EDITORIAL PREFACE

Social Media Today and Tomorrow

Tatyana Dumova, School of Communication, Point Park University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Social media is a buzzword that is on everyone's mind. Practitioners and researchers alike ponder the various aspects of social media use, applications, premises, expectations, advantages, pitfalls, as well as current and future trends. As Pew Research Center's analysis predicts, in ten years "the Internet will become 'like electricity'—less visible, yet more deeply embedded in people's lives for good and ill" (Anderson & Rainie, 2014), and social media may be a large part of it.

Social media is an umbrella term used for a broad range of applications and services brought about by advances in web-based technologies such as DHTML, HTML5, PHP, AJAX, and JavaScript, among others. Online social networks, blogs and microblogs, online forums, wikis, photo and video sharing sites, podcasts, social bookmarking tools, social tagging, collaborative filtering, folksonomies, mashups—the list goes on and on. Social technologies are redefining mediated communication by integrating user-generated content and giving users the ability to join conversations, develop relationships, collaborate with each other, and build communities.

In 2014, over 2 billion people used different social media platforms and services around the world (Kemp, 2014). Social networking topped the charts with 1.79 billion social network users (Statista, 2014). The current issue of the International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies features contributions that highlight the interactive, engaging, user-driven, and participatory nature of social media; this issue also demonstrates how the very characteristics that distinguish social media platforms from traditional communication channels also create new challenges.

According to the 2014 State of the News Media report, 50% of social networking site users share or repost news stories (Mitchell, 2014). With mobile communication on the rise, an increasing number of people retrieve news using smartphones and tablets (Newman & Levy, 2014). The opening article written by Kelly Kaufhold titled "Seriously Social: Young Adults, Social Media and News" revisits the so-called "time displacement hypothesis" developed by sociologist Robert Putnam in 2000 when considering television's role in the decline of civic engagement in twentieth-century America. The author applies the displacement hypothesis to the news consumption habits of young adults in the Internet era, predicting that the affordances embedded in social media platforms will either complement traditional media use or displace

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it. The study employed a sample of 345 college students from two large public universities and focused on the time they spent using social networks, checking email, texting, reading news in print and online, watching entertainment videos, and watching the local, national, and cable television news channels. The results of a series of statistical analyses show that those participants who spent more time on social media also spent less time reading newspapers or watching television news. Thus, the author concludes that social networking activities can displace traditional news consumption patterns.

In the age of social media, viral marketing took the world by surprise; even more so, it continues to spread like wildfire. In many countries, efforts to harness electronic word of mouth and put it to good use resulted in interventions from state regulators or self-regulation initiatives on the part of marketing, advertising, and the public relations sector. Apparently, China did not follow the trend. "A Study on Job Cognition of Internet Pushing Hands" by Mei Wu and Zhiqun Chen elaborates on a new phenomenon in Chinese cyberspace, the so-called "Internet pushing hands" or *wangluo tuishou*. Pushing hands represent a growing but undisclosed segment of online marketing and public relations in China. This part of the industry employs paid social media commentators disguised as regular netizens, and relies on the pay-per-post business model. The goal of pushing hands is to generate Internet hype by means of sensationalism, exaggeration, and behind-the-scenes manipulation of information and thus promote specific products, services, or persons. The study by Wu and Chen employs Q methodology to analyze the job cognitions of pushing hands workers. The argument is made that the absence of self-governance, state regulations, and normative guidelines prevents pushing hand operations from becoming an ordinary occupation and a commonplace business enterprise.

Interestingly, in the summer of 2008, the issue of the potential damaging effects of *wangluo tuishou* on the credibility of online information in the public eye was suggested to a group of Chinese Internet CEOs in one of Beijing's public forums (Yang, 2009). The CEOs responded that this was a transient problem that would self-dissipate as online marketing in China matures and digital literacy grows among Chinese netizens. Meanwhile, Internet pushing hands continue to operate in a legal gray area without any governmental oversight, industry self-regulation, or a self-imposed ethical code of conduct. Their presence in Chinese cyberspace is becoming so pervasive that attempts are underway to employ technology to detect paid commentaries (Chen, Wu, Shrinavasan & Zhang, 2013).

