Bittersweet Social Media

All you need to know about this topic

SECOND EDITION

VALERIO CIRELLA

*Bitter**sweet*** Social Media

VALERIO CIRELLA

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First Published, July 2015

This revised edition published February 2016

For Luca & Julian

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Acknowledgements

Some people fight everyday for their freedom and people freedom. Most of them are silent heroes among us and they not ask for award or popularity; they fight for believes and right. I want thank those people, which serve the interests of society trying to make a world a better place to live.

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Abbreviation

AI =   Artificial Intelligence

FB =   Face Book

SM =   Social Media

SMM =   Social Media Marketing

SN / SNs =   Social Network / Social Networks

TM =   Traditional Media

SROI =   Social Return Of Investment

Introduction

By

Valerio Cirella & Mario Cirella[1]

This book offers the essential information about social media, it does not contain highly technical information or analytical formulas but, in contrast, it offers an explanation of the new communication system and also provides ideas to spark off individual researches.

I wanted to create a book that was simple, effective and brief; focused on analyses and explanations of social media's meaning, the idea behind them, and the influence they have on people's lives.

Social media (SM) system is a next step of the Internet evolution and it represents the result of the interaction between new *communication needs and technology development* (based on internet).

Many important events occurred in the USA in 1969. For example, the military operations in Vietnam, the moon landing, the election of Nixon as the 37th President of the United States, and the Woodstock concert. However, few remember that in that year four American universities connected their PCs together in one single network. This network was the civil implementation of an original military project, designed by ARPA (Advanced Research Project Agency). This military project had the purpose to keep the Pentagon information up and running also after a hypothetical nuclear attack from foreign countries. This because the multiple locations, connected each other, provided a solution of disaster recovery where essential data were stored in different places and restored if needed.

The Internet came years later when it became easier to connect networks using the TCP/IP protocol, and it became popular with the development of browsers and search engines.

Initially, the Internet was conceived and developed to connect only machines, and to allow the exchange of information to make jobs easier and economically convenient for companies. In just a few years, this technology affected company business on the one hand, and people's socialisation, interests and mobility on the other.

Some people made a lot of money from the Internet, and new companies, were created, for example: Larry Page and Sergey Brin (Google founders); Jeff Bezos (Amazon founder); Masayoshi Son (President of SoftBank); Pierre Omidyar (eBay founder and chairman); Hiroshi Mikitani (Rakuten co-founder and CEO); Mark Zuckerberg (co-founder of Facebook); Ma Huateng (founder of Tencent Inc.).

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[1] Mario Cirella is a retired sociologist and a former telecommunication specialist. Between 1992 and 1994 he wrote news articles for three important Italian newspapers: "Il Giornale di Napoli", "Il Mezzoggiorno", "Il tempo".

In 1996 was appointed Co-Editor of a local news magazine "Terra Flegre@" and in 2002 publishing editor of the local news magazine "City Planet". In 2007 was appointed Social Media Strategist for the exclusive and private post-graduation school A.I.P.P.I. Napoli.

Today he enjoys his retirement and, occasionally, he is invited as guest for social media seminars.

The Internet is only a technology, and therefore impersonal, but social media (SM) have changed this trait. SM category is made up of many 'mediums' (for this reason I will always address SM as a plural), which will be discussed individually in this book. They have enriched the 'Information Age' and they are pushing the society toward one based on 'digital interactions between people'.

SM were created to support the circulation of information between people, who need to register their profile and prove their identity for the interactions. For example, it is possible to login to some websites, or sell products and services, using a personal Internet profile from another website (e.g. using the personal Facebook or LinkedIn profile). In order to keep and develop business and social relationships with hundreds of contacts, SM usage is growing because they are:

a) Handy;
b) Cheap;
c) Effective.

One different opinion is Solis, who stated in 2007: "*Social Media is about Sociology and not Technology*". He sustains that any media, in general, exists because they are used for people's interactions and, furthermore, a medium is developed to reach people and not an audience.

This book analyses this kind of statements and ideas, verifying the importance of technology and if it plays an important role in increasing the usage of SM. Nowadays, it looks like the development of technology supports the increase of the human interactions, for example: mobile phones and software applications, tablet computers, fast Internet connections, and the ability to send content as a combination of images and audio.

During my research, I found a very interesting quote: *"We don't have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it."* (Qualman, 2010). In summary, the author's message is that SM represent *"the biggest shift since the Industrial Revolution"*. I completely support this definition because, as I demonstrate in this book, the implementation of SM has changed major aspects of our society and economy. They are so powerful that they can hurt or promote people and companies' reputations, and change the quality of services or their perception.

Other authors, like Centorrino and Romero (2012) believe that SM have redefined communication in terms of time and space (distance), because they have created new places for meetings and a new way to interact, watch TV, listen to music, read a newspaper, or get an education or training.

