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Understanding Social Media

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Introduction

Social Media is a term that is used quite often these days. It is the new in-thing and one would imagine that everyone knows or understands what social media is. It is a fact that ninety percent of all online users use social media in some way or the other. It is also a fact that most of these people will not be able to name more than a handful of social media platforms besides the ones that they are using. It may have been due to the pace of development in the social media arena or just plain lack of interest in the developments that makes it seem like social media jumped out of nowhere and took people by surprise.

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, 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, microblogs, 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 fulfil all their needs instead of settling for a service that best serves their needs. If one has focussed objectives and knows exactly what he wants, 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 realized that they were not speaking in a vacuum; a highly responsive audience, who took part in the conversation and put across their 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 his life waiting for justice or for resolution of issues. One had the choice to come on to the social media, and give his side of the story and demand what he rightfully deserved.

As time passed by, people realized 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 his 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 realization 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 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. Others are still waiting on the sidelines wondering whether it is worth the risk.

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?

Social Media has become an inevitable part of our daily life, and like it or not, it's here to stay. It is the talk of the town these days, being discussed extensively in traditional media and a rage among the youth. Businesses that are still not using the social media are scrambling to get on-board the bandwagon now as they are becoming aware of the enormous power and potential of this medium. The term *Social Media* needs no explanation, as I am quite sure that everyone has heard and knows of it by now. But for those who don't – quite simply, "social media is the media that allows one to be *social*, or get social online by sharing content, news, photos etc with other people."

There are hundreds of definitions for the term *social media* and new ones are added daily as the concepts keep changing and evolving with time.

Definitions of Social Media.

According to the **Merriam-Webster dictionary** online, **Social Media** is defined as "*forms of electronic communication (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).*"

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.*"

The **web dictionary** defines social media (noun) simply as, "*Websites and applications used for social networking.*"

"*Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues.*"
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

"*Interactive forms of media that allow users to interact with and publish to each other, generally by means of the Internet.*" en.wiktionary.org/wiki/social_media

"*Any website or web service that utilizes a 'social' or 'Web 2.0' philosophy. This includes blogs, social networks, social news, wikis, etc.*" webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/web20-glossary_2.htm

To explain in short, 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, Friendster, Google Plus*), **Blogs**, **Internet forums**, **Bookmarking sites**, **online community sites** and **Q & A sites** etc.

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 (1950's – Early 90's)

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 1950's. 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 computerized, 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

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)

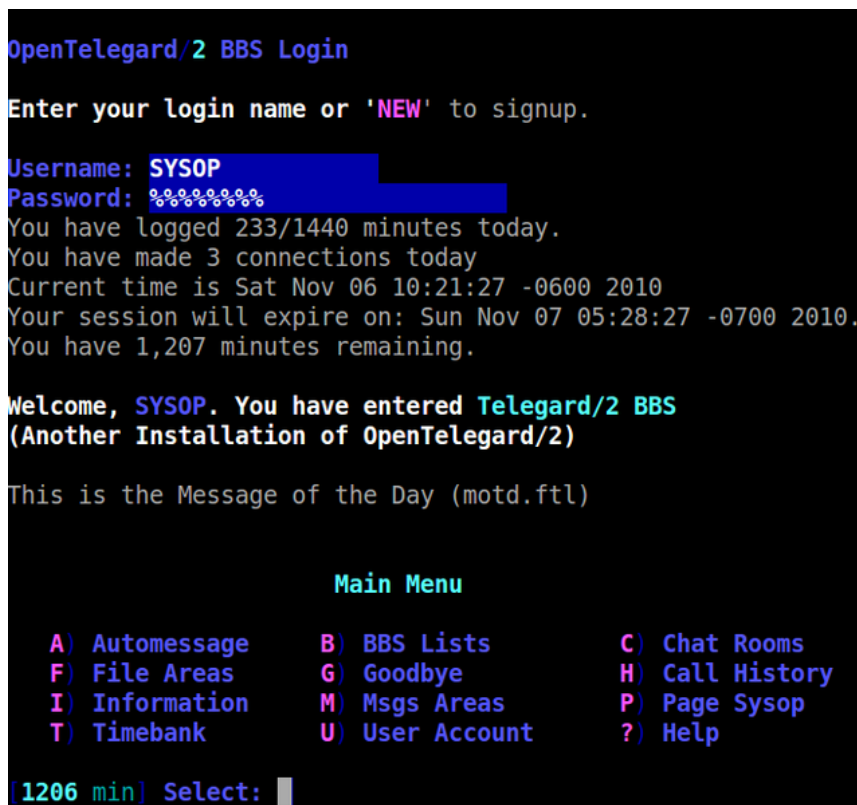


Figure 2.2: Bulletin Boards Systems (BBS's)
 Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

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 colors 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 utilized 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.

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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.

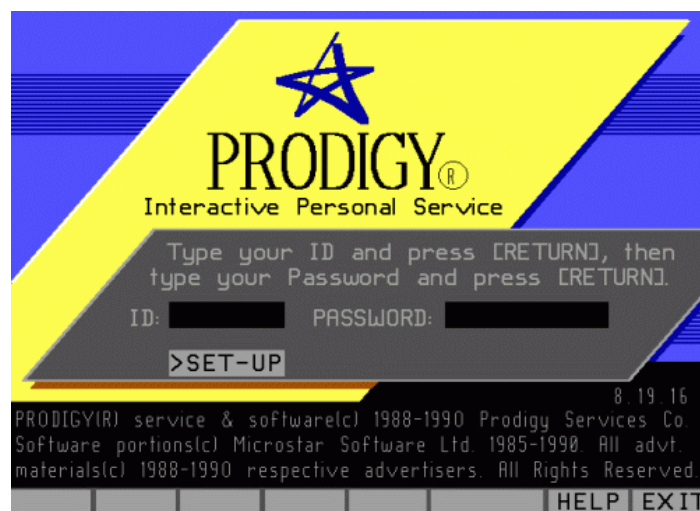


Figure 2.4: Sign-in Screen for Prodigy Service
 Image Source: http://www.search.com/reference/Prodigy_%28ISP%29

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 1960’s, the **World Wide Web (WWW)** became publicly available only on 6th August 1991. In the early 90’s Internet access was available only to those who had legitimate University/Government/Military connections. But in the mid 90’s 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).

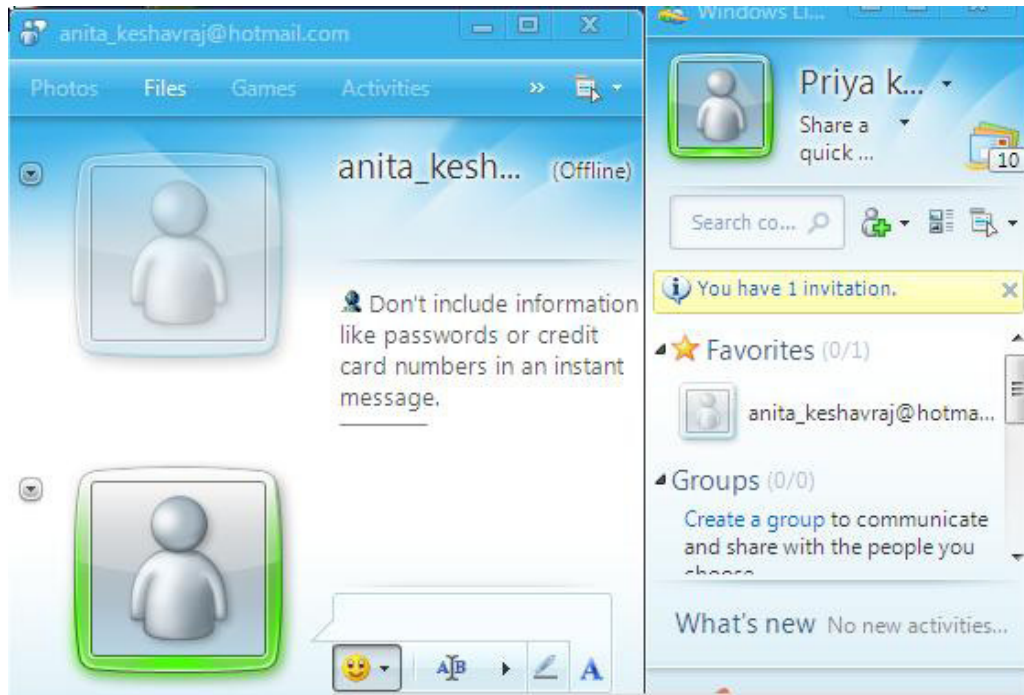


Figure 2.5: Windows Live Messenger (IM)

