

Social Media.

A Literature Review

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Abstract. *The development and expansion of social media have rapidly changed the interaction and communication of people, thereby attracting attention in an unprecedented scale. This paper reviews the relevant literature on social media to yield a better understanding of how it has transformed the way people communicate, acquire and use information. To elucidate on the goals of this paper, the definition of social media, and its characteristics are presented. Different types of social media are also described, including globally popular platforms based on social media types in the 21st century. Lastly, a brief review of the research on social media was presented to provide a reference for researchers.*

Keywords: Social media; Social network; Communication tool; Literature review.

Introduction

In the recent years, social media is described as a global phenomenon. There are billions of social media users worldwide and this number keeps on growing. According to the report of Statista in 2020, Eastern Asia has the largest share of social media audiences worldwide with 1.07 billion active users. Among them, China is the biggest social media market with 926.8 million users, India stands at the ranked second with nearly 350 million users (Clement, 2020, July 15).

Social media touches nearly every facet of people's life, allows users to connect with like-minded people and provide information of interest to them. Social media also affects how businesses conduct their transactions, promotions, and services (Bhimani *et al.*, 2018; Appel *et al.*, 2020). These show the proliferation of social media as well as the growing interest for it from both researchers and practitioners (Kapoor *et al.*, 2018; Ghania *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the number of published articles related to social media is constantly increasing (Olanrewaju, 2020). Along with that, numerous literature review papers on social media have been conducted. These existing papers focus on specific subjects from different fields as marketing (Paquette, 2013; Khan & Jan, 2015), innovation (Bhimani *et al.*, 2018), educational (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Ahmed, 2019) or health care (Zhao & Zhang, 2017; Ukoha & Stranieri, 2019). It is in this interest that this paper reviewed relevant studies in different fields to provide a clearer understanding of the intricacies of social media.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, the definition of social media is presented. Then, descriptions of the main characteristics and various types of social media. Finally, from the literature review conducted, it identifies the current issues in conducting research on social media.

1. Definition of social media

Social media was first known in 1979, when the Usenet, a system to post articles and news, was created. In the 1990s, there were several social networking sites such as Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, and MoveOn where people can interact, including sites for public policy advocacy and a social network based on a web of contacts models (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011, 81). In the same study, Edosomwan *et al.* (2011) demonstrated how social media changed the interaction of individuals and organizations with the witnessing of various social media tools springing up in the 2000s. Among those that were launched included Wikipedia in 2001, MySpace, LinkedIn, lastFM in 2003, Facebook Harvard in 2004, Yahoo!360, YouTube in 2005, etc. As a result, social media has revolutionized the people's life and has attracted much attention, from industry as well as academia (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015).

Although there have been several definitions of social media, there remains a lack of the formal definition (Weller, 2015). Some definitions are simple, focusing on message construction of social media. For example, Russo *et al.* (2008, 22) briefly

stated social media “as those that enable online communication, networking, and/or collaboration”.

Meanwhile, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) defined that “Social media includes a different kind of Internet-based applications which build the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow user to create the content and exchange that with other people through the Internet”. Bobbi K. Lewis, an associate professor in the School of Media & Strategic Communications, described more precisely. She noted that social media simply serves as a “label for digital technologies that allow individuals to connect, communicate, create and distribute content” (Lewis, 2010, 2). These concepts limit social media to digital technologies that emphasize content and engagement created by users.

In 2010, Michael L. Kent, a professor of Public Relations at University of New South Wales, has offered another definition of social media. He described social media as “any interactive communication medium that enables two-way interaction and feedback”, and social media is also characterized by real-time interaction capacity, decreased privacy, a sense of propinquity, quick reaction times, and the ability to ‘time shift,’ or engage the social network whenever necessary for each individual member (Kent, 2010, 645). This definition partially distinguishes social media from traditional media.

More complex definitions of social media have been given. David M. Scott, an American online marketing strategist, said that “Social media offers the way individuals exchange ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media varies from mass media in that anyone can build, comment on, and contribute to content on social media. Text, audio, video, pictures, and communities may take the form of social media” (Scott, 2015, 56). Joseph Thornley, CEO and co-founder of the Thornley Fallis Communications Inc., identified that “Social media is online communication in which we move between the position of viewer and creator instantly and easily without having to know how to code. We do this through social software that includes functions such as publishing, posting, friendship, commenting, linking and tagging” (Thornley, 2019).

