Understanding Social Media: Functionality and Differentiating Social Media and Social Networking Sites

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Abstract - The term "Social Media" has been receiving a lot of recognition lately, however most of the time the concept of social media has been often misconstrued or is inadequate. There are a certain section of the population that has the notion that social media is only limited to social networking sites which is absolutely incorrect. The internet in the beginning was mostly utilised for viewing, reading or to buy products/services. But the most significant change occurred in the internet world that created an impact that changed the way digital communication functioned and it was when users started to use the internet as a platform for sharing, blogging, socially networking, when content was created, shared, modified and discussed. As fascinating as it may sound the term social media is often misunderstood. The popular notion that it mostly comprises of the social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter is completely inaccurate, these social networking sites are only a part of social media. Similarly social media is a part of new media; although there is a very thin line that distinguishes the two, in most aspects they are synonymous. In this paper we would discuss as to how social media is different from social networking and other new media and also how it all bean and evolved into the social media as we know of in the present era.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking, Definition, Evolution, Misunderstood.

I.   WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

The term "Social Media" has been receiving a lot of recognition lately, however most of the time the concept of social media has been often misconstrued or is inadequate. There are a certain section of the population that has the notion that social media is only limited to social networking sites which is absolutely incorrect. So in this chapter we'll be establishing as to what social media actually is.

Social Media Epistemology
It all began with the invention of the internet in 1950's – 60's, as the story went that a *"7-year-old blind boy, armed with a heightened pitch sensitivity, whistled into a phone at precisely 2600 hertz and accidently 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 60's".* (Tapriyal & Kanwar 2012: 9)

That incident gave rise to what we now know as the internet, as after Joe Engressia and John Draper there were many more like Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs built devices that were improvised version of the "blue boxes". It progressed through the years with developments like Bulletin Board Systems, Operating systems etc. Until finally in 6th August 1991 the internet was made public and the term World Wide Web or WWW was coined and with the help of private Internet Service Providers (ISP) the internet was accessible to even the common man. (Tapriyal & Kanwar 2012: 9-13)

However the internet in the beginning was mostly utilised for viewing, reading or to buy products/services. But the most significant change occurred in the internet world that created an impact that changed the way digital communication functioned and it was when users started to use the internet as a platform for sharing, blogging, socially networking, when content was created, shared, modified and discussed. The era of social networking and eventually social media had begun. Figure 1[1] shows the history of social networking that began by sending of an e-mail to the birth of present day social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. So the beginning of social media can be marked as to when people started using the internet for sharing information and communicating with each other. Although it might have been the social networking site that might have awakened the phenomenon but social networking and social media are not the same.