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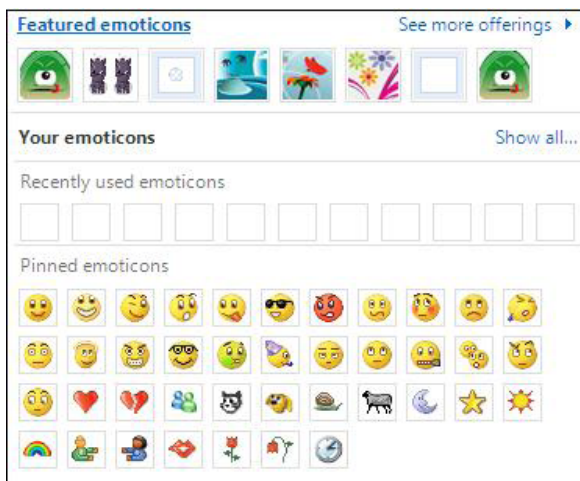


Figure 2.6: Featured Emoticons For Use in Windows Live Messenger

Much later, the **Instant Messenger** feature got incorporated into various email clients like MSN Hotmail, Yahoo, Gmail etc so that it became easier to chat with the friends on the contact list, in real-time.

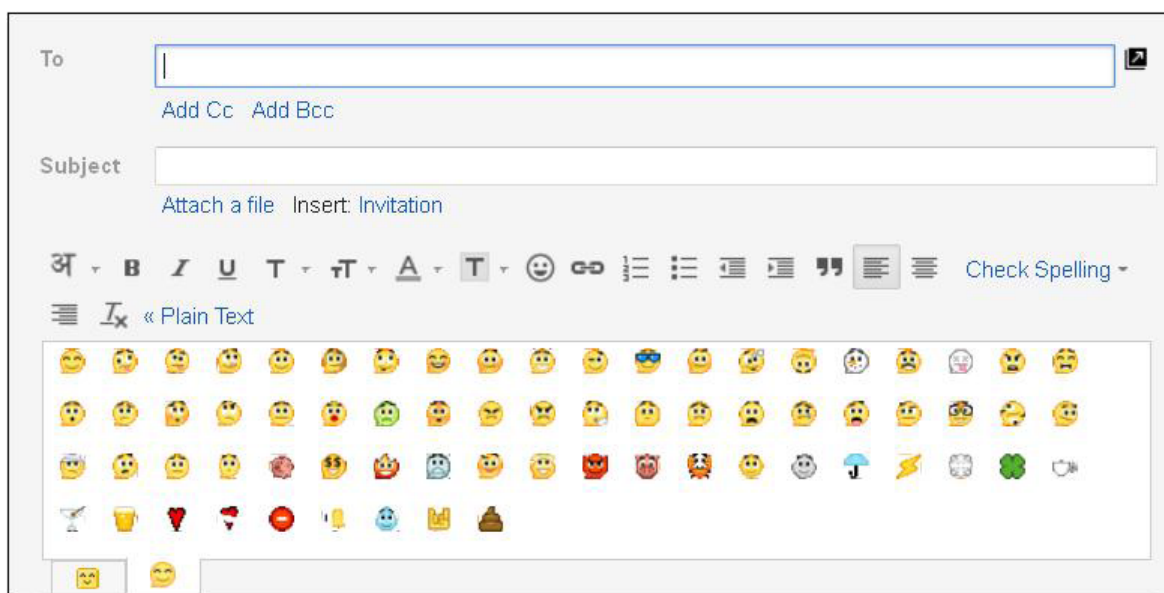


Figure 2.7: Emoticons Used in Gmail Client

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**, also more commonly known as (**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, centralized way to share files without being blocked. Today, without a doubt, BitTorrent is the most recognizable software for downloading large amounts (any kind) of data from the Internet.

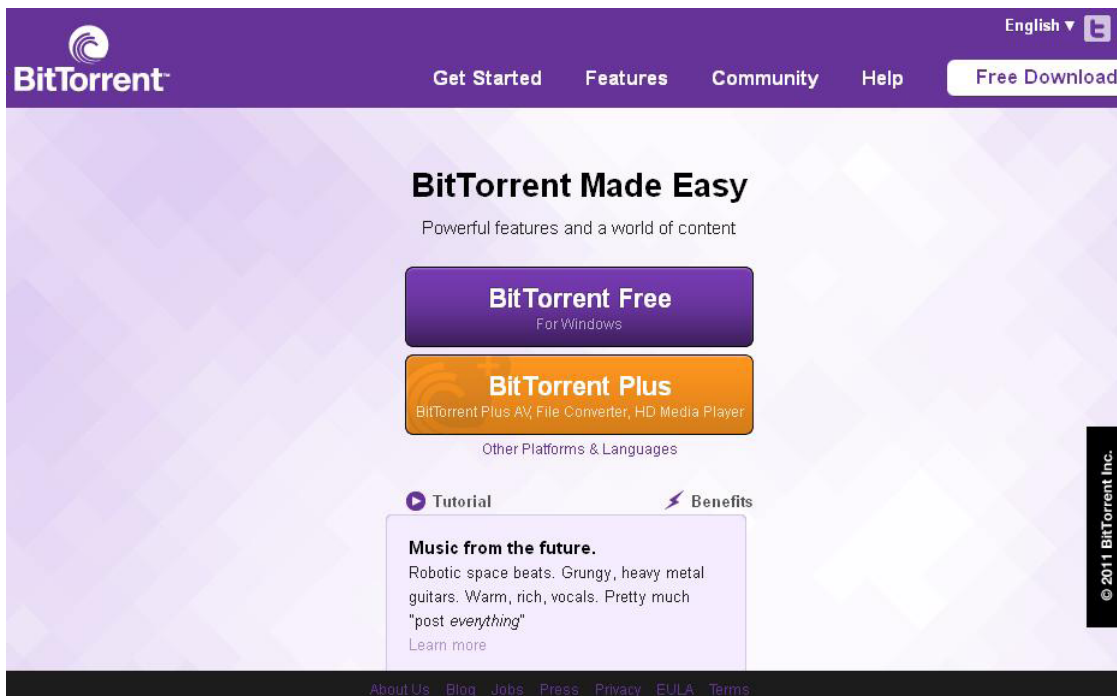


Figure 2.8: Home Page of BitTorrent (P2P File-Sharing Software Site)

Ultimately it was a website, very aptly called, “**The Pirate Bay**” that became a cult online destination for any kind of “social” media distribution.



Figure 2.9: The Pirate Bay Home Page

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2.7 Social Networking Sites (1997-2008)

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, organize 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.