Social media is generally a category of Internet-based applications that draw on Web 2.0’s ideological and technological. Social media provides the ability for its users to communicate, create, edit, and share online contents. These contents can be text, photo, video, sound, or a mixture of all. Besides, we need to clarify two similar terms: social media and social networking. According to Scott (2015, 56), Social media “is the superset of how we refer to the different media that people use to socially connect online”, social networking “is a subset of social media which refers to how individuals interact on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or similar”. Social media is now a networking medium used mostly to send data to a large audience (Hartshorn, 2010, as cited in Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011). Thus, it is important to consider differences between social media and mass media – a traditional media

includes television news, newspapers, and broadcast radio (Dimmick *et al.*, 2004). The differences are as follows:

1. With traditional mass media, there is a barrier between the person who disseminates the idea or information and the audience. The communication is one-way from book, newspaper, magazines, radio, television to audience, and do not receive feedback from audience. This process is ‘one-to-many’ communication – ‘one’ person (for example, the author of a book) communicates to many people (the audience) at the same time. Social media, meanwhile, allows different modes of communication (one-to-one, many-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many) depending on how individuals wish to connect (Jensen & Helles, 2017),
2. Most people who participate in the production and supply of information on the mass media must be trained. They are journalist, reporter, news editor, etc. (Nossek, 2010). However, now everybody can create and publish contents through social media. This is User-generated content,
3. The publication of information through mass media has periods of day, week, month (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010), but this process through social media can be done anytime,
4. If published information via mass media is incorrect, it can be corrected in next issue only. However, this happening can be quickly solved by posting comment or correcting directly through social media (Adornato, 2017).

To sum it up, social media when compared to traditional mass media is different in several aspects. These differences emphasize the right to produce and provide information for everyone on social media. Table 1 summaries the elements often used to define social media.

Table 1. The main elements used to define social media

Element	Explanation
Creation and dissemination of content	User can create and share content
Interactivity	User can make reaction, comment, and share post
Convergence	Media type of post includes text, photo, video, link
Speed	All uploading can be accessed instantly
Cost	Most of social media platforms are free to use
Reach	The reach of social media is globe

2. Social media characteristics

Social media has become very popular over the last decades. The mass adoption of social media is causing several characteristics, which represent value to the social media and gratifications of its users. Main characteristics of social media are as follows.

2.1. Participation of many users

In recent years, the popularity of social media has been growing. In 2019, the number of global social media users was 2.95 billion people, up from 2.78 billion in 2018. In 2023, it is estimated that social media will have around 3.43 billion users worldwide (Clement, 2020, April 1). Reasons for the popularity of social media include the following.

Firstly, social media users are content creators (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lewis, 2010). Everyone can actively participate in generating, commenting, and revising social media contents. People are able to create their own blogs, publish contents on Facebook, Twitter to express their thoughts, and so on. Moreover, they can leave comments, like, dislike, or reply to other people's comments on posts.

Secondly, social media platforms are built in a user-friendly manner. Popular platforms are easy to navigate, they do not require any special prior experience or knowledge to join. Specifically, the mobile applications of social media platforms are even more enjoyable allowing many people to connect through them (Gaikwad, 2020).

Thirdly, social media is free to use. Almost common social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia are free which made them open to everyone (Kohli *et al.*, 2018).

Fourthly, social media has already played a big role in the labor market. People can upload skills, accomplishments, and experiences on professional social networks in order to make themselves recognized by colleagues or potential employers. Besides, people can "search for jobs through these professional social networks just as other job portals" (Gaikwad, 2020, 10).

Furthermore, social media platforms have the great features of being updated. Thus, social media has been attracting numerous users around the world.

2.2. Sharing

Social media has become a significant tool over the past few years for people to share knowledge and information online. The number of Internet users who use social media for sharing purpose is increasing rapidly (Ghaisani, Handayani & Munajat, 2017). Social media offers its users several ways to create and share contents. For instance, social networking site is used for sharing updates on users' daily encounter, microblog is used for sharing short messages, wiki is used for sharing educational information, while forum is a discussion site where participants hold conversations on specific topics, products or events (Budz & Starosta, 2018).