As fascinating as it may sound the term social media is often misunderstood. The popular notion that it mostly comprises of the social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter is completely inaccurate, these social networking sites are only a part of social media. Similarly social media is a part of new media; although there is a very thin line that distinguishes the two, in most aspects they are synonymous.
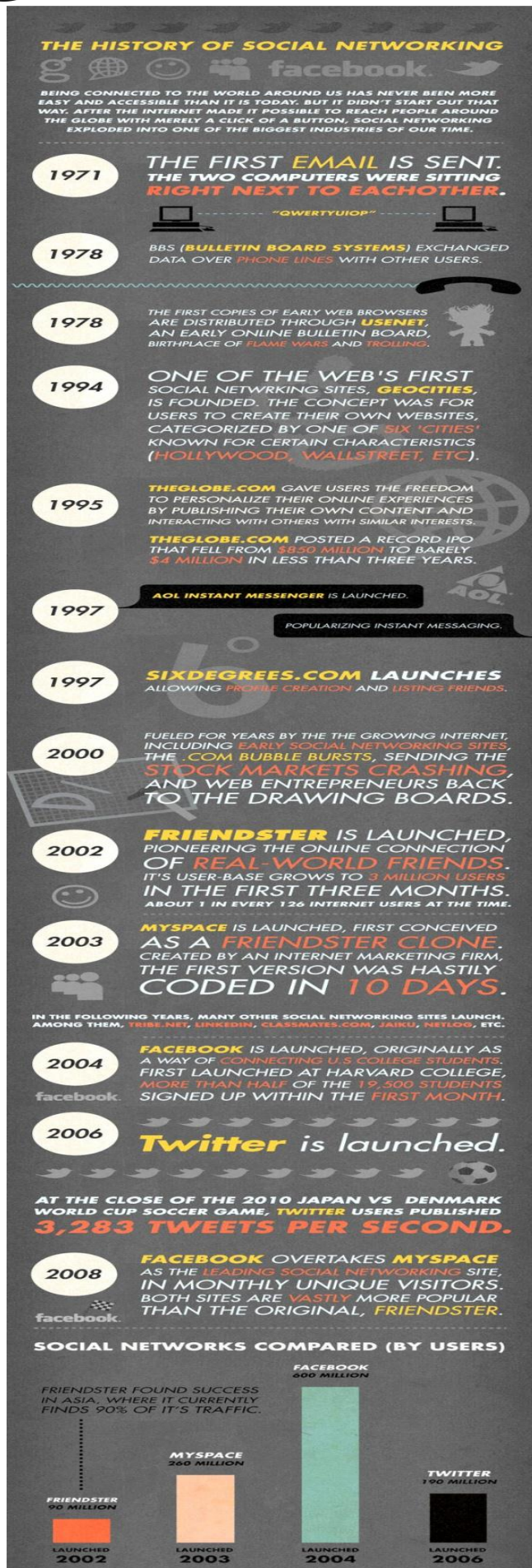
Figure 1. The History of Social Networking

Difference between traditional media and New Media/Social Media

However before we divulge into the distinction of new media and social media and social media and social networking we should look into how the new media and social media are different from the traditional media i.e. print, radio and television. The very first and the most important distinction that comes to notice is that the traditional media is more of a one way communication and it is always one to many form of communication. Whereas new media and social media is a two way platform for communication and they are many to many form of communication. In the beginning even the internet had limited technology and restricted platforms hence it too was a one to many mode of communication, but with the development and innovations in the technology there were more platform introduced which changed the mode of communication form one to many to many to many.

This proved to be a decisive moment in the history of internet that led to the birth of social media as we know it now. The print media had made the people into silent readers; the radio transformed them to silent listeners and the television made them into silent viewers but with the platform provided by social media the people are no more just silent spectators feeding into the information and data fed to them by the media. Now the interaction had reached a new level where people could create, share, examine, analyse, discuss, collaborate and respond to any information or content supplied to them.

The new media provided the platform for the people to express their opinions and views and at the same time communicate the same with others and even respond to their opinions and views. The traditional media utilises a centralised framework for organisation, production and distribution so the there is a time gap between production and distribution and once created cannot be altered. But in case of social media it is not so the framework in decentralised and there are several production points (as every person with access to internet can do it), hence the publication or output is almost immediate and the content can be changed anytime and from anywhere. So social media/ new media is more accessible, more flexible and more hassle free than the traditional media. That is how the new media/social media are different from the traditional media.

Difference between New Media and Social Media

Now coming to the difference between new media and social media; social media as mentioned before is a part of new media i.e. all forms of social media comes under the umbrella of new media but is not true vice-versa. Social media is the interactive part of new media for example if a person takes a photo and uploads it on the internet then it is not social media but becomes inclusive of new media.

However if the same photo is shared on a social media platform like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram where people can see, share and comment on it then it becomes social media. So as according to the definition of the word 'social' which is according to the Oxford dictionary *"Relating to society or its organisation",* it can be understood that it may be any behaviour, gesture or activity that leads to interaction to other members of the society. So for any new media to be a social media the operative word is 'interaction'.