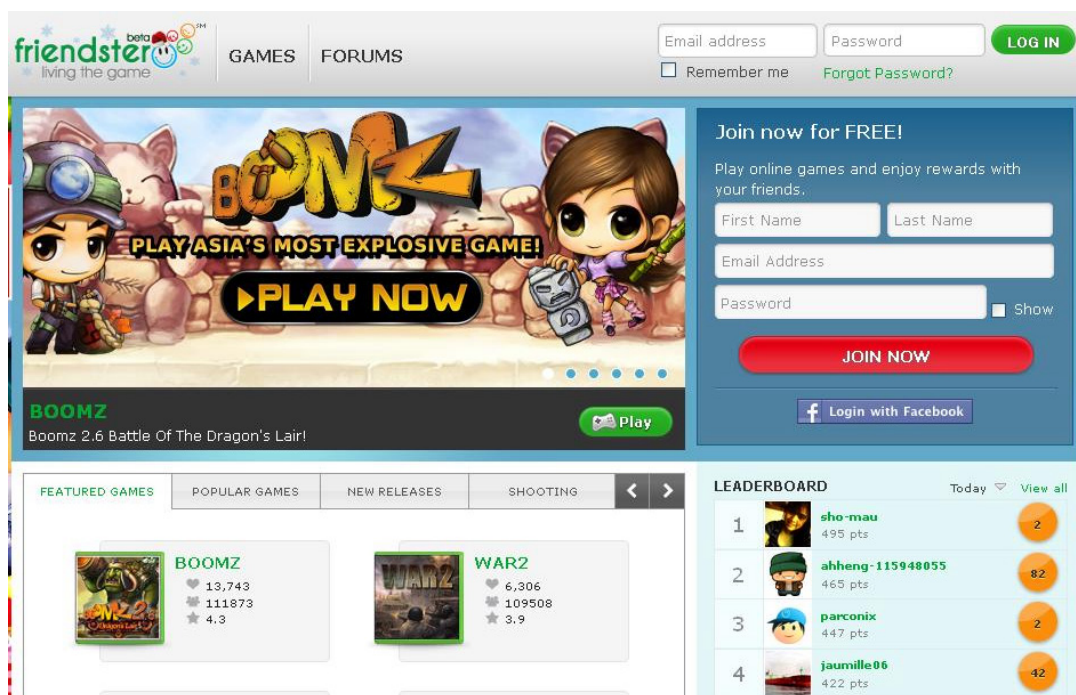


Figure 2.10: Home Page of Friendster.com

A year later, in 2003, other social networking sites like **LinkedIn**, **MySpace** and **Facebook** were introduced.

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 100 million users and is still growing.



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 July 2011 it had over 800 million active users.



Figure 2.11: Facebook New Timeline

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 categorized 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.



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).

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Google Plus is still in the evolving stages and has now also opened its doors for business pages, which has been welcomed with open arms. Google Plus 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 plus 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 Plus on the other hand is not far behind, as they have also integrated the Picasa albums with the Google + account and one can also update their location using the maps feature.

2.8 Social Bookmarking (1996 –2003)

According to Wikipedia, *"Social bookmarking is a method for Internet users to organize, 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 organize 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 organize their bookmarks and enable viewing of bookmarks associated with a chosen tag. They also provide webfeeds for their lists of bookmarks, including lists organized 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.



Figure 2.12: Blogs

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.

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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.

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 300 million users as of 2011. It was described as the "**SMS**" of the Internet.



Figure 2.13: Twitter Home Page

The smartphones technology (iPhones) 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**.

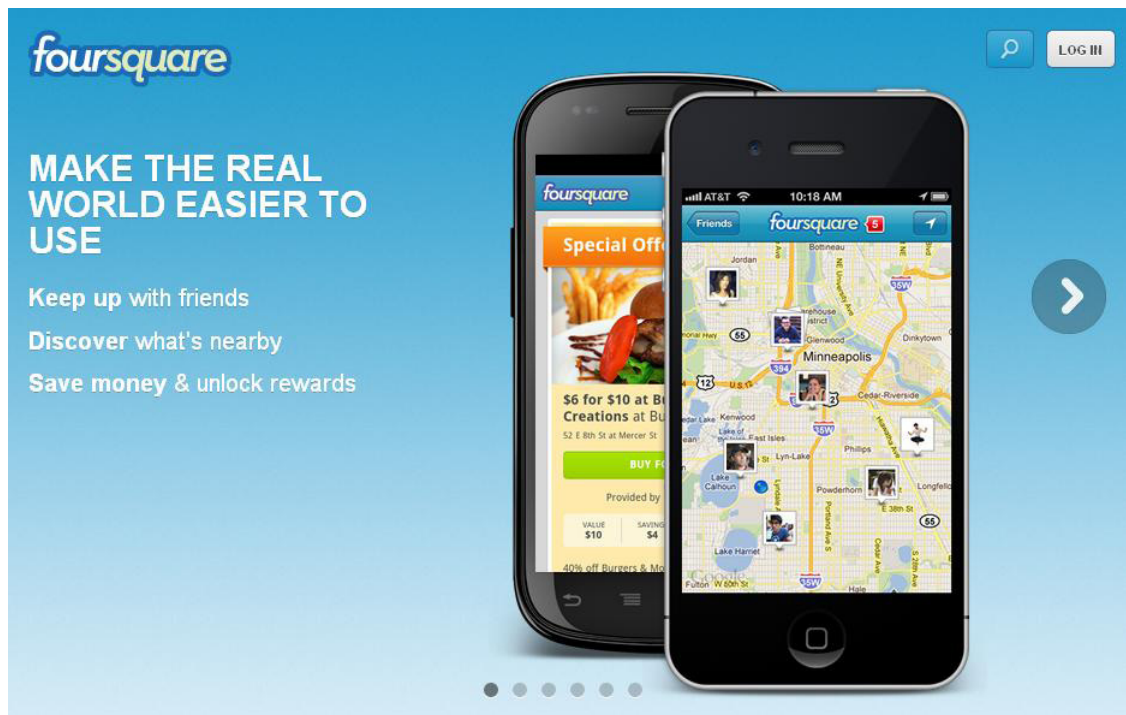


Figure 2.14: Location-Based Networking Site, Foursquare

2.11 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 sites today are already evolving at such a fast pace that it is becoming difficult to keep up with them. But, one thing is for sure that social media is not just a phase, and is here to stay...so get used to it!

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, it is the mobile technology that's slowly taking over our lives. The mobile phones (iPads, iPhones, Tablets) or smart phones, whatever you want to call them have already taken over the computer in almost all the functions. They are definitely the next generation in the social media scenario.

Most social media sites are already integrated with the smart phones along with mobile websites and 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.

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Figure 2.15: Mobile Marketing (Source: Internet)

The future of mobile marketing is bright and around the corner. Consider these statistics of the mobile marketing: (Source: CTIA The Wireless Association and <http://mobithinking.com/mobile-marketing-tools/latest-mobile-stats>)

- 250+ million Americans carry mobile phone, that's over 80% of the nation's population.
- The subscriptions for cell phones will top 5 billion globally before 2011.
- The global mobile advertising market will be valued at over \$16 billion by 2011.
- Four out of five teens carry a wireless device, and the majority (57%) view their cell phone as the key to their social life.
- By 2012, an estimated 10 trillion text messages will be sent and delivered globally.
- Half a billion people accessed mobile Internet worldwide in 2009. Usage is expected to double within five years as mobile overtakes the PC as the most popular way to get on the Web.
- Mobile ad spend worldwide is predicted to be US\$3.3 billion in 2011 sky rocketing to \$20.6 billion in 2015, driven by search ads and local ads. In the US over half of U.S. mobile ad spending is local. In Asia, Japan continues to dominate global mobile ad spend.
- There are more than 350 million active users [44 percent] currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices. People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are twice as active on Facebook as non-mobile users.
- In the last twelve months, customers around the world have ordered more than US\$1 billion of products from Amazon using a mobile device.
- Smartphone sales showed strong growth worldwide in 2010. Total shipments in 2010 were 302.6 million units up 74.4 percent from 2009. This makes smartphones 21.8 percent of all handsets shipped.
- Corporate use of mobile websites grew 210 percent in the last 12 months! Retailers have been particularly aggressive in pursuing mobile strategies this year; with 37 percent operating specially tailored mobile websites (compared to 12 percent in 2010).