2.3. Community-driven

Social media is built and expanded from community concept, so that members in social media communities hold common beliefs or hobbies (Tella, 2015). It is not

difficult to find groups of people who share commonalities, such as college, university, or social media alumni or travel groups. Besides, people can reconnect with old friends, make new friends based on shared interests easily. Furthermore, social media gives an opportunity to meet people around the world. An introduction of profiles on social media helps people to know information about others before connecting with them (Sharanyaa & Sangeetha, 2018).

2.4. Multi-way interaction

Social media involves all four prototypes of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many, and many-to-one (Jensen & Helles, 2017). In particular, “One-to-one is one person interacting with another individual, One-to-many is one individual or organization transmitting to many individuals, Many-to-many is multi-way contact between many individuals, and another type of contact is Many-to-one in which multiple individuals’ acts, decisions, or attitudes are aggregated, converted, and re-presented to an individual” (Dron & Anderson, 2014, 10). For example, a post on social media platform such as Facebook is one-to-many. As soon as people leave comments, it becomes many-to-one. When more people are added to the dialogue, it becomes many-to-many. A personal message in the inbox is one-to-one (Egilsdottir, 2019).

Moreover, social media also provides “Synchronous communication (real-time communication), asynchronous communication (communication that the receiver may display, listen to, or read at a different time than when it was posted), or both” (Dron & Anderson, 2014, 9).

2.5. Multimedia content

Social media has a unique characteristic of having diverse types of information content, including text, photo, video, and network. A blog may contain text, graphic, video, and link to other blogs or websites. Photo sharing platform allows people to store and share photo, video sharing platform permits users to upload and share videos (Ariff *et al.*, 2018).

To sum up, social media has become a part of people’s lives (Zhan, Sun, Wang, & Zhang, 2016). People access different types of social media several times per day, almost social media users share personal updates, posts contents in addition to interacting with others. According to the statistics on how people interact on social media in 2019, there were about 30% of users interact on social media more than 10 times per day and 94% users post contents on social media (Herhold, 2019). Social media gives people the ability to build online communities of like-minded people (Tella, 2015), and to connect with others who have similar likes and interests around the world (Steckman & Andrews, 2017).

3. Types of social media

Several approaches for the classification of social media categories and types currently exist. According to social presence and self-presentation, different social media services such as blogs, social networking sites, joint ventures, content communities, virtual social environments, virtual game environments were proposed to be classified (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Unlike Kaplan and Haenlein, Scott (2015) presented that social media provides tools for users to share their views online, such as social networking sites, blogs, video and image sharing sites, chat rooms and message boards, review sites, listservs, wikis, social bookmarking sites, and smartphone apps.

Sharma and Verma (2018) classified social media by the basis of their primary purpose. They defined social media as encompassing a gamut of platforms such as social networking site, blog, discussion forum, video sharing, content sharing, social bookmark, podcast and wiki. This classification approach is used to present social media types because it is more relevant to the research direction of the author in the field of Library and Information Science, especially to develop information services. Since there is a large amount of social media platforms, this paper mainly introduces the most popular ones.

3.1. Social networking site

Boyd and Ellison (2017) defined social networking site as a web-based services that individuals may (1) build a public or semi-public profile within a bounded framework, (2) express a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those created within the framework by others. People often have multiple reasons for using social networking site as keep in touch with family, make new friends, to be general socializing, update news or current events, and so on (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009). The most popular social networking sites are listed and described below.

Facebook gives its users an opportunity for interaction and sharing with family, friends, and colleagues. Via Facebook, people can share text, photo, video, and link with others easily. Additionally, in order to receive updates about others in their news feeds, Facebook users may follow someone or a page. With over 1.73 billion daily active users and over 2.6 billion monthly active users during the first quarter of 2020, Facebook has been the largest social networking site in recent years (Clement, 2020, May 18).

In a post restricted to 280 characters, *Twitter* users can share their thoughts as well as upload images or short videos. Real-time contact is the real power of Twitter. Twitter post (tweet) can be included hashtag (e.g., #topic) to indicate its topic which allows people find related tweets easily. With over 386 million active users, Twitter has become one of the most successful social networks at the moment (Clement, 2020, April 24).

LinkedIn is a professional social networking site that reveals more personal information. People use LinkedIn to find jobs and organizations use LinkedIn to look for potential candidates. Unlike social networking sites that people use to maintain relationships with friends, LinkedIn's goal is to "connect professionals from around the world and make them more active and effective" (Scott, 2015, 255).