Difference between Social Media and Social Networking

Similarly social networking is a part of social media but social media is not only comprised of social networks. To clarify the popular but false notion let us consider an example of Wikipedia which is a collaboratively edited, multilingual, free-access, free content Internet encyclopaedia, now here the interaction happens in terms of collaboration where people can collaboratively give inputs and edit the content regarding any topic or subject and this information or content is free and accessible to anyone who has access to the internet. So Wikipedia is an example of a social media platform, however it is not a social networking platform as your engagement is not to form relationships as in social networking sites where the main motive or goal is individual or group engagement within like-minded individuals. So social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, MySpace are all about building relationships and the users do have a choice on privacy as to whom can interact with them and who cannot. Whereas in social media sites which are not social networking sites like

Different aspects of social media

Wikipedia or blogging sites like WordPress, Blogger, Quora the content is accessible to anyone but there is no personal engagement between the one who shares and the one who reads. However it doesn't mean that social networking sites are not a part of social media but it only that social media is much more than only social networking sites.

II.   DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

As now we have established the difference between new media and social media, and social media and social networking, let us look into the definition of social media. According to Kaplan and Haenlein social media is:

"A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content".

-    (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 61)

"Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co- create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. Given the tremendous exposure of social media in the popular press today, it would seem that we are in the midst of an altogether new communication landscape."

-    (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 241)

The above statement rationalises the ecology of social media.

Figure 2. Different aspects of Social Media[2]

Figure 2 outlines the different platforms that constitute the entity: social media. As we can see from the figure that social network is only a part of social media. The components of social media comprises of:

➤ Creativity work sharing sites like video sharing sites (YouTube), Photo sharing sites (Flickr), Music sharing sites (sound cloud), Content sharing combined with assistance (Piczo.com), General intellectual property sharing sites (Creative Commons). Kaplan and Haenlein in their paper *"Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media",* have described these platforms as to be more of like content communities where media content is shared between users.

➤ Business networking sites like LinkedIn which is like a professional listing of individuals a companies which is mostly used for networking professionally and as a job hunting site by individuals and as a recruiting platform by the companies.

➤ Collaborative websites like Wikipedia, *"Collaborative projects enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users and are, in this sense, probably the most democratic manifestation of UGC[3]."* (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 62)

➤ Blogging sites like Tumblr, WordPress, Blogger: Blogs, which represent the earliest form of Social Media, are special types of websites that usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order. (OECD[4] 2007). Blogs are mostly text based personal web page which in generally administered by the creator themselves.

➤ Social Network like Facebook, MySpace: Social networking sites are applications or platforms that allow the users to interact by creating personal profiles that include personal information, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 63)

➤ Virtual Gaming World:

"Virtual worlds are platforms that replicate a three dimensional environment in which users can appear in the form of personalized avatars and interact with each other as they would in real life. In this sense, virtual worlds are probably the ultimate manifestation of Social Media, as they provide the highest level of social presence and media richness of all applications discussed thus far. Virtual worlds come in two forms. The first, virtual game worlds, require their users to behave according to strict rules in the context of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG)."

-    (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 64)

➤ Podcasts: According to Merriam Webster a Podcast is *"a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet".* Now with the development in technology it is not only restricted to music or talk shows. Podcasting has eliminated the "be on time" fundamental of radio and TV shows as with podcasting you can listen to or view anything you want, whenever and wherever you want. So this is how podcasting has made broadcasting timings irrelevant. Also it eliminates the regional limitations of broadcasting, so now any user can watch shows only broadcasted to a specific region. For example the popularity of the American TV series Game of Thrones is mostly due to users watching the show via on the internet along with the American TV audience, which is not possible with broadcasting, unless you have your broadcasting right for the specific show in the provided region.

➤ Virtual Social World: Virtual Social Worlds, enable users to choose their characteristics more freely and essentially live a virtual life that will be very similar to their real lives. As in virtual game worlds, virtual social world users appear in the form of avatars and interact in a three-dimensional virtual environment; however, in this realm, there are no rules restricting the range of possible interactions, except for basic physical laws such as gravity. (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009a, 2009b).