2011 = The Year of Mobile

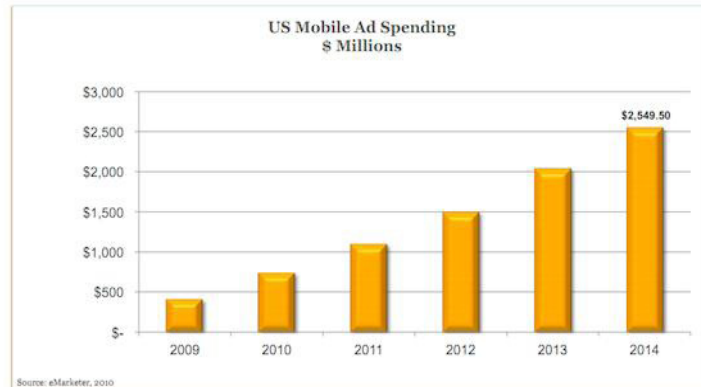


Figure 2.16: Bar Graph Showing US Mobile Ad Spending (2009-2014)
(Source: Internet)

Keeping the above statistics in mind, we can clearly see the trends that are on the horizon with respect to mobile marketing. Some of the top trends predicted for the future are as follows:

1. **Smartphones** will overtake the other mobile phones by 2012.
2. Number of **text messages** being sent via mobile phones will increase.
3. **Social networking sites** get more exposure and accessed on mobile phones.
4. There will be a sharp rise in **social gaming** as more social games are being developed for mobile devices.
5. The trend of **Location-Based marketing** will develop due to new technologies in Wi-Fi, RFID, and mobile phone tracking.
6. There will be an increase in **mobile spending**. (mobile advertising) See Figure 2.15.
7. A rise in **video marketing** on smartphones predicted.
8. **Mobile money transfers** will become trendy. (2011 saw \$86.1 billion move around the world in about 141 million exchanges.)

The future of social media definitely lies in “*Social Media on the GO....!*”

3 Understanding Social Media

Ok, so now you know the definition of the term “social media” as defined by various web dictionaries and other websites. And in the previous chapter you also learned how and from where the social media evolved to become what it is today. In this chapter, we will try to learn a little more about the social media to help you understand it better.

Basically, people are interested in networking and connecting with friends, sharing content, sending messages, collaborating with each other in real-time, gathering news/information/feedback or just uploading/downloading media files (movies/music/photos) on the Internet. Any media in the form of websites that allows them to do these things with ease becomes a social media site. Today, social media has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate with each other.

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

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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.

People are using the social media to stay connected with friends/family, find people with similar interests, discuss issues with others, share opinions, asking and answering questions, reading user reviews etc. We can surmise that, in addition to staying connected, the users want to acquire/enhance knowledge and gain insights into specific subjects to help them make better decisions. It is this consideration that makes social media an enticing opportunity for businesses, celebrities, politicians etc. Opportunities to help them gauge consumer sentiments, acquire new customers/fans, interact with the customers, enhance their brand and manage their online reputation.



Figure 3.1: Names and Icons Of Popular Social Media Services Used

3.1 Classification of Social Media

The various types or forms of social media that exist on the Internet are; Magazines, Internet Forums, Weblogs, Social Blogs, Micro-Blogging, Wikis, Podcasts, Photographs, Videos, Rating and Social Bookmarking.

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)

Social media is still a work in progress and evolving on a daily basis. The scope of the social media is very vast and its usage extends into various fields, regions, demographics etc. People are getting connected to each other in more ways than previously imagined. Therefore it becomes difficult to understand the complexities involved and efforts are still on to understand the true nature of social media. With more and more businesses investing in the social media for supporting their offline functions, it becomes all the more important to understand the social media landscape and functionality in order to effectively derive positive returns form the investment.

3.2 Honeycomb Framework of Social Media Functionality

Kietzmann et al. (2011) studied the social media activities on the Internet and found that the behaviour 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.

Thus, to help the organizations to engage with, know and understand the social media better, they came up with a honeycomb framework (Figures 3.2 and 3.3) that defines the social media by using seven functional building blocks, namely: **Identity, Conversations, Sharing, Presence, Relationships, Reputation, and Groups.**


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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.*)

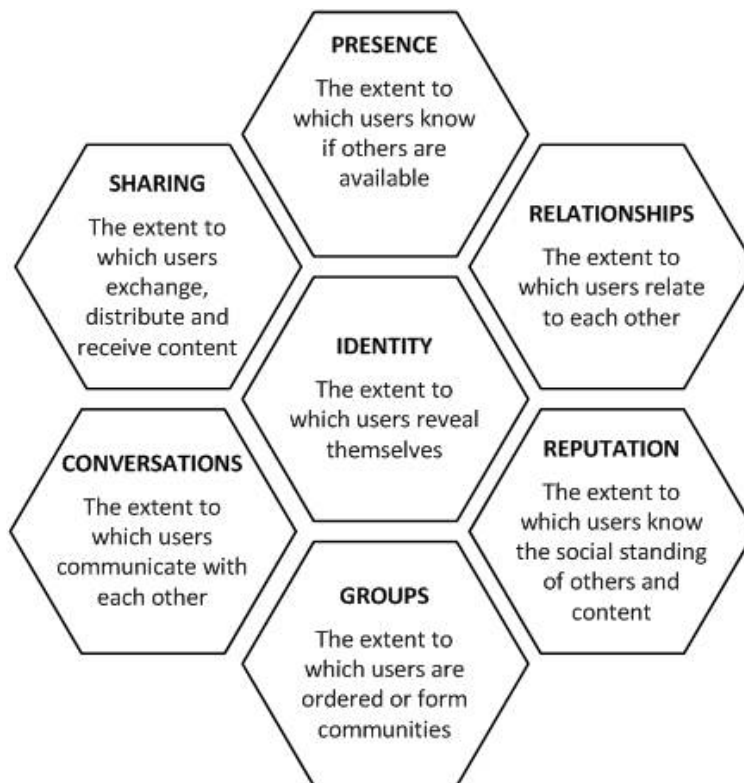


Figure 1 Social media functionality

Figure 3.2: Definition of Each Functionality

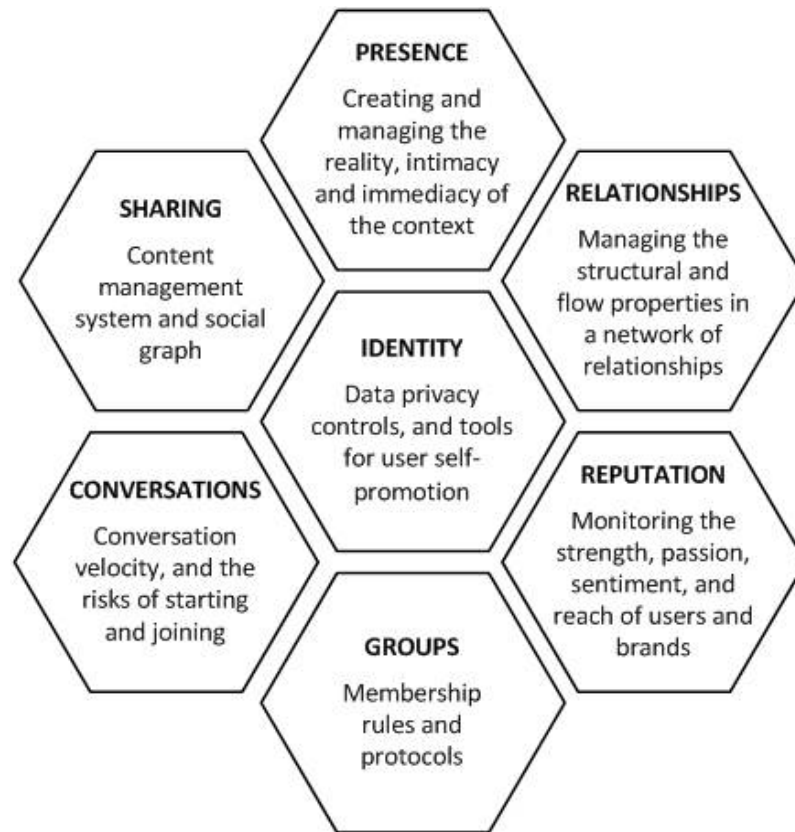


Figure 2 Implications of each functionality for firms

Figure 3.3: Examples of Each Functionality

3.3 Social Media Landscape 2011 by Fred Cavazza

To understand the social media even better, **Fred Cavazza** (A Web Consultant and French Blogger) creates an infographic each year to illustrate effectively the different social media platforms that are being used most, their diversity and their uses. The figure 3.4 below illustrates the social media landscape for 2011 in all its glory.