3.2. *Blog, Microblog*

Blog is a personal website written by people who are passionate about a topic, provides "a way to share that love with the world and encourage an active community of readers who comment on the posts of the author" (Scott, 2015, 55). Blog is about particular subjects in which articles are arranged in reverse chronological order and can be identified by tags. These tags define post material, connect comparable posts and help people quickly find what they need on the blog. Although readers can leave comments on posts, bloggers can monitor information on their blogs, therefore, they can remove inappropriate comments as spam or profanity. There were over 1.6 billion websites until 2019 and over 500 million were known as blogs with more than 2 million blog posts a day (Hostingtribunal, 2019).

Microblog is characterized by enabling people to send and publish short messages. Tumblr is a microblog site that users can publish post very easily and quickly. Tumblr allows different types of posts, including text, audio, video, images, and external links (McClean, 2020). At the present time, Tumblr has become one of the largest blogging platforms worldwide with more than 500 million blogs and nearly 14 million daily posts (Tumblr, 2020).

3.3. *Forum*

Forum is an online community that allows visitors to read and share common interest topics (Forum, n.d.). The main objective of forum is to create a platform for communication among participants where a person can write one post which will be answered by others. Although subjects discussed vary widely, forum also has small groups with specific topics. Forum does not have many features and the especially the interaction is much worse when compared to social networking sites. However, forum is regularly used by Internet users, the need for forum will not decrease. The reasons of this value are: first, forum is built for threaded discussions about specific subjects, second it is one of the few remaining spaces online that affords anonymous interaction (Pendry & Salvatore, 2015).

3.4. *Sharing website*

It is not easy to divide separate social networking site from sharing website, because social networking site is also used for sharing contents. While the market is dominated by media sharing platforms, presentation sharing platforms (e.g., Slideshare)

and documents (e.g., Scribd) exist today. Media being shared is divided into three categories as described below.

Video sharing platform: A popular website for video sharing is YouTube, which has been part of Google since 2006. YouTube makes it possible for its users to stream, upload and share videos. In addition, users can also subscribe to YouTube channels built by others. Available in 80 languages, YouTube is attracting about 1/3 of Internet users, they are now watching 150 million hours of YouTube every day (Aslam, 2020, February 10). Another famous platform that people can watch, upload, and share videos is Vimeo. There are two major differences between Vimeo and YouTube. At first, Vimeo has more artistic and high-quality videos than YouTube. Other difference is commercial content on the site, Vimeo restricts advertisements, while YouTube focuses on earning money via advertisements throughout videos.

Photo sharing platform:

Flickr is one of the oldest sites for photo sharing, allowing users to control and share their images in high-quality. In 2015, Flickr announced they had over 10 billion images on their site and as of March 2019, Flickr has over 90 million monthly users (Smith, 2019). Flickr is a photo storage warehouse created by the account owner, so that users of Flickr do not collect pictures from the Internet.

Instagram is a mobile photo sharing network that enables users to take photo, apply editing apps then share them. Instagram had an impressive expansion in the past few years. With 1 billion active users in 2018, up from 800 million in 2017, Instagram is considered as one of the fastest growing sharing websites globally (Clement, 2019, December 3).

Pinterest is another platform for sharing images and videos. By using Pinterest, users can gather photos, videos from the Internet, then organize and share them with others via topic-themed virtual boards. Although other platforms as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr can be used to share photos, however, they do not allow users to collect and organize photos from other websites. Therefore, Pinterest fills a void not filled by other social media sites (Thornton, 2012).

Audio sharing platform: There are several social media platforms for publishing and sharing audio, especially music audio. This includes the launch of Soundcloud in 2008 with the goal of “becoming the YouTube of audio”. Today, Soundcloud is known as the largest music and audio platform with more than 200 million tracks (SoundCloud, 2019). Last.fm is also a common music website, which helps people to find songs based on what they have already listened to. On other platforms as Spotify and Simfy, users can listen to songs or to the radio and share what their interests with friends.