While it is still unclear what the future holds for Internet pushing hands practices in China, measuring social media impact is the focus of the article entitled "Evaluating Social Media: Towards a Practical Model for Measuring Social Media Influence" by Shahizan Hassan, Norshuhada Shiratuddin, Nor Laily Hashim, and Feng Li. This study centers on user-driven media enabled by the growth of social technologies. In this article, the authors propose a new way for measuring the impact of social media—the Social Media Influence Assessment model (SMIA). The researchers argue that existing web performance metrics and analytics are not quite suitable for social media assessment and provide a detailed description of the stages of development for SMIA, from selecting criteria and identifying general assessment dimensions to testing formulas and validating the model. The resulting model utilized nine criteria (i.e., the number of likes, subscribers, inlinks, comments, posts, shares, presentation types, factual errors, and hyperlink citations) representing a range of user behaviors and online activities across three general dimensions: recognition, activity generation, and credibility.

In the following article, "Social Media Usage, Social Relations, and a Sense of Community in Indonesia," Hamideh Molaei examines whether social media bring any change into social relationships. As Indonesia is undergoing a push towards modernization, the inevitable question arises: will the spirit of solidarity and sense of community that has long distinguished and bound Indonesia's geographically diverse and multicultural society endure? Notably, Indonesia

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is a demographic powerhouse and home to diverse cultures and people from China, India, the Middle East, and Europe. Thousands of the big and small islands of the Indonesian archipelago are populated with more than 360 ethnic groups that speak over 700 languages. At the same time, half of the country's population is under the age of 30 and the youth eagerly embrace the development of communication technologies. For example, according to a Paris-based social media intelligence company called Semiocast (2012), Internet users from Indonesia's capital city Jakarta made it the "tweeting capital of the world" as they posted the largest number of public tweets (27%) outnumbering Tokyo, London, New York, and other major world metropolises. In the global ranking of Twitter accounts, Indonesia placed fifth after the U.S., Brazil, Japan, and the U.K. with 29.4 million user profiles (Semiocast, 2012). Results of a qualitative study conducted by Mole demonstrated that social media enhance social relationships in Indonesia by contributing to the spirit of togetherness and solidarity within the community, which encourages the acceptance of new styles of communication, including social media use.

A study entitled "Self-Presentation Strategies among Users of Social Networking Sites" by Azza Abdel-Azim Mohamed Ahmed contributes to a recurrent discussion of self-presentation tactics used in social media. The author examines self-presentation tactics among 230 users of online social networking sites (SNS) in the United Arab Emirates and focuses on three strategies: ingratiation, supplication, and enhancement. It should be noted that in the UAE, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are among the most popular social media sites. Results of correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between the frequency of SNS use and ingratiation and enhancement strategies. Greater diversity of online friends among the participants was positively associated with the perception of online self-presentation success. Males and females differed in the size of the online social network they interacted with, the diversity of online friends, and preferred self-presentation strategies. However, no significant differences were detected between genders when viewing their social network connectivity, diversity of relationships, and perception of online self-presentation success.

The issue concludes with a review of Howard Rheingold's latest book, "Net Smart: How to Thrive Online" (The MIT Press, 2012). Earlier Rheingold has chronicled the development of digital culture from its humble ARPANET beginnings to current Internet glory. While on the beat, Rheingold invented the staple term "virtual community" (1987) and penned several classics along the way. This new text is a must-read for anyone interested in using social media "intelligently, humanely, and mindfully" (2012, p. 1). Laura Jennings reviews the book while keeping an eye on the five essential digital literacies emphasized by the author: attention, critical consumption of information, participation, collaboration, and knowledge of networks or "network smarts." According to Rheingold, being net smart is not only vital for getting ahead; people need this knowledge to keep from falling behind. As Jennings concludes in her review, digital literacies "are not standalone concepts but interconnected ideas that form the basis of better digital citizenry." Indeed, in Rheingold's own words, "those who understand the fundamentals of digital participation, online collaboration, informational credibility testing, and network awareness will be able to exert more control over their own fates than those who lack this lore" (p. 2).

Overall, the authors address some of the current questions facing social scientists and professionals in the fields of communication, journalism, marketing, advertising, and public relations. As new communication channels continue to emerge and the demand for Internet-based services and tools continues to grow, the editor would like to invite readers to join in this exciting conversation surrounding the future of social media and the Internet.

Tatyana Dumova
Editor-in-Chief
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T. Dumova, (PhD) is an associate professor in the School of Communication at Point Park University in Pittsburgh where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in communication theory, research methods, and multimedia. Her research focuses on the social and cultural implications of Internet-based communication technologies and the role of technology in teaching and learning. She has presented and published her research nationally and internationally. She has lead-edited Blogging in the Global Society: Cultural, Political and Geographical Aspects *(2012) and the two-volume* Handbook of Research on Social Interaction Technologies and Collaboration Software: Concepts and Trends *(2010).*

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