(Image Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/fredcavazza/5260700799/>)

Social Media Landscape 2011



Figure 3.4: Social Media Landscape2011

Fred Cavazza describes the social media as a rich ecosystem that is perpetually evolving. He created the infographic of the social media landscape in 2011 that showed a much sharper vision of the social media ecosystem and emerging practices like social commerce or social search as compared to his earlier version in 2008. According to him, this new landscape is composed of 7 families, which matches the 7 primary uses of the social media as follows: **(quoted below verbatim, with permission, from <http://www.fredcavazza.net/2010/12/14/social-media-landscape-2011/>)**

- **Publish**, with blog platforms (WordPress, Typepad, Blogger, Overblog), microblog (Twitter), social stream services (FriendFeed, Tumblr, Posterous) and wikis (Wikipedia, Wikia, WetPaint);
- **Share**, with services allowing you to share videos (YouTube, Dailymotion, Vimeo), photos (Flickr, Picasa, Instagram), links (Delicious, Digg), music (Last, iLike, Spotify, Deezer) or documents (SlideShare, Scribd);
- **Discuss**, with bulletin boards (PhpBB, bbPress, Phorum, 4Chan, Gravity), comments management systems (IntenseDebate, Cocomment, Disqus, JS-Kit, Backtype) and social search tools (Quora, Aardvark, Mahalo);
- **Commerce**, with customers reviews solutions (BazaarVoice, PowerReviews), collaborative feedbacks tools (UserVoice, GetSatisfaction), recommendation and inspiration communities (Polyvore, StyleHyve, Weardrobe, Hunch), localized coupons (Groupon, LivingSocial), purchase sharing tools (Blippy, Swipely), co-shopping tools (Look'n'Be) and Facebook-shopping tools (ShopTab, Boosket);

- **Location**, with social location platforms (Foursquare, Gowalla, MyTown, Facebook Places, Google Places), local social networks (Loopt, Whrrl), mobile social networks (Mig33, MocoSpace) and events sharing (Upcoming, Plancast, Zvents, Eventful, Socializr);
- **Network**, with personal social networks (MyYearBook, MyLife, CopainsDavant, Badoo), professional social network (LinkedIn, Viadeo, Xing, Plaxo), « traditionnal » social network (Facebook, MySpace, Orkut, Tagged, Hi5) and social networks creation tools (Ning, KickApps);
- **Games**, where you can find traditionnal players from casual gaming (Kongregate, Pogo, PopCap, PlayFirst), but also new comers from social gaming (Zynga, Playfish, Playdom, SGN), as well as mobile gaming (ngmoco, OpenFeint) and virtual worlds for tweens (Habbo, Club Penguin, Poptropica).

The aim of the chart was not to have an exhaustive list, but to give the readers a sharp overview of what type of services the social media are made up of. And according to him the three players who managed to grab the full attention within this overview were undoubtedly: **Facebook, Twitter and Google.**

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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 and web 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 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.

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, Orkut and Hi5 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.

People use these networking sites for their daily conversations today. And it is also possible to see what other people in your network are talking about. 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. Thus 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.*

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**.*

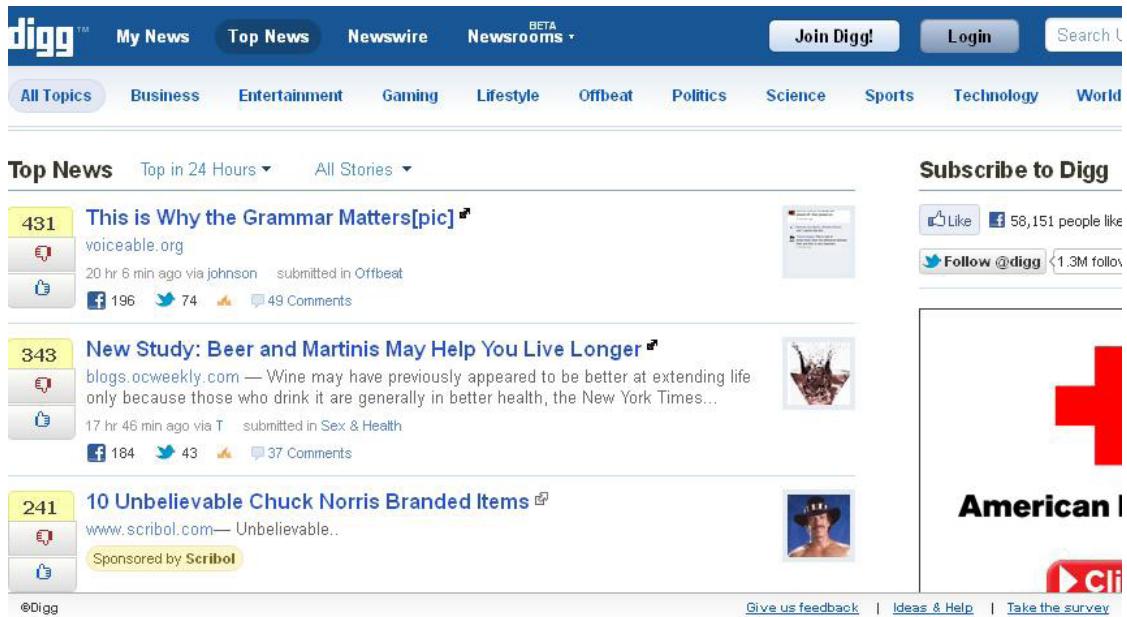


Figure 4.1: Top Stories in Digg (Social Bookmarking Site)

Thus, the social media has **empowered** the people to “speak and be heard”!

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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% 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.

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.

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.



Figure 5.1: Branding (Source: Internet)

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.

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 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.



Figure 5.2: Social Media Marketing (Source: Internet)

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 focussed; 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.

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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.



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

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 on Social Media Tools).

- **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.
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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. But 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 labour-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.

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.

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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, assess 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?

Its 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, 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.

