7.5 shows a screenshot of Social Mention results page for Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi.

Addict-o-Matic (Free): Addict-o-matic searches for keyword related content on popular websites and presents the results in source boxes. One can customise the dashboard by moving the source boxes around and then saving/bookmarking it to keep a track on the keyword related activity on the various monitored websites. At the time of writing this, Addict-o-matic searches for content in 25 platforms.



Figure 7.6 Addict-o-matic Home Page (Screenshot)

Twazzup (Free): Twazzup is a real-time monitoring and analytics tool for Twitter. Twitter is perhaps the best social media platforms for listening to conversations since it happens in **Real-Time**, has a **Wider Reach** and gives instant and **Direct Feedback**. Therefore, it makes sense to monitor what’s going on there and Twazzup offers just that.

With Twazzup you can easily monitor the keywords mentioned in tweets and categorise your results by link popularity, contributors, tagging clouds, and users. Its unique feature of avatar mouse-overs give us more details about that user’s relevant tweets that makes Twazzup a surprisingly powerful social media monitoring tool.

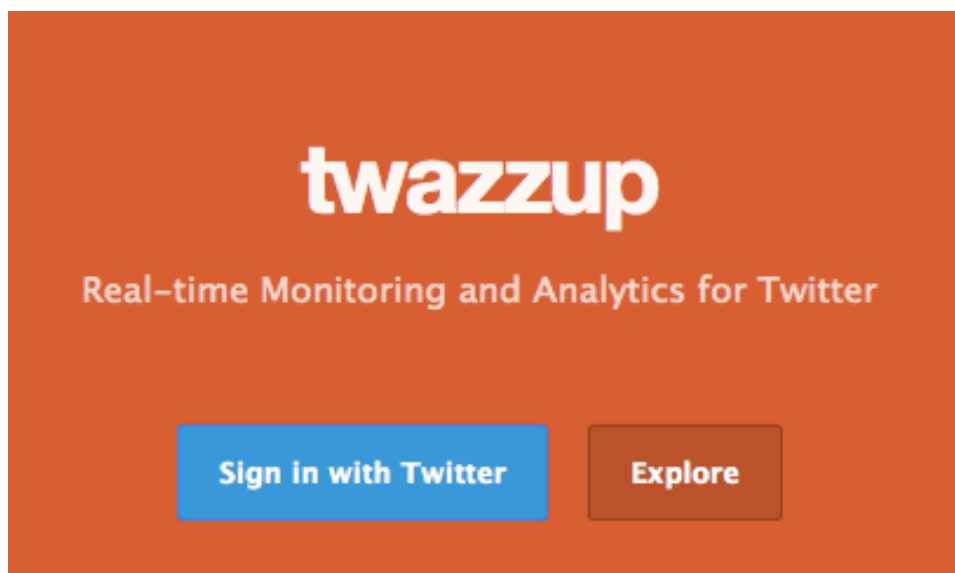


Figure 7.7 Twazzup Home Page (Screenshot)

Examples of other **free** to use social media monitoring and analytics tools are: **Hootsuite, TweetReach, Klout, HowSociable and IceRocket, etc.** There are also **paid sites** that offer more features that are worth exploring if you are an individual or small enterprise, and examples of such sites are: **Mention, SproutSocial, Topsy, Hootsuite, PinAlerts, Brandwatch Analytics, Buffer, CrowdBooster, Talkwalker, etc.**

7.3 PROFESSIONAL LISTENING TOOLS

There are paid **professional listening tools** available, which have everything one requires to monitor the social media with respect to the search keywords. However, keep in mind that the amount of information these tools provide is tremendous and may not be what you want to begin with.

These are social media tools used for market research and reputation tracking that help in **monitoring** (social mentions), **analysis** (sentiment accuracy, historical data, email alerts, analytics etc), **back office and reports** (auto prioritization and routing, CRM integration, API, PDF reports and drag & drop), **social engagement** (manage workflow, schedule and respond to posts, mobile friendly) and also provides **help, support and documentation.**

Thus, these social media monitoring and engagement software tools help a company to track the conversations happening on the social media 24/7 and allows it to manage and improve its reputation and brand value online by its ability to respond to any complaints or compliments instantly. They also help you to track trends apart from monitoring public attitude towards your company, discover the key influencers with whom you can develop relationships to get them talking about your products and services.