These were the basic major platforms that constitutes the social media, there are other platforms such as: User-sponsored blogs (The Unofficial AppleWeblog, Cnet.com), Company-sponsored websites/blogs (Apple.com, P&G's Vocalpoint), Company-sponsored cause/help sites (Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, click2quit.com), Invitation-only social networks (ASmallWorld.net), Commerce communities (eBay, Amazon.com, Craig's List, iStockphoto, Threadless.com), Educational materials sharing (MIT OpenCourseWare, MERLOT), Open Source Software communities (Mozilla's spreadfirefox.com, Linux.org) and Social bookmarking sites allowing users to recommend online news stories, music, videos, etc. (Digg, del.icio.us, Newsvine, Mixx it, Reddit).

III.   SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTIONALITY

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy& Silvestre in their paper: *"Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media"* has utilised a framework (figure 3) in the shape of a honeycomb in order to explain the functioning blocks of social media. They named the frame work as the honeycomb of social media, the honeycomb comprised of seven functional blocks that

represented: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Every functional building block enables to measure and analyze the explicit factors of social media user experience and their implications.

- (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 243)

"These building blocks are neither mutually exclusive, nor do they all have to be present in a social media activity. They are constructs that allow us to make sense of how different levels of social media functionality can be configured."
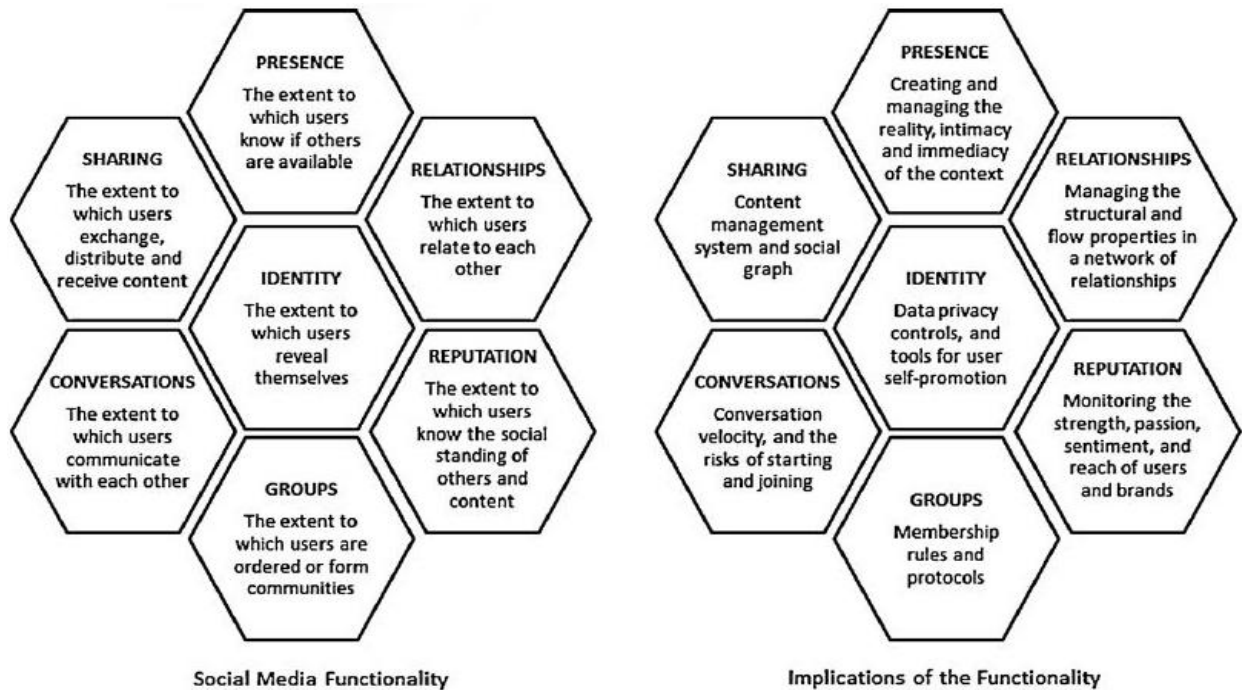

Figure 3. The Honeycomb of Social Media (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 243)

The seven functional building blocks of the honeycomb of social media are:

1. **Identity:** This is the functional block represents the degree to which the users divulge their personal details in a social media platform. It could be anything ranging from name, age, gender to profession, location and even preferences of the user. The chief implication of this functional block is privacy. Although users willing upload their personal details they do have reservations and concerns regarding to what those details are being utilised for. This is one reason that sometimes users tend to enter false data for their profiles, it may have various motives.