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 audience 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, 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, its 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.”*

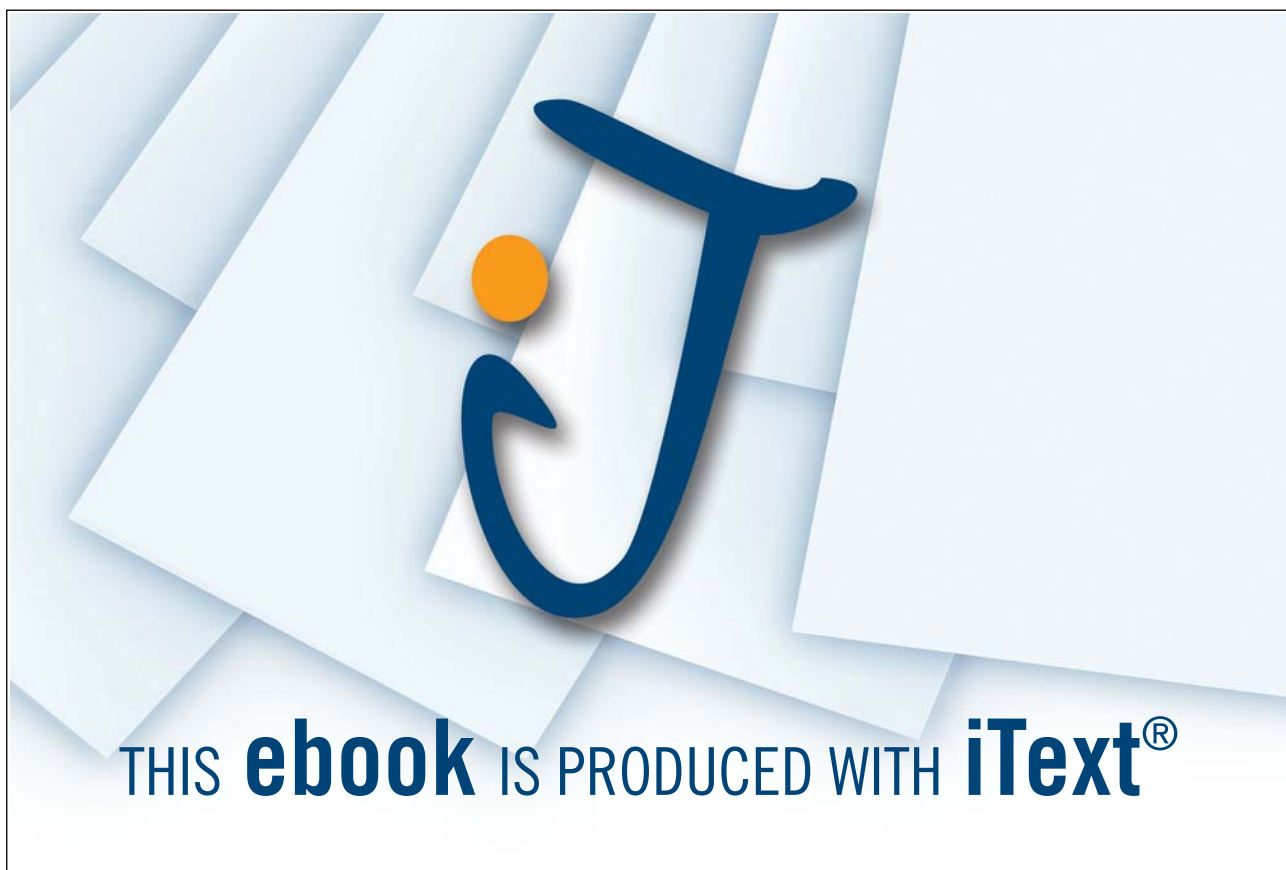
7 Social Media Tools

The number of social media and networking 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.

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 48 hours of video is uploaded every minute on YouTube, there are more than 200 million tweets per day on twitter and Facebook has more than 60 million 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. Fortunately, help is at hand and there are 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 and monitoring/analysis. Some of these tools are specific to a single function while some others carry out all the functions.

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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.

HootSuite: Hootsuite can be used to manage multiple accounts/profiles across **Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace, Wordpress, Ping.fm** and **Foursquare**. 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. There is a free basic version which allows for up to five streams to be managed and the paid service which has unlimited profiles. The paid Pro version also gives enhanced analytics and integrates the reports from Google analytics, Facebook insights along with the network statistics.

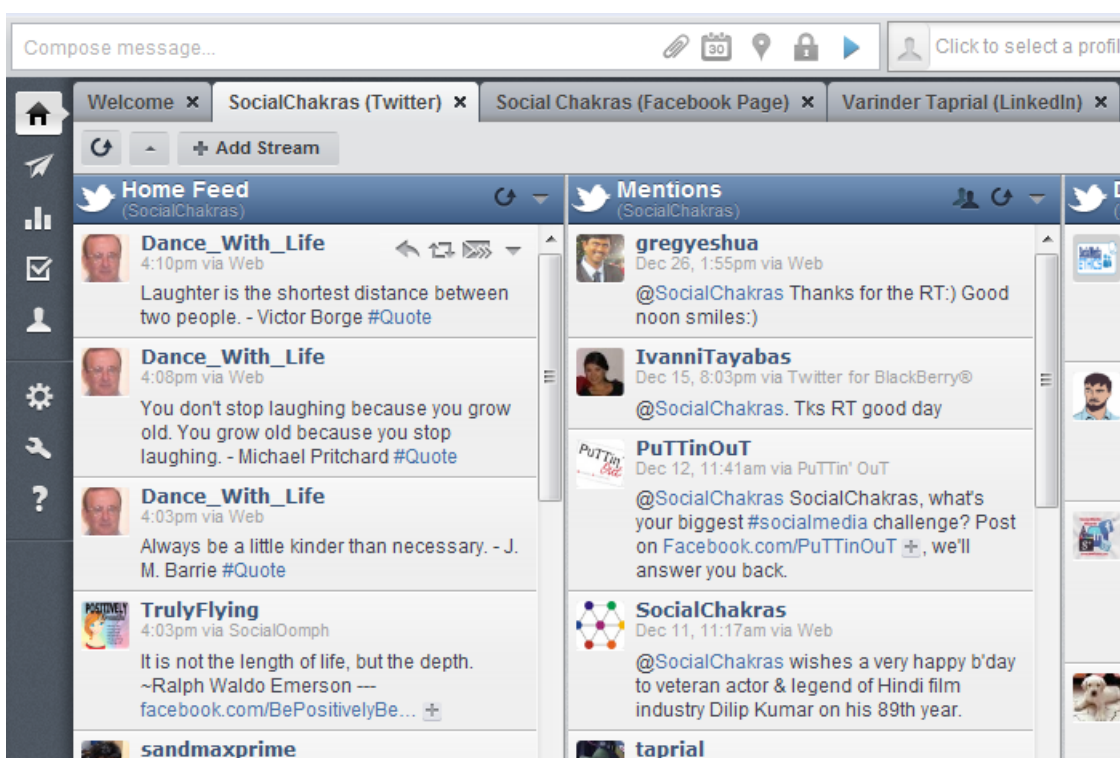


Figure 7.1: HootSuite

CoTweet: is a web-based social media management, engagement and reporting solution which helps in engaging, tracking and analysing conversations around a brand or product across **Twitter** and **Facebook**. The standard version supports only Twitter accounts whereas the Enterprise version integrates both Facebook and Twitter. The standard version is more suited for individuals and small businesses, while the Enterprise version is meant for medium to large businesses and allows for unlimited users, better analytics, conversation history and scheduling. A screenshot of the CoTweet preview is shown in the Figure 7.2 below.

