
Social Media & Networking

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Abstract

Social media evolved from a specialized communication tool to widespread, "always-on" phenomena. The swift "mobile-first" shift, the emergence of visual-focused platforms like Instagram and Pinterest, and the incorporation of social data into fundamental commercial and political strategy characterized this year.

Mobile Dominance: Sales of smartphones and tablets overtook PCs for the first time, and users now mostly accessed social networks through mobile apps.

Visual Web Transition: As evidenced by Facebook's \$1 billion acquisition of Instagram, platforms moved from text-heavy status updates to highly engaging photos and videos.

Massive User Growth: Twitter gained over 500 million active users, while Facebook became the first social network to cross one billion.

Mainstream Politics: The 2012 U.S. Presidential Election was the first "Social Media Election," with candidates actively interacting with voters on Twitter and Reddit (most notably President Obama's "AMA").

Keywords: First on mobile devices, viral, the second screen, timeline, photo filters, and hashtag (#).

Introduction

The "Great Transition" of social media, evolving from a desktop-based hobby to a mobile-centric need. Social networking evolved from a means of messaging pals to a potent tool for political upheavals, world news, and visual storytelling.

Apps evolved from being "lite" versions of webpages to becoming the main means of communication.

The "mobile-only" experience was first introduced by Instagram in late 2010 and Snapchat in 2011. Real-time photo sharing and video streaming became feasible with the release of the iPhone 4S with fast 4G connection.

The Arab Spring: In Egypt and Tunisia, protests were coordinated via Twitter and Facebook, circumventing state-run media.

Occupied Wall Street: A decentralized movement that expanded throughout the world was made possible by social media.

The 2012 Election: President Obama's digital team established the benchmark for leveraging social media and "Big Data" to win a national election.

Facebook IPO: The social network became a major player in the global financial industry when it went public in May 2012.

Launch of Google+: Google tried to subvert Facebook's hegemony with "Circles."

Issues and Things to Think About for Social Media & Networking

Social TV: As the "Second Screen" trend gained traction, 33% of Twitter users tweeted about TV shows they were watching.

Business Maturity: Companies went beyond "likes," concentrating on influencer marketing, social CRM (Customer Relationship Management), and hard ROI.

Privacy Concerns: Early discussions about digital footprints and "over-sharing" were sparked by the trend toward greater public sharing.

Social Gaming: Zynga (Farmville, Mafia Wars) and similar platforms generated enormous Facebook engagement and revenue.

- **The Origins of Privacy Concern**

Default Public Settings: Facebook often modified its privacy policies, making private information public by default.

The "Permanent Record": The initial understanding that a picture from a college party could keep you from landing a job.

Oversharing: A recent societal phenomenon in which people have not yet grasped the limits of appropriate online behavior.

Facial Recognition: When Facebook began automatically "tagging" individuals in pictures, early worries were raised.

- **Safety and Security**

Cyberstalking: Fears that "checking in" on Facebook or Foursquare could reveal your precise position to thieves or stalkers.

Stranger Danger: Predators on websites like MySpace and Chatroulette are a major source of fear, particularly for parents.

Account Hacking: Account "rape" (Facebook rape/hijacking) was popular due to weak passwords and a lack of Two-Factor Authentication (2FA).

- **Early Effects on the Mind**

MySpace Stress: The "Top 8" friends list's social structure led to real teenage worry and conflict.

Internet Addiction: Physicians initially discussed "BlackBerry Thumb" and "Internet Addiction Disorder" during this time.

Cyberbullying: The first wave of anti-bullying laws was introduced to social media when Megan Meier and others committed themselves.

- **Digital Morality and Etiquette**

Accountability vs. Anonymity: Discussions on whether or not individuals should be required to use their true names (the "Real Name Policy" issue).

Content Ownership: Uncertainty about whether the images you posted to a platform "owned" them.

Workplace Productivity: In response, a number of businesses outright prohibited social media from being used on office computers.