   "Striking a careful balance between sharing identities and protecting privacy is crucial in selecting social media tools; the wrong mix can lead to a lack of accountability among users, encourage cyber-bullying, and pave the way for off-topic and off-colour comments."

   - (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 244)

2. **Conversations:** This functional block represents the extent to which the user interacts with other users via social media. Most of the social networking sites are generally based on the idea to provide a platform for conversations among individuals or groups. The

conversations may happen due to various reasons like users comment, tweet, blog, etc with like-minded people or even to make new friends, to find true love, to build their self-esteem, or to be on the cutting edge of new ideas or trending topics. At the same time there are social media platforms that allow the users to convey social messages towards the well being of the society, environment or for humanitarian purposes. There are platforms that facilitate debates over economic and political issues. So the variety of topic and platforms for having a conversation are numerous. The functional implication of this block would be to be able to track these conversations, it implication would be to track the rate and course of the conversation which according to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre is termed as "conversation velocity". The rate of change is the number of new conversations over a specified period of time, and the direction of change is the continuity or discontinuity of the conversation. (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 244). The other implication of the functional block is initiative taken to begin a conversation or to change the course of conversation.

3. **Sharing:** This functionality building block characterises the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content. The term 'social' often implies that exchanges between people are crucial. In

many cases, however, sociality is about the objects that mediate these ties between people. (Engström, 2005)[1] The implications of this functionality block are:

a) The need to evaluate what objects of sociality their users have in common, or to identify new objects that can mediate their shared interests.

b) The degree to which the object can or should be shared.

4. **Presence:** It is the functionality block that denotes the extent to which a user can be aware of the accessibility of other users. The implication of presence is to recognize that social media presence is influenced by the intimacy and immediacy of the relationship medium, and that higher levels of social presence are likely to make conversations more influential. (Kaplan & Haelein 2010)

5. **Relationship:** The relationships block represents the extent to which users can relate to other users. *"By 'relate,' we mean that two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet up, or simply just list each other as a friend or fan."* (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 246). The implication of the functionality block is to give prominence or emphasis to the availability of the users and their desire to interact. The key point is to understand the way the users develop and maintain their relationships.

6. **Reputation:** The functionality block that attempts to gauge the extent to which the users can recognise the status of themselves and other users in a social media platform. The implication of reputation block is to decide on a metric system to estimate and supply the information. Once the metric system is selected then a tool for evaluation should be established or created.

7. **Groups:** The functionality block that characterise the extent to which the users can create or join groups and sub-groups within a social media platform. The implication of the functionality block is the formation of communities within social media with various groups and sub-groups. This makes the categorisation easier as the groups themselves act as categories. *"If the members just need to order their contacts to manage followers, friends, fans, and the like, then simple user-generated grouping will suffice. This resembles allowing users to label their contacts, without these contacts being aware of it. If, however, a group wants to pursue an agenda and grow its membership, then more formal group rules and functions would be required."* (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 247).

These were the seven functionality blocks from the honeycomb of social media and their implications. Now different social media platforms utilise various combinations of these functionality blocks with carefully worked out combinations according to the requirement of the social media platform. By evaluating the Social Media Honeycomb's seven building blocks firms can examine and comprehend how social media activities vary in terms of their purpose and influence, so as to develop a compatible social media strategy based on the suitable combination of building blocks for their platform and community.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hence it can be concluded that social media is not only restricted to social networking sites. The understanding of social media is much larger than the misconception. This paper was able to establish the difference between new media and social media and social networking sites and social media. Internet has definitely provided the users a platform through social media where a two way communication is possible which was not possible with the traditional forms of media. The seven blocks of functionality helps us understand the way social media is utilised by the users for gratification and how and how much can social media influence the users. However it also brings out the fact that social media is just a tool or medium of communication and what it does is entirely dependent on the users.

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