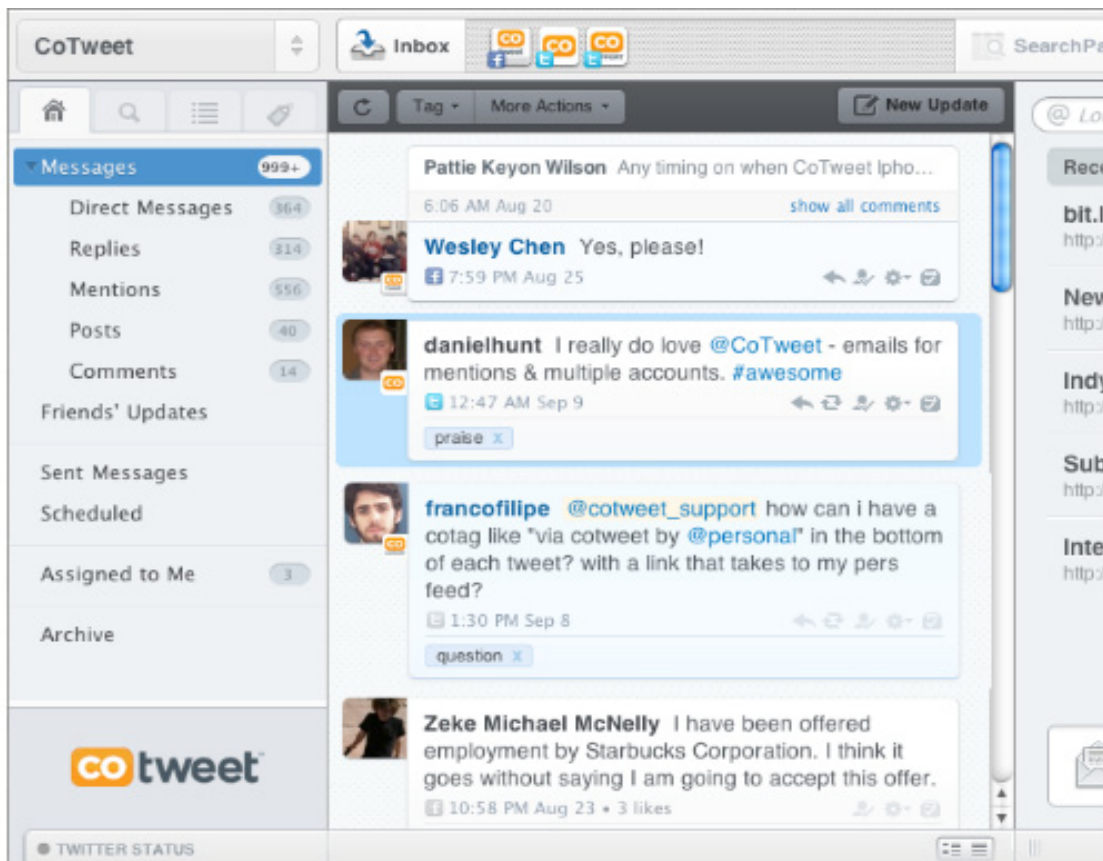


Figure 7.2: CoTweet

Sprout Social: Integrates with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare and Gowalla. Sprout Social is a complete social media management tool, which allows you to publish or schedule updates across various channels, monitor the conversations, collaborate with team members and analyse your performance on the social media. It also has a contact management feature and a discovery feature, which facilitates finding targeted customers.



Figure 7.3: Sprout Social

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Seesmic: is again a social media management tool that comes in desktop and web based version. Like all other engagement tools it allows posting and scheduling updates, monitoring the streams across subscribed channels and in addition also has a feature of adding pictures and geo-location to the updates. **Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare** and **Salesforce** can be managed with Seesmic. The dashboard looks similar to that of HootSuite but integrates filtering of the stream by mentions, trends, lists etc.

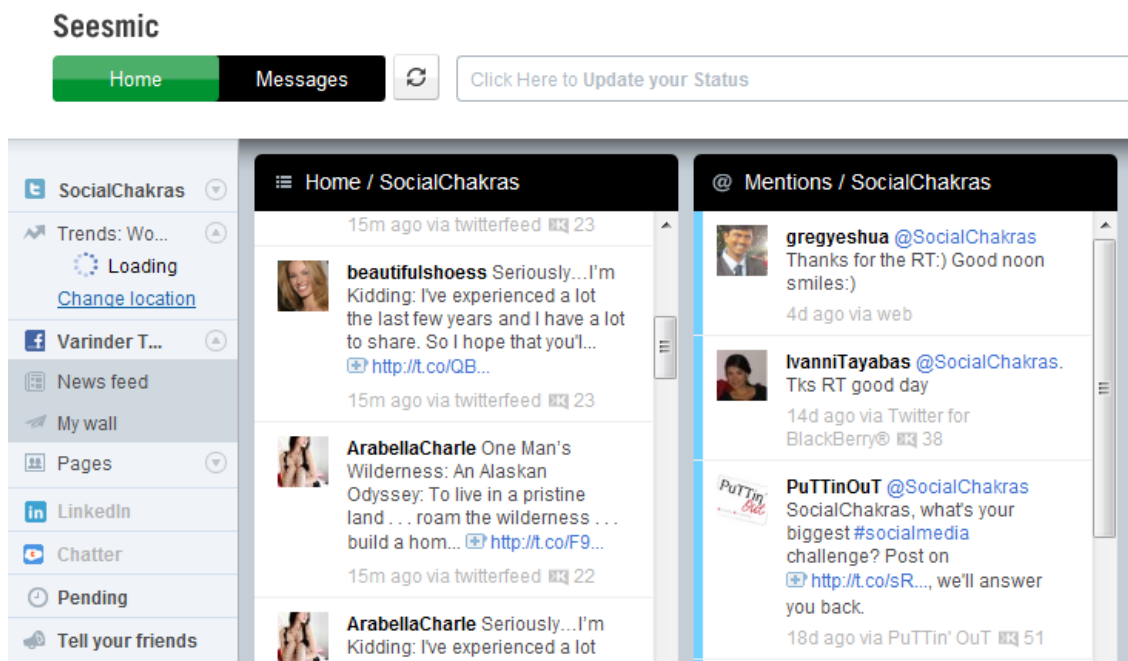


Figure 7.4: Seesmic

There are many other tools for managing the social media engagement like **Tweetdeck, MarketmeSuite, Simplify 360** and more. The choice depends on what exactly you are trying to achieve.

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.

Social Mention: 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. 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. A screenshot of the Social Mention results page for the query “Bookboon” is shown at Figure 7.5 below.

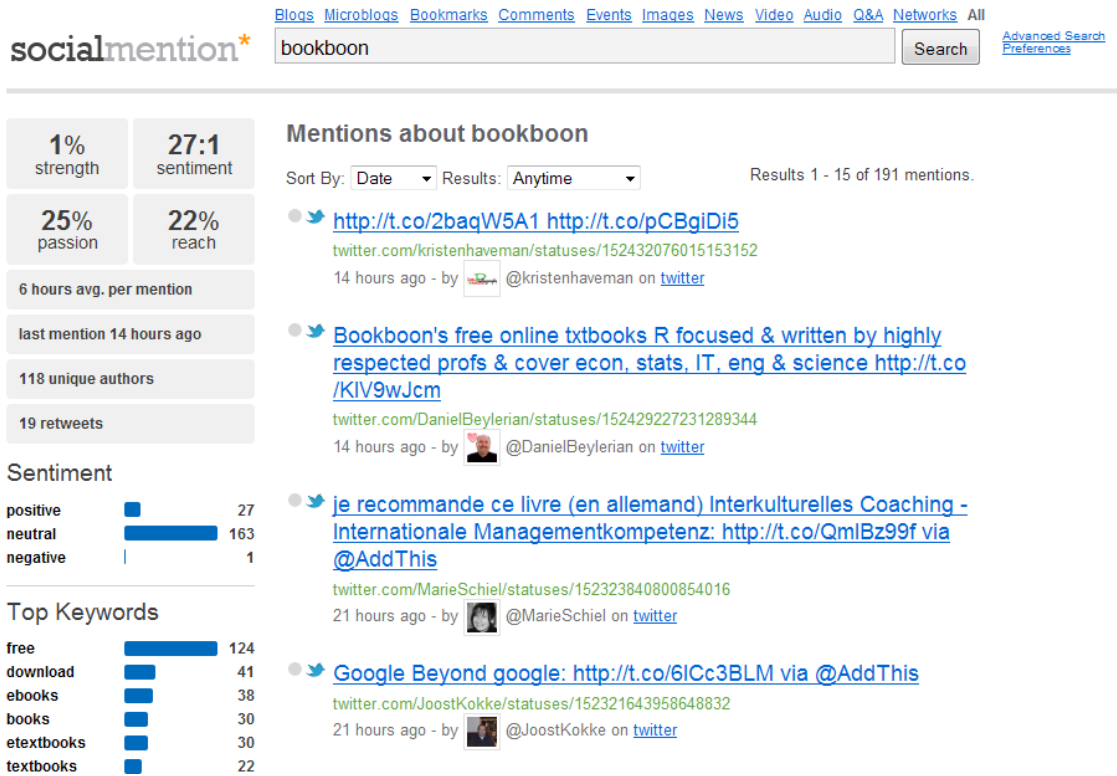


Figure 7.5: Screenshot of Social Mention Results Page

Addictomatic: Addictomatic searches for keyword related content on popular websites and presents the results in source boxes. One can customize 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, there are 25 platforms that Addictomatic searches for content in. A screenshot of Addictomatic results dashboard for the term “NFL” is placed at Figure 7.6 below.