Medium or large enterprises that have a sizeable advertising budget need software that does not just track number of posts or tweets, but examines the entire internet for information and then filters out the noise and delivers the messages and sentiments that relate directly to their needs. The top ranked social media monitoring tools that fulfill these requirements, according to **TopTenReviews.com** are (in the order of ranking): **Sysomos, Visible Technologies, Oracle Social Cloud, Sales Force Radian6, UberVU, Viral Heat, Brand24, DataSift and Brandwatch.**

Sysomos: is a comprehensive social media monitoring and response software, which also has an excellent global reach. Its easy-to-use and comprehensive package along with its many features and a very dedicated customer service make Sysomos the Top Ten Reviews **Gold Award Winner.** It monitors 25 different social media platforms including **Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler,** some **video sites** and more. Furthermore, it also tracks news and blog sites.

This software lets you manage all your social media accounts in one area so that you can both schedule posts across your accounts and respond to individual posts. It offers a multiple-step filtering system to remove all the noise from the billions of posts. It boasts of 86 percent accuracy in judging the positive or negative sentiments. Sysomos can also identify key influencers and potential leads – people who have a large following or a strong internet reputation. It integrates with Google analytics to give additional traffic analysis of your sites. See Figure 7.8 and 7.9 for all its features.



Figure 7.8 Sysomos Home Page (Screenshot)

Sysomos offers unlimited activity, but charges by seat (probably the only drawback). So a basic Sysomos Heartbeat account allows for 5 seats or users. However, one can pay to add more users. With this account one can access upto two years of data. Sysomos Heartbeat understands 186 languages plus slang and intent and can translate 55.

Sysomos Solutions offered are: **MAP Search** (Real-time Social Research), **Heartbeat** (Social Monitoring), **Expion** (Social Media Marketing), **Analytics** (Paid and Owned Analytics aggregated insights for real-time analysis), **Scout** (Facebook Analytics Tool) and **Gaze** (Visual Marketing and Analytics).

Thus, all in all, Sysomos is a potent social media monitoring service with powerful tools and an excellent choice for businesses.



Figure 7.9 Features of Sysomos (Screenshot)

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Management Time Management

Problem solving Self-Confidence Effectiveness

Project Management Goal setting Motivation Coaching



Sales Force Radian6: Now a part of **Sales Force Marketing Cloud, Radian6** is a professional monitoring and analytics tool that scours millions of websites for mentions about brands and keywords. This software is very user-friendly with an easy interface and a huge library of how-to videos. Since it offers one of the best and most easily accessed training sections for those who are new to social media monitoring and engagement software and being user-friendly, we have highlighted this tool rather than any of the others mentioned in the top ten reviews.

