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Research Paper

THE MIRACLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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ABSTRACT

Social media are online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives. They are interactive digital tools that feature content users may generate, manipulate, or influence. The social media provide several advantages to the mankind. The ability of the social media to increase the networking potential or work with others regardless of distance presents new ways for people. Social media could be easily utilized to **create cost effective strategies and campaigns** in all walks of life across the globe. There has been the most dramatic development in the information age over recent years. Social media platforms are completely free to use, the only cost to businesses being the time spent on updating profiles and interacting with contacts. Social media are different from social networking sites. There are about 100 largest social networks in the world based on the number of active users. Social networking is a two-way communication, where conversations are at the core, and through which relationships are developed to achieve the goals of social networking and social participation for development.

KEYWORDS: Social media, social networking, communication tools, communication technologies

PREAMBLE

The social media have become all pervasive interactive and participatory communication tools and technologies in modern times. The technological factors (increased broadband availability, the improvement of software tools and the development of more powerful computers and mobile devices), social factors (rapid uptake of social media by younger age groups), economic factors (increasing affordability of computers

and software and growing commercial interest the social media sites) and political factors (increasing political mobilization and several political changes across the world) have boosted the social media revolution across the globe. The social media application has become a new way of life in all modern organizations including the educational institutions. The specialists have explored new avenues for better social media application in higher educational institutions. The social networking sites range from general-purpose tools for the generic



community of interest to highly specialized tools for the support of learning in higher educational environment. The emergence of social media as parallel media of participatory communication and development is primarily analyzed in this paper on the basis of qualitative research methodology.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Information and communication technologies were developed all over the world during the last quarter of 20th century. The earliest forms of the Internet, such as CompuServe, were developed in the 1960s. Primitive forms of email were also developed during this time. In 1971, the first e-mail service began by connecting two computers. In 1978, exchange of data over phone lines took place. The first copies of early web browsers were distributed through Usenet in 1979 to enable the users to communicate through a virtual newsletter.

The home computers were developed in 1980s and paved the way for the emergence of Internet as an informal university in 1990s. The Geocities were the first web-based social networking site developed by David Bohnett and John Rezner in 1994. The users were enabled to create their own websites. In 1995, TheGlobe.com was founded by Stephan Paternot and Todd Krizelman which allowed the users to publish their content and interact with the other users sharing similar interests. In 1997, AIM was invented in North America, and was the leading instant messaging application in that region.

The SixDegrees.com was created as a social network service website by Andrew Weinreich in 1997. It was based on the Web of Contacts model of social networking. It functioned effectively as a social media network till 2001. It was named after the six degrees of separation concept and allowed users to list friends, family members and acquaintances both on the site and externally; external contacts were invited to join the site. Users could send messages and post bulletin board items to people in their first, second, and third degrees, and see their connection to any other user on the site. It was one of the first manifestations of social networking websites in the format now seen today (Carton, 2009:06). Subsequently, the Internet moved into the era of blogging and instant messaging.

By the year 2000, around 100 million people had access to the Internet, and it became quite common for people to be engaged socially online. Joe Cothrel opines that social media include the channels for user-generated content based on social technologies. Sam Decker describes social media as a digital interaction

oriented channels and contents created by and between people. Gini Dietrich states that social media allow people to network, to find people with like interests and to meet people who can become friends or customers. Bryan Eisenberg notes that social media are platforms for interaction and relationships, not content and advertisements. Howard Greenstein remarks that social media are online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives (Motaghem, 2016:12).

The social media are universally defined as the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. The websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation and wikis are among the different types of social media. The social media have become an integral part of life online as social websites and applications proliferate. The social media have also become an all pervasive online media which include social components, such as comment fields for users. The social media are commonly defined as internet or cellular phone based applications and tools to share information among people. The prominent characteristics of social media include - free web space, free web address, building profiles, uploading contents, making conversations, chatting with clients and members, sending of e-mails and creating pages.

EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are interactive digital tools that feature content users may generate, manipulate, or influence. Social media are conducive to timely, interactive communication and foster dialogue and content exchange among message consumers and creators. The online Social Networking enables people to maintain and to extend their personal and professional networks, as well as to facilitate the flow of information through these networks. The mobile communications and social media have gained a great deal of attention and research for their ability to raise awareness of issues, improve monitoring of environmental and social realities, and as social networking for better and governance and development. The role of social media in modern times is highly visible.

