



Cover Page



SOCIAL MEDIA- PRACTICE AND MANIPULATION: THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share or exchange, information, ideas, and pictures / videos in virtual communities and networks. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Keywords : Social Media, Computer-Mediated, Networking Service, Business Potential

Introduction

A social networking service (also social networking site or SNS) is a platform to build social networks or social relations among people who share interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his or her social links, and a variety of additional services. Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to create a public profile, to create a list of users with whom to share connections, and view and cross the connections within the system. Most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging. Social network sites are varied and they incorporate new information and communication tools such as mobile connectivity, photo/video/sharing and blogging. Online community services are sometimes considered as a social network service, though in a broader sense, social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, interests with people in their network.

Classification of social media

Social-media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking.

Mobile social media

Mobile social media refers to the combination of mobile devices and social media. This is a group of mobile marketing applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. According to Andreas Kaplan, mobile social media applications can be differentiated among four types:

1. **Space-timers (location and time sensitive):** Exchange of messages with relevance for one specific location at one specific point in time
2. **Space-locators (only location sensitive):** Exchange of messages, with relevance for one specific location, which are tagged to a certain place and read later by others
3. **Quick-timers (only time sensitive):** Transfer of traditional social media applications to mobile devices to increase immediacy
4. **Slow-timers (neither location, nor time sensitive):** Transfer of traditional social media applications to mobile devices

Mobile social media and business potential

Although traditional social media offer a variety of opportunities for companies in a wide range of business sectors, Economic Sector mobile social media makes use of the location- and time-sensitivity aspects of it in order to engage into marketing research, communication, sales promotions/discounts, and relationship development/loyalty programs.



Cover Page



- **Marketing research:** Mobile social media applications offer data about offline consumer movements at a level of detail heretofore limited to online companies. **Communication:** Mobile social media communication takes two forms, the first of which is company-to-consumer in which a company may establish a connection to a consumer based on its location and provide reviews about locations nearby.
- **Sales promotions and discounts:** Although in the past customers had to use printed coupons, mobile social media allows companies to tailor promotions to specific users at specific times.
- **Relationship development and loyalty programs:** In order to increase long-term relationships with customers, companies are able to create loyalty programs that allow customers who check-in regularly at a location to earn discounts or perks.
- **E-Commerce:** Mobile social media applications such as Amazon.com and Pinterest are influencing an upward trend in the popularity and accessibility of e-commerce, or online purchases.

Distinction from other media

E-commerce businesses may refer to social media as consumer-generated media (CGM). Some of the properties that help describe the differences between social and industrial media are:

1. **Quality:** In industrial (traditional) publishing—mediated by a publisher—the typical range of quality is substantially narrower than in niche, unmediated markets.
2. **Reach:** Both industrial and social media technologies provide scale and are capable of reaching a global audience.
3. **Frequency:** The number of times an advertisement is displayed on social media platforms.
4. **Accessibility:** The means of production for industrial media are typically government and/or corporate (privately owned); social media tools are generally available to the public at little or no cost.
5. **Usability:** Industrial media production typically requires specialized skills and training.
6. **Immediacy:** The time lag between communications produced by industrial media can be long (days, weeks, or even months) compared to social media (which can be capable of virtually instantaneous responses).
7. **Permanence:** Industrial media, once created, cannot be altered (once a magazine article is printed and distributed, changes cannot be made to that same article) whereas social media can be altered almost instantaneously by comments or editing.

Managing social media

There is an increasing trend towards using social media monitoring tools that allow marketers to search, track, and analyze conversation on the web about their brand or about topics of interest.

Honeycomb framework of social media

“Present a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups.”

- **Identity:** This block represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting.
- **Conversations:** This block represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting.
- **Sharing:** This block represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content.
- **Presence:** This block represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible.
- **Relationships:** This block represents the extent to which users can be related to other users.
- **Reputation:** This block represents the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting.
- **Groups:** This block represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub communities.



Cover Page



Criticisms of social media

Criticisms of social media range from criticisms of the ease of use of specific platforms and their capabilities, disparity of information available, issues with trustworthiness and reliability of information presented, the impact of social media use on an individual's concentration, ownership of media content, and the meaning of interactions created by social media.

1.Disparity

Eric Ehrmann contends that social media in the form of public diplomacy create a patina of inclusiveness that covers traditional economic interests that are structured to ensure that wealth is pumped up to the top of the economic pyramid, perpetuating the digital divide and post Marxian class conflict.

2. Trustworthiness

Because large-scale collaborative co-creation is one of the main ways of forming information in the social network, the user generated content is sometimes viewed with skepticism; readers do not trust it is as a reliable source of information.

3. Concentration

Some have said that "fast (social) media and deep slow thought don't mix well."

Phishing scams on social networking sites—don't be tricked into giving your information away!

SCAM watch is again warning consumers to protect themselves from identity theft when using social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. While social networking sites can provide users with many benefits, scammers can use your personal information to steal your identity.