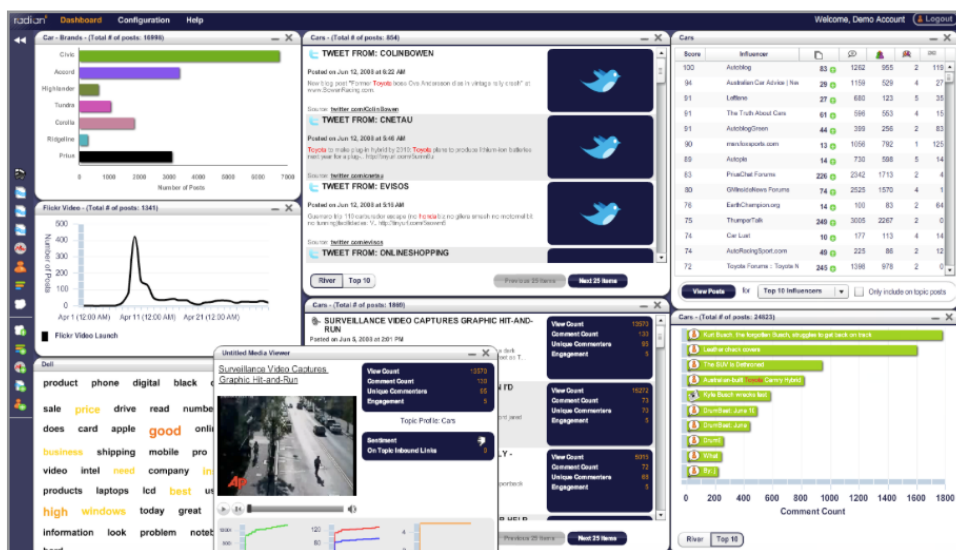


Figure 7.10 Screenshot of Radian6 Dashboard (Image Source: getapp.com)

Radian6 software is used by brands to increase customer engagement, enhance social media campaigns, gain better understanding of target audiences and industry, and provide better customer support. It provides a range of analysis and reporting features to understand customer sentiment, demographics and industry trends. The social media listening tool allows you to identify various types of mentions and posts, analyse their urgency, and route them to the most appropriate department, or employee. It also lets you create custom reports, build your own visualisations, filter data by workflow, notes, tags, and insights, as well as export and route data for internal use.

Both Radian6 and Sysomos are quite similar in their features, except for a few differences. Both store data in quick retrievable ways. Both provide monthly subscriptions to access and analyse this data and they have both been acquired by large organisations; **Radian6** by **Sales Force** and **Sysomos** by **Marketwire**.

While Radian6 uses **Adobe Flash** for its dashboard interface, Sysomos uses **HTML** with **Boolean Operators**, which is used to create queries. With Radian6 one can get **only 30 days** of historical data, while Sysomos provides **two years** or more. However, more historical data can be added to the profile in case of Radian6 at an added cost.

7.4 OTHER TOOLS

There are some function specific tools available online which can be used by individuals and businesses to further their social media activity. **Klout** is a social media analytics provider, which measures or rates a user's influence across his/her networks. A Klout score ranging from 0 to 100 indicates a user's influence, which depends on **True** reach (no of people a user influences), **Amplification** (how much a user influences them) and **Network Impact** (The overall influence of a user's network). Businesses can use the service to identify and engage with key influencers.

Similarly, **bit.ly** is a URL shortening service, which is the default service for **Twitter**. In addition to the URL shortening, the website also provides information on users who click on the generated URLs.

Google Analytics: is a free service from Google which gives a lot of information about the web traffic to the website including the visitors, sources, keywords, regions etc. One can also create funnels and goals to track actions and conversions.

There are some content distribution services also available, which help in posting photos/videos to multiple sites. **Tube Moghul** is one such service, which can be used to post videos to top video and social networking websites across the web. In addition, they also provide analytics with respect to the videos thus uploaded.

One word of advice; it is best to start with the free services to understand what you really want to track and also the workflow while using these services. If you straightaway jump into one of the advanced services you will have a lot of data available but will, in all probability, not know what to do with it!

8 THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media has come a long way since the early days of the telephones, BBS's and the IRC Chats. There is no doubt that it will continue to evolve with time and with more advanced technologies to something better. As it is, all the social media is continuing to evolve at such a fast pace that it is difficult to keep up. But, one thing is for sure that we still have not seen all, the journey will continue and the way we use the social media will also change with time, just like we have moved from the web versions to mobile versions in the last five years (2011–2016) and we did tell you that!

Five years back, in 2011, in the first edition of the book we said, **The future of social media definitely lies in “*Social Media on the GO...!*”** And how has it turned out? Today most social media interactions are taking place on the mobile phones. People are creating content and accessing the content posted by others on the phones, and all social media platforms have an app for the mobiles. There are platforms like Pinterest, Peach, Instagram and Snapchat which primarily started out being “mobile only” even though they might facilitate web access. WhatsApp is the latest entrant into the mobile only space and has so far continued to dominate the space. The point is, irrespective of the type of social media; more than 80 percent of Social media time is coming from mobile devices.