Social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics. The web site provides free web space to the users to upload the contents. The web address enables the users to post and share all their

content on this web address. The build profile helps the users to maintain personal details and connects individuals. The users are also provided the tools to post content in real time. This content can be text, images, audio, video or even symbolic likes and dislikes. The social media facilitate conversations between the likeminded persons. All posts are time stamped, making it easy to follow posts. Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

Social media is one of the major methods of social interaction around the world today. Social media is user-generated content distributed through the Internet with the intent to be shared and facilitate conversation between users (Wright and Hinson, 2010:15). Social media can create opportunities for two-way dialogue and interaction among organizations, the public, and individuals (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009:03). Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on. The social media facilitate two-way communication and allow communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people. The social media ensure emotional bonding with a circle of friends provides a great deal of support in an otherwise unmanageable situation.

UTILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media provide several advantages to the mankind. The ability of the social media to increase the networking potential or work with others regardless of distance presents new ways for people. The social media enable the users to stay in contact with friends, family members, fellow citizens and other likeminded persons across the globe. The social media provide the benefit of world wide connectivity in the age of globalization. They have become highly useful tools for multi-faceted communication. They promote commonality of interest and enable the users to participate in a social network community.

The social media have leveled the playing field for businesses as it is accessible to anyone, regardless of company size, turnover and contacts. The social media channels are extremely simple to use, even for people with basic IT experience. Modern organizations can communicate information in a flash, regardless of geographical location. The social media channels offer

unparalleled opportunities to interact with customers and build relationships. The social media's adaptability makes content management generally more flexible. The social media services provide be an outlet for the users to share their ideas and thoughts with other people in a comfortable environment. They enable the users to connect with entire groups of people who are interested in the same things. The social media could be easily utilized to **create cost effective strategies and campaigns** that can create viral results, writes Hollier (2009:10).

The social media will help in building a good reputation for a business organization. Through social media, the company can repeatedly reinforce the brand name. Brand awareness starts with the experiences of the employees of a company. Social media forum acts as a powerful way to communicate the brand value and brand attribute as they facilitate open forms of communication (Carragher et. al, 2009:05).

Social networking platforms may allow organizations to improve communication and productivity by disseminating information among different groups of employees in a more efficient manner, resulting in increased productivity. Social media advantages include – open communication leading to enhanced information discovery and delivery, discussion of ideas, post news, ask questions and share links, enhancement of business contacts, useful and effective recruitment, improvement of business reputation and implementation of marketing campaigns (Society for Human Resource Management, 2010).

The industry is in an excellent position to benefit from all concomitant advantages social media can offer by evaluating goals and objectives, conducting professional research and by using a systematic approach; social networking enables us to change the nature of events in the future (Tretenhahn, 2011:14). The strategic importance of social media is high for tourism competitiveness. Slow progress is made by the industry in responding to business opportunities by social media. The online world is rapidly evolving and some companies may embrace new technologies due to the pressure to be digital but are not thinking about what it means to the business in a virtual environment. The phenomenon of social networking and the development of social media (web-based and mobile technologies that turn text communications into active dialog) has been the most dramatic development in the information age over recent years (Bank and Bank, 2014:01).

The social media incorporate an instant messaging feature facilitates exchange information in real-time via a chat. Social networking can provide a tool for managers to utilize in team meetings, for conference organizers to use to update attendees and for business people to use as a means of interacting with clients or prospects. The social media also provide free advertising services to the mankind about the activities and contributions of government and non-government organizations. The social media have led to the development of a near instantaneous news cycle as millions of social networking updates rapidly spread news and information.

The social media have provided opportunities to the people to meet frequently and interact well for various purposes. The social media enable the users to constantly keep in contact with family through advanced means and methods. The social media facilitate the creation of networks of like-minded people. The users can always remain well connected to a larger pool of new information and opinion. The social media platforms are completely free to use, the only cost to businesses being the time spent on updating profiles and interacting with contacts.

DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Empirical studies have reported the advantages and disadvantages of social media and found that the advantages weighed over the disadvantages. Studies have reported that the social media association had considerably reduced inter-personal relations and social interaction. The children, adolescents and youth do not find adequate time for face-to-face interactions with their peers and lose opportunities for developing social skills for their success. The use of social networks has exposed individuals to harassment or inappropriate contact from others. The users also encounter the risks of fraud and theft of identity on account of social media abuse.

Several decades of research has found that greater social contact is related to reduction of morbidity while fewer contacts lead to increased morbidity. Lack of social connection or loneliness is also associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease. The Internet Paradox concluded that greater use of the internet was associated with declines in communication between family members in the house, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their levels of depression and loneliness. Another disadvantage of social networks is that it can help create something which does not exist or may not be as good as it is presented (Sigman, 2009:13).