Twitter has recently warned that scammers have tricked users into handing over their passwords and user names to commit identity theft or steal money.

Scammers can gain control of a consumer's email or social networking account in a number of ways. These include genuine-looking emails or messages from the site requesting the consumer to 'confirm' their username and password for their social networking accounts via attached links.

Once a scammer has control of a consumer's account, they can change the password and pose as that person. Scammers use this information to send bogus emails or messages that look like they are from the registered user to request money or gain access to other consumers' accounts.

SCAMwatch understands that scammers are posting false internet posts using consumers' names and email account details and sending bogus emails and invitations to their friends on the social networking sites. These emails have been known to contain links to download spyware and malicious software disguised as legitimate files as well as requests for money.

There have also been reports of consumers receiving emails or messages from their online 'friends' or the social networking site. These contain a link to a fake login or website masquerading as their social networking site. Once a person logs into that false site, the username and password for that person is also stolen and may be used to steal the identity of that second person.

Protect yourself

- **Never** send your online account details through an email and think carefully before you give away any personal or financial information.



Cover Page



- **Never** enter your personal information on a website if you are not certain it is genuine. Don't click on the link provided in an email or call the phone number provided; instead, find the business's contact details through a general internet search.
- **Keep** your computer updated with the latest anti-virus and anti-spy ware software, and use a good firewall.
- When using social networking websites:
 - Check the privacy settings and think about who you really want to have access to your personal information.
 - Be careful about what personal information you put on the internet, because scammers can use these details to guess your passwords or to commit fraud.
 - Check how much information about you is available on the internet—type your name into a search engine and see how many hits you get.
 - Don't be lulled into a false sense of security—online 'friends' may not be who they say they are.
 - If you receive an email that appears to be from a family member or friend, look at the way the email is written and ask yourself whether the email sounds like it was written by that person.
 - If you receive an unexpected request for money from what appears to be a friend, try to contact that friend or their family or friends to verify the request. Do not use any of the contact details in the message.

Problematic Social Networking: Over-sharing and Cyber bullying

Over-sharing Fears

According to the Internet Safety Project, "Oversharing is willingly, but naively, posting information on the Internet that puts you or your family at risk" (Over-sharing, n.d). Over-sharing is a rising issue and was Webster's New World Dictionary word of the year for 2008 .

While it would be common sense to think about the information before you decide to share it, social networking sites are actually set up to encourage the user to share as much as possible about themselves. "That's intentional: these sites succeed by increasing the activity within the network. Yes, there are privacy settings, to limit access to some data- but these settings are never the default. Only a tiny minority of users make the effort to opt out. Everyone else shares with the world.

The rise in popularity of social networking has given online confidence to its users. However, that wasn't always the case. In the late 1990's. "many people didn't even use their real names on the Internet. Email addresses were usually aliases or nicknames in an attempt to retain as much privacy as possible" (Jordan, 2010). Where does this confidence come with the new Internet generation? "The premise is that everyone in your social circle not only wants to know but NEEDS to know when you are buying that tall frappuccino from star bucks. That they need to know precisely where you are and what you are doing every minute of the day" (Jordan, 2010). This is how the phenomenon of over-sharing has developed, however, people don't realize the implications of this posted information.

A staff member at Retrevo reminds users of the existence of screenshots

"The information people post to sites like Twitter and Facebook can easily go on to have a life of its own,' says Jennifer I. Jacobson, Director of Public Relations and Social Media for Retrevo.com. 'You don't always know who's following you and just about anyone can take a screenshot of your post, save it, and share it with the world.'"

In February 2010, a Web site called Please Rob Me was launched and contained a live feed from people "checking in" at locations via Four Square and cross-referencing the information from their Twitter feed. By publicly telling others where you are via a social networking site, you are in essence telling them you are not home, creating the potential opportunities for criminals to take advantage of it. While the create of Please Rob Me create angry buzz, the creators, Groenveld, Orsboom, and van Amstel, discussed their logic:



Cover Page



Many people are becoming too relaxed about their privacy and safety. While the tech crowd may claim that experts are overreacting to too much information being posted online, the fact remains that social networks have become increasingly intertwined. According to Groeneveld, Orsboom, and van Amstel, relaying messages between the various sites makes it easy to lose track of the information shared and how many people have access to it. "It is important to be aware of privacy settings, to control the reach your messages have. If you allow your messages to travel between different social networks, this becomes more complicated. Information you trust to your friends might end up somewhere else."

By teaching others about social media literacy, it can help protect them and broaden their knowledge base of technology. Just because the social networking sites are there, we don't necessarily have to use it. However, if we do, it must be responsibly.

The Internet Safety Project has the following tips to keep from over-sharing:

- Giving away too much information can put it at risk for identity theft.
- Letting other Web users know that you'll be away from home puts you at risk for having your house broken into.
- Children and teens who over-share may attract the attention of online predators.
- Potential employers often look at person's social networking accounts, blogs, and so forth as they make hiring decisions. Posting inappropriate material online could hurt your professional information.