What will the social media scenario be like, say 10 years from now? Difficult to imagine, isn't it? A decade is a long time for computer and Internet technology. Who knows where it's all headed? But seeing the way things are at present, the mobile technology has taken over the mantle of delivering the social media to us. The mobile devices (iPads, iPhones, Tablets) or smart phones, whatever you want to call them have already taken over the computer in almost all the functions.

Most social media sites are already integrated with the smart phones along with mobile websites that have specially designed mobile apps to cater for all the networking needs of the people, which include sharing, gaming, collaborating, sending messages, networking, uploading/downloading media files (music and movies) and a lot more.



Figure 8.1: Mobile Marketing (Image Source: Internet)

While the mobiles will continue to be the medium for some time to come, we are yet to fully realize the potential of mobile marketing and most businesses and social media platforms are working overtime to extract the maximum mileage through the obviously phenomenal and ever increasing number of mobile users. Consider these statistical figures:

- Close to 50 percent of the world's population is connected to Internet; that is 3.6 billion people.
- 2.7 billion of these use social media, of which 2.4 billion use the social media on mobile phones.

These staggering figures pose an enormous marketing potential. However, the free lunches may not continue for long, as eventually the social media platforms would require to earn revenue for their investors and would start to feel the pressure from these investors to provide a better ROI. As a result, the social media marketing, in due course of time, will convert to "paid" where it is "free" now, and may become costlier. These factors may lead to consolidation of social media platforms and /or integration of the social media with other worldly things.

Who knows, at the end of it all, we may be left with a single entity that would be to Social Media what Google is to Search, today. As we are already witnessing, the big ones are all consolidating. In the last four years;

- Facebook bought Whatsapp and Instagram
- Microsoft bought Yammer and LinkedIn
- Google bought YouTube and Vaze
- Twitter bought Periscope and Vine

The idea behind all these acquisitions is to ensure that a user gets all that s/he wants on the same platform. They don't want you to leave. WeChat has done a good job of integration so that while it remains a social media platform it also allowing users to make payments, order taxis or deliveries, and play games as well.

On the other hand, videos are the next big thing with YouTube being the clear leader. Facebook is trying to catch-up with its in-line streaming videos. But, ultimately it is the **Virtual** and **Augmented reality** which would shape up the future of Social Media. The mass hysteria recently created by the launch of *Pokémon Go* says a lot about people wanting to leave their real worlds and transport themselves into an augmented or virtual world.

The acquisition of **Oculus** by Facebook and the in-development **Social VR** is a sign of where the things are headed. While Google may have failed with the apparently “concept-testing” *Glasses*, they are back with the *Daydream* and also heavily betting on *Magic Leap*. **vTime** is another **Social Virtual Network** which is gaining audiences by the day.

Virtual Reality would bring in more proximity in social media interactions, which the present form of text messaging is not able to do. Also, as technology advances it would probably be much easier for the applications to capture the user's movements and emotions as well and reflect them to the other participants.

Businesses would want to use the **Augmented Reality** feature to add value to a shopper's experience while they look for a product in a shop or a mall. A **virtual assistant** could prove to be very valuable in providing complete information about the products and also answering all the queries of any shopper, thereby, making it easier for them to make an informed choice.

Some of the top trends predicted for the future are as follows:

1. Social Media goes **Augmented** or/and **Virtual**.
2. **Artificial intelligence** and **IoT (Internet of Things)** will get integrated with social media not only for management but also to monitor and filter content and remove *noise* or *clutter* from the feeds.
3. **Mobile marketing** will gain prominence as the businesses and social media companies both push for faster access to the users.
4. **Mobile Referral Marketing** – The day is not far when users will get paid for referrals of products to their networks; per view/sale.
5. **Wearable smart devices** will make an impact in the future; think mobile phone in a watch or goggles or jewelry.
6. **Location-based interactions** will develop further and become an integral part of real world dynamics.