- **Technical Obstacles**

Walled Gardens: Transferring your data from one platform (like MySpace) to another (like Facebook) was challenging.

Bandwidth Restrictions: The majority of "social" activity was still text and low-resolution images, and uploading a video was a laborious and slow procedure.

Applications of Social Media & Networking

- **Social and Personal Links**

The Digital Scrapbook: Facebook evolved from a college directory to a "Timeline" where members used "Wall" posts and photo albums to preserve their whole lives.

Status Broadcasting: Twitter was mostly used for "microblogging"—responding in 140 characters or fewer to the initial query, "What are you doing?"

Niche Interests: Long-form blogging, art, and fandoms were concentrated on sites like Tumblr and LiveJournal.

Music & Discovery: MySpace continued to be the key resource for finding new independent musicians and personalizing HTML profiles.

- **Academic and Professional Use**

Digital Resumes: LinkedIn positioned itself as the "professional Facebook," where users host digital resumes and conduct headhunts instead of skimming through daily material.

Expertise Sharing: The most popular apps for crowdsourcing technical and professional information are Quora (which debuted in 2009) and Stack Overflow.

Collaborative Learning: Students shared notes and planned study sessions outside of the classroom using wikis and early Facebook groups.

- **News and Public Participation**

Real-Time News: Users frequently received news about earthquakes or plane catastrophes minutes before major news networks covered them, giving rise to the "Twitter First" craze.

Political Organizing: Meetup and Facebook Events were essential tools for grassroots movements, particularly during the Arab Spring of 2011.

Crowdsourced Reporting: Reddit and Digg operated as the "first page of the internet," with users casting votes to determine which news items merited international coverage.

- **Entertainment and Media**

Photo Sharing: Instagram, which debuted in 2010, was the newcomer with an emphasis on "immediate" mobile photos, while Flickr was the gold standard for professional photography.

Social Gaming: Millions of people visit Facebook especially to manage virtual farms thanks to Zynga (FarmVille, CityVille), which transformed the platform into a gaming console.

Advantages of Social Media & Networking

- **Information Democratization**

Breaking News Speed: In the 2009 Hudson River plane landing and the 2011 Arab Spring, for example, "citizen journalists" were able to report news more quickly than television stations for the first time.

Bypassing Gatekeepers: Without a record company or publisher, musicians (on MySpace) and authors (on Tumblr/Blogger) might find an audience.

Free International Communication: For families residing overseas, the days of costly "long-distance" phone calls were essentially over thanks to platforms like Facebook and Skype.

- **Community and Niche Links**

The End of Loneliness: It was much more difficult in the real world for people with uncommon interests or identities to find "their people" on forums and specialized Facebook groups.

Reconnecting with the Past: In 2011, Facebook's main "killer app" was the ability to locate long-lost acquaintances and classmates from high school.

Crowdsourced Assistance: Prior to artificial intelligence, Twitter was the best "recommendation engine" for receiving immediate travel or tech assistance from actual people.

- **Personal and Business Branding**

Low-Cost Marketing: Small businesses might reach local customers without spending a lot of money on advertisements by using a Facebook page as a free substitute for a website.

Direct Celebrity Access: With the removal of Twitter's "PR wall," fans may now communicate directly with politicians, athletes, and celebrities for the first time.

Professional Visibility: Recruiters from large firms were able to "find" young professionals on LinkedIn without requiring a personal relationship.

- **Innovation & Entertainment**

Social Gaming: Through straightforward, browser-based play, platforms like Zynga made gaming "social" and accessible to non-gamers (such as parents and elderly).

Visual Discovery: Finding visual inspiration for travel, fashion, and home décor was simple in the early days of Pinterest and Instagram.

Disadvantages of Social Media & Networking

- **Security and Privacy Vulnerabilities**

The "Public by Default" Trap: Facebook regularly modified privacy settings, frequently disclosing personal information to the public without explicit user approval.

Absence of Deletion: In 2011, it was infamously hard to "untag" yourself from humiliating pictures or permanently erase an account.