Social networks have accounted for the majority of time spent online since about 60 percent of people across the world have become active Internet users. The study revealed that social networking sites have wasted the time and energy of people. The social networking invites major corporations to invade their privacy and sell personal information. Cyber bullying, spreading of misinformation, locating the where about of the people, less real life interaction, risk of identity theft and fraud, drop out of users from schools and colleges, distraction from healthy habits and lifestyles, enabling the hackers to commit fraud, launch spam and virus attacks, victimization of people through online scams, inability to connect in-person, lack of privacy, open to security issues, lesser productivity and health hazards are the major drawbacks of social media identified by the researchers across the globe (Nielsen Report, 2012).

The social media have also posed certain serious confidentiality issues in the workplace. The leakage of sensitive information has caused financial and credibility loss for modern institutions. The atmosphere of the organization can become unhealthy because of tensions between the employees. Inadequate human interaction has also caused health disorders among the workers and affected the productivity. The healthy social activities naturally take a back seat when social networking becomes the prime agenda of the people. Excessive time spent on social networks causes some individuals to experience withdrawal symptoms.

SOCIAL MEDIA vs. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others. The difference is not just semantics but in the features and functions put into these websites by their creators which dictate the way they are to be used (Cohen, 2009:07). There are several differences between social media and social networks. The first one could be the definition; social media is still a media which is primarily used to transmit or share information with a broad audience, while social networking is an act of engagement as people with common interests associate together and build relationships through community (Hartshorn, 2010:08). Indeed, social media is simply a system, a communication channel; it is not a location that you visit. In contrast, social networking is a two-way communication, where conversations are at the core, and through which relationships are developed (Bedell, 2010:02).

What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between latent ties who share some offline connection. On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily networking or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them social network sites (Haythornthwaite, 2005:09). Basically, social media facilitate social interaction and participation in modern society.

The Pew Research Centre examined the status of social networking sites in the world. The Face book has dominated over other social media sites in terms of access and usage. It remains the king of social media as on today. A majority of the users are Smartphone users. Approximately, 80% of internet users are also Smartphone users. The Pinterest and Instagram are the fastest growing social networking sites in the world. Face book continued to grow slightly, whilst LinkedIn actually saw a slight dip on 2015. Face book is the number one social media website today and it currently boasts over a billion users.

A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations) and a set of the dyadic ties between these actors. The social network perspective provides a set of methods for analyzing the structure of whole social entities as well as a variety of theories explaining the patterns observed in these structures. Social networking sites also give users the ability to observe their connections and the connections of others on the site. These sites are about the facilitation of relationships, relationships that existed before the connection on the site as well as relationships that were created through the social networking site. Social networking sites are characterized by a user's ability to create a public profile which contains demographic and personal information, and is made visible based upon personal privacy settings (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Newer forms of social media include mapping and geo-tagging, sometimes known as location services. There are many terms related to social media that are important to understand. Computer mediated communication (CMC) is the conversations facilitated through technology-based social media platforms (Hughes et. al, 2008:11).

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are not only widely used, but they have become widespread in business. Social media icons are seen everywhere and it became almost unusual to see businesses or brands without them. Social media have enabled the internet marketers and website owners to enjoy great visibility of their websites across the world. The benefits of social media marketing for business began to become quite clear to business owners large and small. Social media bookmarking have become quite popular. There are services that would bookmark a post or a website across dozens or even hundreds of social media services. Social media today consists of thousands of social media platforms, all serving the same – but slightly different purpose. The social media platforms are more popular than others, but even the smaller ones get used by a portion of the population because each one caters to a very different type of person. Modern businesses are using social media to promote their products and services in a brand new way. The social media platforms serve multi-purposes and they continue to play a vital role in future.

CONCLUSION

The Internet access is the process that enables individuals and organizations to connect to the Internet using computer terminals, computers, mobile devices, sometimes via computer networks. The consumer use of the Internet first became popular through dial-up Internet access in the 1990s. By the first decade of the 21st century, many consumers in developed nations used faster, broadband Internet access technologies. By 2016 this was almost ubiquitous worldwide, with a global average connection speed exceeding. The Internet access has changed the way in which many people think and has become an integral part of peoples economic, political, and social lives. The social networking sites have become wildly popular. There are about 100 largest social networks in the world based on the number of active users. Modern educational institutions also have encouraged the academicians, researchers and students to utilize the social networking sites for the purpose of educational interaction and advancement. The social network sites (SNSs) are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach. The social networking is a two-way communication, where conversations are at the core, and through which relationships are developed.

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