Cyber bullying

- One problem with social networking is that it can lead to cyber bullying, which affects students in and out of school.
- Did you know that nearly 1 in 3 students are involved in bullying?
- Did you know that while school violence as a whole is declining, bullying behaviors have increased by 5%?
- Did you know that kids who are obese, gay or have disabilities are up to 63% more likely to be bullied than other children?
- Did you know that last month alone, there were multiple suicide deaths as a result of bullying? (Maiers, 2010)

What is Cyber Bullying?

Cyber bullying is a hard concept to define as more and more technology becomes available to children. Many people believe that only children can be involved in cyber bullying, but in fact a survey of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers showed that 17% of teachers had been cyber bullied. Teachers can be cyber bullied when students use technology to harass a teacher in some way.

Cyber bullying is also complicated because there is direct cyber bullying, which most of us think of when we think of cyber bullying, but there is also cyber bullying by proxy, or indirect cyber bullying. The proxy bullying involves using other people to help cyber bully a victim, sometimes without the accomplice actually knowing what they are doing. It essentially is getting someone else to do the dirty work in bullying. Cyber Bullying by proxy also can occur when someone hacks into a victim's account of some type and uses it to send out inappropriate content to the victim's friends and contacts.

What really distinguishes cyber bullying from "playful teasing" is the aggressive intent behind the bullying. But again what makes it complicated is intent can be in the eye of the beholder, and someone can always claim they "were just joking." But a basic definition of cyber bullying is when someone bullies someone else through the use of technology. The cyber bullying exists on a continuum of severity. When the bullying is on the lesser end of the spectrum it is very hard to identify that it is bullying. But on the more extreme end cyber bullying has led to murder and suicide.



Cover Page



Types and Methods of Cyber Bullying

Flaming - Flaming is a brief, heated exchange that happens between 2 or more people using some sort of communication technology. It usually happens in a public space like chat rooms or discussion groups, rather than in private discussions like emails .

Harassment - This is words, conduct, or actions being directed at a specific person with the intent to annoy, alarm, or cause emotional distress in that person. It is usually repeated messages or actions against one person.

Denigration - This is information about someone that is derogatory and untrue. Online it can be posted to a website, sent via email, or messaged to someone else. This also included sending or sharing photos of someone that portrays them in a sexual or harmful manner. Online “slam books” which are created in order to make fun of others are also forms of denigration.

Impersonation - This is when a person pretends to be another person, usually by using the victim’s password to gain access to their accounts. They then send communication to others that is usually cruel, negative, or inappropriate, posing as that person. In more extreme cases, impersonation has led to someone giving out where a person lives to the wrong people, in order for them to be track down by said people.

Outing and Trickery - Outing is sharing personal, and sometimes embarrassing, information with others who were not meant to learn that information. Trickery is tricking someone into revealing personal information, and then sharing that information with others.

Exclusion/Ostracism - Children, like most people, just want to be a part of a group and fit in with others. Being excluded can be seen as “social death”, and people can be excluded using online methods. The online exclusion could be being locked out of a password protected chat space, or just being de-friended on Face book.

Cyber Stalking - This is stalking via the use of electronic communication using repetitive harassing and threatening communication.

Happy Slapping - This is a fairly new method of cyber bullying that has become popular in England. People, usually teens walk up and slap someone, while another person uses a phone or camera to record the incident. The video is then put on the internet for others to see, even though the victim may not be aware of it (Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston, 2008).

When your child is being bullied online a parent can/should take the following steps:

Save the evidence -Teach your children to print out any evidence of cyber bullying that happens to them online. If any material is offensive to them, teach them to turn off the monitor and get an adult. This evidence can also be shared with the school, because the school needs to be aware of the bullying situation.

"Society has always carved out space for young people to misbehave. We used to do this by making a distinction between behavior we couldn't see, because it was hidden, and behavior we could see, because it was public. That bargain is now broken, because social life increasingly includes a gray area that is publicly available, but not for public consumption."

Social Networking Addiction

Social networking addiction has become increasingly debated among experts. "The American Psychology Association (AMA) has been clear about their skepticism over social networking addiction" (Rose, 2009). With recent abilities to become even more connected with user-friendly platforms, the ability to become addicted to social networking



Cover Page



sites is becoming even more plausible. However, little research has been conducted on the subject. "Psychiatrists often see social networking addiction as a symptom of other underlying conditions such as loneliness, depression, anxiety, and phobias. The AMA and other expert organizations agree that there is a possibility, but require more in-depth investigation and research".

conclusion

In general, addiction occurs when an elevation in a person's mood occurs. It is an emotional cycle. "For instance, an addict is created by the need for more pleasurable feelings in their life. They then begin to feel shame or guilt, the shame and guilt (being a negative emotion) then causes them to look for more pleasure...thereby creating a cycle of addiction. Addiction is a reaction to a habitual need to act in a way to relieve stress, emotional discomfort, or levels of sadness. Looking for healthy substitutes at the onset can help avoid addiction".

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