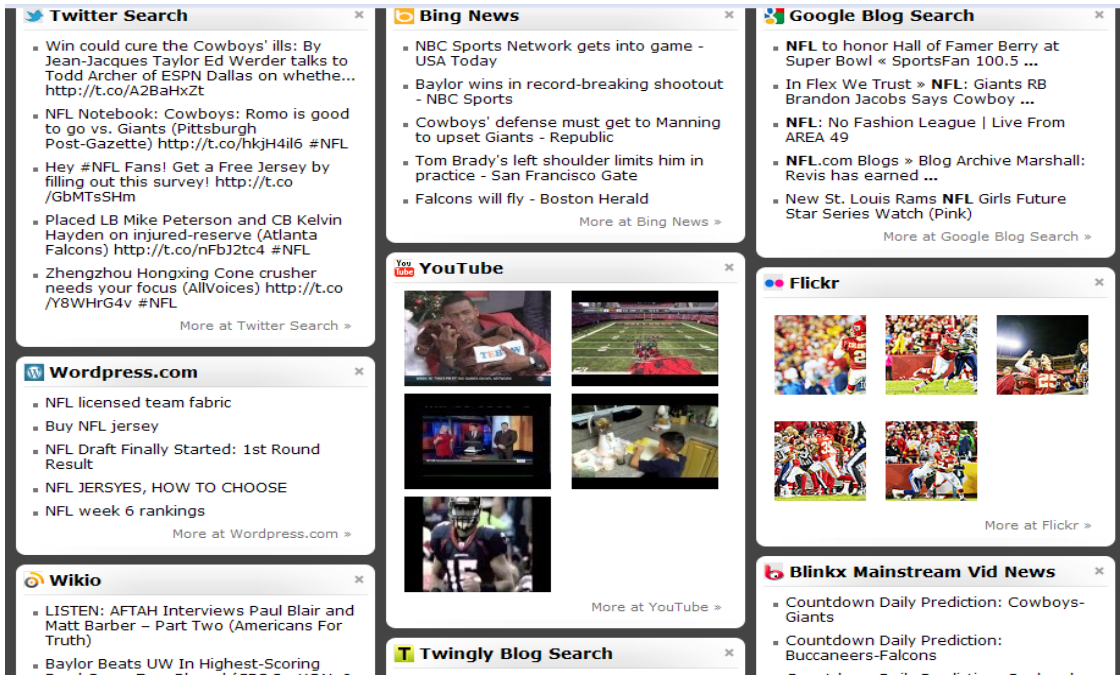


Figure 7.6: Addictomatic

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Kurrently: is a simple real time search engine for **Facebook** and **Twitter**. The platform combines the keyword relevant Facebook and Twitter updates into a single stream. The search results are self-refreshing and all one needs to do is to watch after submitting the query. To cater for varying frequency of updates based on the keyword the speed of the stream can be put to fast or slow and even halted if one needs to get up for a break. So if Facebook and Twitter are all you are bothered about, Kurrently may just be the right choice. The Figure 7.7 below shows a screenshot of the Kurrently search result stream for the keyword “economy”.



Figure 7.7: Screenshot of Kurrently Search Result Stream for the Keyword “economy”

There are many other free tools like **howsocial**, **Backtype**, **trendrr**, **icerocket** etc that more or less help in monitoring keyword related content on social media. Most of the social media sites themselves have their own monitoring or search tools like **Facebook** has **Insights**, **Twitter** has **twitter search** and **Google** has **Google Insights** 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.

Radian6: is a professional monitoring and analytics tool that scours millions of websites for mentions about brands and keywords. In addition to presenting results for brand mentions Radian6 also offers comprehensive analytics with data segmentation and filtering. With Radian6 you can find what your customers are saying about your brand and respond to them thereby developing relationships with them. It has a host of features like automatic assigning of cases to experts, keeping a record of interactions, gathering social market intelligence and measurement of social media campaigns. Advanced configuration options facilitate filtering by language, region or media type. One can also group keywords together to monitor the competition.



Figure 7.8: Radian6

Alterian SM2: helps in tracking conversations, monitoring sentiment and offers detailed analysis and reports about the searched keywords. It includes monitoring across **blogs, message boards, forums, microblogs, wikis, social networking sites, review sites** and **video/photo sharing websites**. It allows you to easily capture and analyse data from social media channels to monitor your brands, identify key communities and influencers, address customer service issues, and generate new sales leads. The Figure 7.9 below shows a sample report from Alterian about demographics.

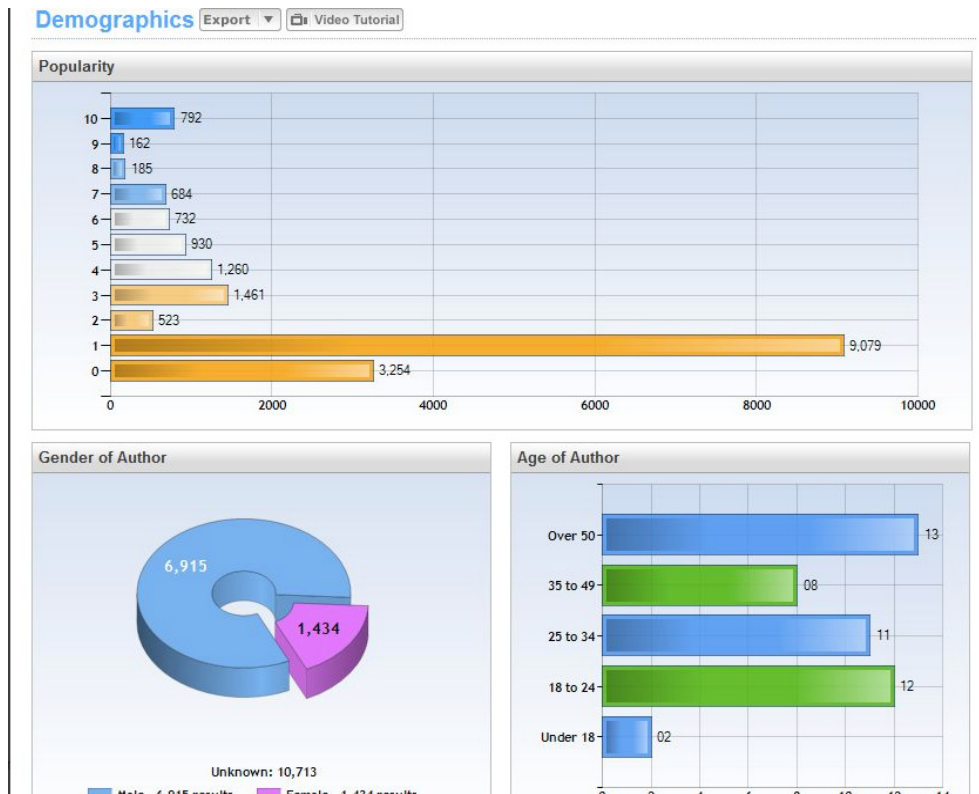


Figure 7.9: Alterian SM2 Sample Report about Demographics

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There are many other paid tools for social media monitoring like **Lithium**, **Sysomos**, **Meltwater**, **Buzzmetrics**, **Trackur** etc which can achieve most of your social media listening and measuring needs.

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.