Location Stalking: By "checking in" on Facebook Places or Foursquare, you unintentionally let stalkers or burglars know exactly when you were gone from home.

Profile Hijacking: Inadequate security allowed friends or hackers to take over an open account and upload objectionable stuff, a practice known as "frape" (Facebook-rape).

- **Social and Psychological Problems**

The "Top 8" Drama: High school "friendship wars" and real social divisions resulted from MySpace's public listing of pals.

Early Cyberbullying: Anonymous trolls could easily abuse users on websites like Formspring or Ask.fm since platforms lacked robust reporting features.

Oversharing Regret: Because users were unaware that "the internet is forever," they created "digital footprints" that prevented them from taking advantage of early employment possibilities.

The Emergence of FOMO: The first widespread wave of FOMO was sparked by seeing friends' "check-ins" and party images in real time.

- **Workplace and Efficiency**

The "Time Suck": Due to employers' perception that social media significantly reduces productivity, websites like Facebook and YouTube are completely prohibited in workplaces.

Professional Errors: In the absence of the current "private/professional" split, some users were dismissed for voicing grievances over their employers or supervisors.

The History of the "Big Three" (2003–2010)

Prior to 2012, these significant launches laid the groundwork for our modern digital lives:

The first significant professional network, LinkedIn (2003), demonstrated that social media wasn't limited to teenagers.

Facebook (2004): Originally a Harvard-only website, it has one billion members by 2012.

Twitter (2006): Changed real-time news forever with the introduction of "microblogging" and the hashtag (2007).

Instagram (2010): Released at the same time that the iPhone 4 popularized mobile photography, it had 25,000 downloads on its first day.

"Social Revolutions" and Global Impact

The years 2011 and 2012 demonstrated how social media may coordinate large-scale grassroots movements and overthrow governments:

During the 2011 Arab Spring, demonstrators used YouTube to broadcast revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, Twitter to coordinate, and Facebook to arrange.

Occupy Wall Street (2011): A worldwide movement that was largely coordinated and maintained via social media platforms.

The 2012 election, dubbed the first "Social Media Election," saw President Obama use internet participation as a key component of his campaign.

The Pioneers' Ascent and Decline

There were many "giants" in the pre-2012 landscape, but they gradually vanished or changed:

Friendster (2002–2012): Known as the social graph's forerunner, it peaked in 2003 but declined as a result of competition and technological problems.

MySpace (2003–2009): Until Facebook surpassed it in 2009, MySpace was the top website in the United States.

Google's last significant effort to take on Facebook, which had trouble generating organic engagement, was Google+ (2011).

Conclusion

Social media and networking evolved from specialized online groups into a prevalent, popular force that drastically changed digital marketing, content consumption, and interpersonal contact. By the end of 2011, Web 1.0 "watching" had given way to Web 2.0 "participation" due to the predominance of user-generated content, the emergence of mobile social networking, and the development of sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Dominance of User-Generated Content (UGC): This era's fundamental change was the transition from editorially driven websites to user-generated content-driven platforms that let users produce, share, and engage instead of just consuming.

Creation of Core Social Platforms: LinkedIn became the norm for professional networking, while Facebook surpassed rivals like MySpace to become the main center for personal connections.

The Rise of Mobile and Real-Time Information: Twitter solidified the "real-time" part of information sharing, while the introduction of platforms like Instagram and Snapchat (2010–2011) marked a swift shift towards mobile-first, visual, and short-form communication.

Marketing and Corporate Integration: Prior to 2012, companies realized how important social media was, progressing from initial research to investing in social media management as an essential tool for customer service, branding, and audience engagement.

Impact on Society and Behavior: Social networking has become an essential aspect of everyday life, influencing academic and professional emphasis, establishing worldwide connections, and altering interpersonal communication.

Change in Information Access: Social media platforms are now many consumers' main sources of news and information, and traditional media has lost its monopoly.

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