Specifically, they are part of a group of theorists who believe that the Internet has compressed time and space (in terms of distance) between users, just as all previous systems of transportation have done. For example, when the railways were developed, they reduced the time and space needed to transport goods and people and, years later, the development of airplane reduced the two elements even more. This means that the progress and developments of technology contribute to reduce the importance and the role of Time and Space in the transportation system. Same analogy can be used for the communication. Indeed, in the past the creation and development of new methods of communication (e.g. papyrus, smoke signals and letters) had both purpose of reducing the time needed by message to travel and to spread the message over the distance. The Internet has given a big contribution in this sense, because it makes possible to distribute the message quickly and over a long distance.

In this case, the Internet represents the vehicle, which transport the message (e.g. information, songs, pictures, documents, opinions and e-books, commands and instructions), and SM are a methods of communication.

For one of the world's most prominent social theorists, Bauman (2000), time and space compression also affects the transformation of people's lives. He explains that people use SM for different reasons, for example for buying, interacting with others, finding and providing information, and for playing; this use affects people's behaviour and habits. One of the most interesting of Bauman's views is that the modern society is becoming 'exterritorial and not more contained by the space'. Specifically, the element of 'space' is about to disappear from our society because it is becoming less important than it was a few years ago.

To explain this point more effectively, let's analyse four different ways to communicate between people: a face–to-face conversation implies that two or more people are in close proximity (space has a primary role in this case). If they decide to communicate with a letter, the social interaction is compressed into words on paper, the letter takes time to reach the receiver and it has a space (distance) to cover before reaching the destination. In contrast, an email drastically reduces the time needed for the interaction and the space is non influential for the purpose of communication. If the same people decide to communicate using online chat, well, the two elements (time and space) are almost non-existent.

The continuous technology evolution makes people's habits dynamic, and this changes our society's organisation creating a 'Liquid Society'. Bauman also suggests that SM have created a double life, because in addition the real one, there is a digital one. For example, people can socialise with friends in one place and be also connected to another network, using tweets, instant chats, business emails, dating applications, picture postings and tags.

A scary or intriguing part (depending on the personal view of the 'Internet evolution') is that personal opinions, tastes, interests, and hobbies are exposed and available to almost everyone with the Internet access, and this makes it easier to recreate and analyse identities.

SM can show also other information such as: places visited and time of visit, current employer name, date of birth, current living city, siblings and many others. This also means that personal life can be available for comments, to be recalled at anytime in a discussion or comment and also saved…just in case.

Chapter One

Social Media Today

This chapter opens with a definition of social media and with a list of medium which are part of this category. The main arguments are around what the most popular medium is nowadays, and how and why it has become successful.

The main success of social media is due to social networks, which are based on the theory of *"six degrees of separation"*. Social media are also used in many situations and for different scopes that will be described in the last section.

1.1 Phenomenon Definition

In my view, **social media** *are virtual communities and networks that support the communication and the sharing of ideas and data between people (users).*

Social media (SM) represent the newest media developed and used nowadays for communication between people. The most common social platforms used are quite young: for example, MySpace was founded in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. The full potential and comprehension of this new way of communication is not yet well perceived by the majority of people.

While they are used widely — for example, Facebook has an average of 802 m daily active users (Facebook, 2014), LinkedIn has 300 m members (LinkedIn, 2014), and WhatsApp has more than 100 m users (Forbes, 2012) — only a reduced number of users know what SM really represent today from a political, economic and social point of view. Instead, the majority of users associate SM only with social networks (SNs) or online news channels.

This chapter explains what the differences are between SM and SNs. As a starting point, Sterne (2010) defines SM as a group of Medium, which is represented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 – SM channels

The following details give greater clarifications on each role and characteristic:
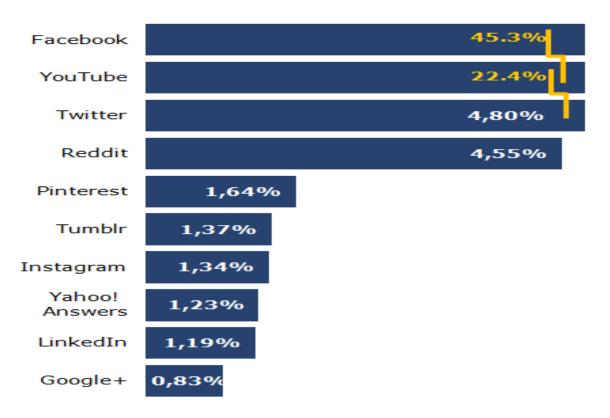
- **Social Blogs and Weblogs**. These are websites run by an individual or small group of writers, which provide comments or news on facts and events that would interest a particular community. Usually, blogs create information and support idea–sharing, and readers can post comments regarding the topics covered.
- **Microblogging**. These are blogs that use a limited number of characters. The most well-known one is Twitter, which uses only 140 characters per message.
- **Social Bookmarking**. These are websites that are focused on bookmarks and web documents that users can share and edit. Pinterest, Digg and Fark are examples of social bookmarking. There is not shared data, but only references to other web pages. Typically, public libraries use those platforms to speed up catalogue research.
- **Internet Forums**. These are websites, or parts of websites, dedicated to specific topics such as getting advice or solving problems. For example, mobile phone providers have webpages dedicated to providing information such as: service numbers and the procedure to deactivate/activate a service. Other examples are: Yahoo Forums, and boards on the WikiHow.com website.
- **Rating.** The most common are the ones used to book holidays, review restaurants and buy goods (e.g. eBay, Amazon, Airbnb and Alibaba).