3.5. Social bookmarking

Social bookmarking enables users to add, annotate, and manage web pages while searching on the Internet to glean information from various resources. Moreover, users can distribute these pages with other people for jointly exploring interested topic (Lina & Tsai, 2011). Social bookmarking keeps only the links to original sources, so that its users are able to access their bookmarks from any computer with the Internet access. Another advantage of social bookmarking is adding keywords for bookmarks to help users search what they want easier. There are some common social bookmarking as Digg, Reddit, Newsvine, etc. Among them, Reddit is the 18th most visited website in the world, while Digg is ranked at the 165th (Medvedev, 2019; Alexa, 2020).

3.6. Podcast and Wiki

Podcast concerns a series of episodes such as series of speech, music, radio/television or a mix of sounds, etc. A podcast contains audio, image, video, and PDF file that users can upload and download from a website. Each new episode can be delivered automatically to users if they subscribe to a podcast (Van Looy, 2016).

Wiki is a website that permits users to update, edit, or delete contents on the site. Thus, wiki offers an easy way to collaborate and share knowledge. Wikipedia is recognized as today's most popular wiki with more than 23 million articles in 275 languages, all contributed by Internet users. Usually, Wikipedia appears at the top of the search results list and remains among the top 10 most visited websites on the Internet (Scott, 2015).

4. Research on social media

Social media has received attention from academics, practitioners, and experts of various fields, including communication, public relations, marketing, advertising, information system, etc. The existing review studies help to understand the current trend of research on social media. For instance, Kapoor *et al.* (2018) reviewed 132 papers on social media published between 1997 and 2017. In their study, they found that papers reviewed focused on different aspects of social media, including people's behaviours on social media, authenticity of reviews or recommendations, adaptation of social media according to organizational purposes, applicability of social media as a marketing tool, risks as well as negative influences of social media usage, and the impact of social media on political issues. In addition, several papers compared traditional media and social media. Additionally, Kapoor *et al.* (2018) recognized that researchers utilized qualitative, quantitative, and a mix of both methods in previous papers. In particular, qualitative methods were applied in form of interviews, quantitative methods were conducted via surveys or used for statistical analysis. Whereas, realizing the impact of social media on business deci-

sion as well as the social life, Bhimani *et al.* (2018) conducted a systematic literature review to provide an overview of the current trends of social media and innovation. Through analyzing 111 articles, they conclude social media is considered as enabler and driver of innovation, with behavior and resource-based perspectives being the most popular theoretical lens used by researchers. However, little is known on social media and innovation interactions, in both theory and practice. Therefore, theoretical, contextual and methodological research diversity is necessary to discover social media capability for innovation and its management. In the educational field, Al-Qaysi *et al.* (2020) reviewed and synthesized 122 social media research related to the educational and information systems theories. Based on the results of analysis, they proposed two recommendations for future research. First, future research should focus on the application and verification the effectiveness of social media for educational purposes. Second, research on the examination how lecturers and students acceptance of social media is needed.

Researchers on social media in different disciplines applying different methods indicates that social media has gained large attention among scholars and find the process challenging. Weller (2015) disclosed main challenges of research on social media: first, the need for an overall research infrastructure that involves data collection and facility sharing, as well as training in new methods and technologies; second, the call for greater consideration of research ethics; and third, the need for essential Big Data and data quality considerations. Therefore, current researches have been focused on these challenges. Pagoto and Nebeker (2019) proposed six steps the scientific community should do to ensure ethical issues are considered when using social media data in their studies. Other researches are about gathering digital research data via social media types and tools (Lackéus, 2020); using social media data (Martí, Serrano-Estrada, & Nolasco-Cirugeda, 2019), social media big data analytics (Ghani *et al.*, 2019), etc. To sum up, researches related to social media are providing a comprehensive knowledge of this area that are very valuable to academicians and practitioners.

Conclusion

This paper begins with definition of social media. A section describing the characteristics of social media is presented next, followed by the approaches in classification of social media. Finally, a detailed overview of the current state of social media research is presented. Social media refers to websites or apps that allow users to connect and exchange data through the Internet. There are many social media platforms with millions of people accessing and using every day for different purposes. The main advantages of social media are spreading contents, reaching out, and interactivity between users. Social media is omnipresent and is expected to expand in the future. This current paper has restricted concentrate on a general

review of social media. Moreover, the literature review is not exhaustive. Thus, future research can concentrate on the positive and negative effects of social media, a particular form of social media, explore the potential to achieve specific goals by using social media.

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