In addition to the list above, there are other categories to consider, such as:

- **Social Networks (SNs)**. These are applications dedicated to people's connections (personal and/or professional). Users invite people to join their network in order to read their professional and private life updates and progression, and to seek opinions and information. SNs support interactions between users through the sharing of: comments, opinions, videos, images and personal status updates. SNs are convenient because they are cheap or free, and quick and easy to

use. They are either public or private (invitation only) communities. In this category, instant chat applications are also included because they share the same characteristics: they allow connections and sharing of digital material.

- **Sharing Platforms**. Examples are: OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive and YouTube. These are cloud applications, which allow the uploading and downloading of digital content and to view streaming content.

Marketing Charts (2015) reports the ranking of most used social media website of November 2015 and, from this particular list, Facebook is the leader, followed by You Tube and Twitter (see Fig. 2).

Source: Marketing Charts, 2015

Figure 2 - Top 10 Visited Multi-Platform Social-Networking Websites & Forum

1.1.1 Facebook

Facebook (FB) is the market leader of SNs, with a really impressive popularity. According to the company's data release, FB had 1.01 billion daily active users on average for September 2015. It is an American company but the 83.5% of the daily users are based outside USA & Canada.

FB was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student, with the initial idea to profile students and staff of his college. Soon, the website became very popular and he extended access to other colleges, and gradually the application became international and accessible to everyone.

The original business idea, which made Facebook a $ 2.5 b company (Facebook, 2014), was created and developed without market research or a business plan.

There are few points that make Facebook the number one in the entire SM:

1. The founder believes strongly in the realisation of an idea; the best business idea is nothing without an execution.
2. The FB application is easy to use and intuitive. When the company decides to improve the web site, the simplicity is the first approach.
3. Service is reliable (minor crashes) and easy to access. Since its creation, FB has moved forward, but always keeps in mind to guarantee access to the service.
4. Focus on the product and service quality. Zuckerberg always been focused on his product, considering profits as less important. In this way, the company creates a real value for customers, and this leads to the generation of more business by itself.
5. Hire and retain the best employees on the market and be ready to replace them when needed. This has contributed to developing FB to be the successful company it is today.
6. Zuckerberg has had full company control since the company was created. This has helped the company growth because decisions are made quickly and the company vision is clear and achievable.
7. Keep the focus on innovation in order to keep the business going. FB is a company which invests in new applications or services (e.g. news feed, Facebook Messenger, video calls) and acquiring new companies (WhatsApp).
8. FB has long-term goals and it is not focused exclusively on profit. Since the beginning of company's creation, the founder believed in the company's future and its potential business growth. This made him continue working and achieving big successes.

1.1.2   YouTube

Founded in 2005, YouTube is the most popular platform for video sharing. It was created by three young entrepreneurs: Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim. In 2006, the company grew quickly, thanks to the increase of users and a business partnership with NBC for marketing and advertising. Late in 2006 the company was acquired by Google for $1.65 b in stock.

Key success factors:

1. It is perceived as the first online on-demand TV. Users are free to search any topic they want.
2. It is easy to use, available and easy to access.
3. Zero or low streaming latency. No need to download the application, and there are no pop-ups.
4. Its popularity also increases the number and the quality of videos available on the platform.

1.1.3   Twitter

Twitter is a SN that provides a microblogging service. A registered user can "tweet" a maximum of 140 characters. The company was founded in 2006 and soon gained popularity, with 320 m of active users for September 2015 (Twitter, 2016). According to eMarketer (2014), active US Twitter accounts will grow even more in the coming years. In particular, the expectations are:

1. The growing number of users over the years (from 36.2 m in 2012 to 64.9 m in 2018).
2. The positive trend year on year for:
   a) Compared to the overall SNs population, Twitter expectation is to grow from 23% of 2008 to 34% in 2018.

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