

Stephan Dahl

# Social Media Marketing

Theories & Applications



2E



# **Social Media Marketing**

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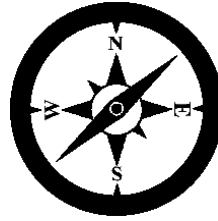
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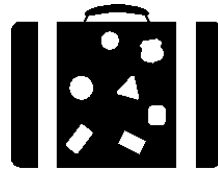
Think box



Research Direction



Research Highlight



Case Study



Further Reading

## About the Author



**Stephan Dahl** is Adjunct Associate Professor at James Cook University in Australia. Born in Germany, he worked in media, marketing and PR both for non-profit and commercial companies in the UK, Belgium, Germany and Spain before joining academia.

His research interests include health and social marketing, cross-cultural marketing and online/social media marketing and he publishes widely in national and international journals, as well as being the author or co-author of several books on social marketing, marketing communications and international business.

He currently serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Advertising Research* and the *Journal of Consumer Affairs*. His research has recently been featured in the UK on Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme, and BBC's *Newsnight* and *Look East*.

He is also the co-author of *Marketing Ethics* (SAGE, 2015).







## Introduction

## Welcome to the New Marketing

Few technological developments have created enthused and petrified marketing communication professionals and academics more than the loose concoction of different platforms referred to as social media. While some marketing professionals have hailed the social media as 'a game-changing technology with a major impact on business' (Corstjens and Umblijs, 2012: 433), even as a new paradigm of how to do business and connect to customers, others have been petrified by the possible onslaught of constant connectivity, the potential for ferocious customer intrusion and concerns with regards to nebulous privacy, as well as fearful of potential backlashes when engaging with the new media.

Social media has its fair share of success stories, and there are many examples of how socialising has reinvigorated traditional activities: think Spotify and SoundCloud, the social music platforms, which have revolutionised the way music can be shared, heard and listened to. Imagine how dull sales promotions and coupons used to be before Groupon made collecting offers fashionable. But, there are also the spectacular failures on social media, for example when Tesco tweeted in January 2013 that 'It's sleepy time so we are off to hit the hay' (Twitter, 2013a), seemingly oblivious to the on-going saga of horsemeat being sold as beef, in, amongst others, Tesco stores. Or the hacking of the Burger King social media account, which suddenly promoted McDonald's products, and bombarded followers with racial slurs and obscenities. And maybe it wasn't the right moment for American bank J.P. Morgan to ask Twitter users what they wanted to ask the bank, using #AskJPM in late 2013 as more than 24,000 users mocked the bank, rather than asked any serious questions (Kopecki, 2013). So much so that the social media managers themselves tweeted an apology: '... Bad Idea. Back to the drawing board' (Twitter, 2013b). Or asking people on Twitter what they wanted to know from British Gas (#AskBG) coinciding with the company announcing price hikes for gas and electricity customers. The reactions by

hundreds of Twitter users were similarly disastrous, from ‘... which items of furniture do you, in your humble opinion, think people should burn first this winter? #AskBG’ (Twitter, 2013c) to ‘will you pass on the cost savings from firing your social media team to customers? #AskBG’ (Twitter, 2013d).

So, while the transformative character of widespread and ubiquitous social media usage and the rise of the ‘networked individual’, cannot be easily dismissed, condemning long-standing theoretical frameworks based on the assumption of a revolutionary technology to the virtual scrapheap is, however, both simplistic and naïve. Have any of the examples really changed the way we all communicate? Or have they just made communication more open? Are individuals really changing the way they listen to music? Or have they always recommended bands, records and playlists to their friends? Nevertheless, and indicating a seismic change in the way we communicate, a recent survey of leading peer-reviewed, academic marketing and public relations journals found that a staggering 60% of articles discussing social media made no reference to theoretical frameworks (Khang et al., 2012), something unquestionably inconceivable for articles examining traditional media or communication methods. Such results inevitably raise the question of which assumptions are being made about this mystical and preternatural paradigm shift that negates the need for an academic debate informed by theory? How come buzzwords such as **Web 2.0**, that have been described as plain jargon (Berners-Lee, n.d.), have deceived even hardened academics into assuming that somehow communication changed after social media was born?

Three fundamental, interrelated areas arise as a consequence of this debate. Firstly, what is meant by social media and related terms? Secondly, is social media really such a seismic move away from previous technology and communication that new theories need to be developed and the old ones are no longer applicable? Or does it merely represent an evolution of existing technology, with opportunities for adaptation and refinement of, but certainly not a replacement of, existing theories? Thirdly, which theories are being used to investigate social media-mediated communication and marketing?

## DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND RELATED TERMS

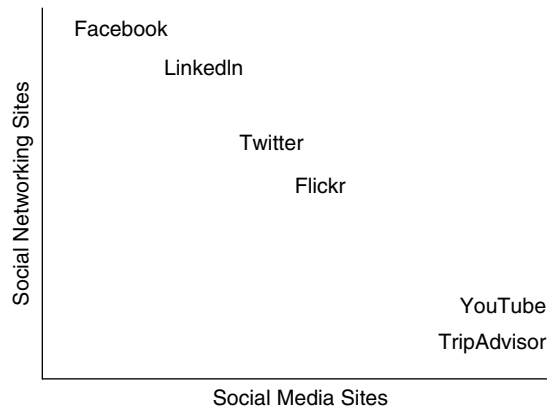
Without doubt, the seemingly rapid rise of ‘social media’ is astonishing, although what exactly is meant by terms such as social networking sites, social media, citizen media, participatory media, and consumer- or user-generated content, Web 2.0 technologies and social web, often used interchangeably, remains vague.

To clarify some of these terms, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) offer a widely accepted series of definitions. They define social media as ‘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 and Haenlein, 2010: 61). This definition encompasses a wide variety of sites and usages, from sites where the emphasis is on sharing of user-generated content, but not necessarily enduring interactions between different users, such as YouTube or TripAdvisor, to sites, or rather applications, which focus on continuous and ongoing contact between users, i.e. social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

In order to distinguish social media and social networking, boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system and (d) create and share content. (2007: 211)

As boyd and Ellison point out, a distinguishing feature of successful social networking sites is not that these function primarily as ‘networking’ tools in order to initiate relationships amongst strangers, but rather that users of such sites ‘are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network’ (2007: 211). Hence, social networking sites are a distinct subgroup of sites from social media sites, fulfilling different functions in the daily routine of their users. Yet, social networking sites make use of social media technologies, as described by Kaplan and Haenlein, particularly emphasising the sharing of user-generated content. However, the intended audience of social networking sites is different from the more general social media sites.



**Figure I.1** Taxonomy of social media sites

Based on this distinction exemplified by using popular ‘social’ websites, Figure I.1 shows the distinction between social media and social networking sites.

Although delineation between social media and social networking sites is likely to be fluid and individual usage dependent, three broad classifications of sites can be made:

1. Social networking sites where the emphasis is on social networking between mostly personally known users, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
2. Sites relying on user-generated content that is shared amongst users that may not be personally known to each other, such as TripAdvisor or YouTube.

3. Sites which can be used as both social networking sites and social media sites, integrating functionality for both elements dependent on the user. For example, a photographer can use Flickr to showcase user-generated pictures and share this with relative strangers, in the same way as the site can be used to circulate pictures from a family event to other members of a family.

Knowing the types of interactions that are likely to occur on different types of sites is important when considering how communication takes place on these sites, and the likely motivators for interactions. For instance, as interactions on primary social networking websites are amongst usually personally known users, considerations such as established interpersonal trust or social conformity are likely to be important. Conversely, on primary sites where the target audience remains largely unknown, such as TripAdvisor or similar review sites, trust in the message needs to be established first, and social conformity pressures are likely to be relatively insignificant, as users do not focus on interacting with each other. Thus, understanding the type of communication, social relevance and intended audience of user-generated content posted on these sites is important for successful interactions with users. For instance, social media disasters like the #AskBG campaign may have been avoidable if the social media managers had considered the primary audience of people on Twitter. As the majority of Twitter users seek to connect with like-minded individuals, and therefore will pander to their perceived audience, trying to get users to engage with an unpopular brand is likely to backfire – who would be a user that asks a serious question instead of entertaining their followers by posting a witty and cynical comment?

Accordingly, having an in-depth understanding of the culture and type of site (or application as per the definition) and understanding the nature of the communication is important for social media managers. And while having a wide variety of different communication tools and types may seem revolutionary, the question is, is it really such a paradigm shift from previous communication methods – especially the early Internet?

## EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

It is not uncommon to find expressions such as ‘social media explosion’, as one advertising agency called the phenomenon (Euro RSCG, 2009). Similarly, characterisations of social media as ‘the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publisher ... the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-one model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers’ (Solis, 2010: 37) are commonplace when describing social media. Yet, these characterisations are remarkably similar to predictions about the future of business made much earlier in the history of the Internet, for example, in 2000 prior to any notion of social media, the Cluetrain Manifesto proclaimed that the effect of the Internet is that ‘your organization is becoming hyper-linked. Whether you like it or not. It’s bottom-up; it’s unstoppable’ (Levine, 2000: 199).

The reason for the similarity is that many of the qualities ascribed to social media are neither novel nor did consumption co-creation and user generation start with Facebook,

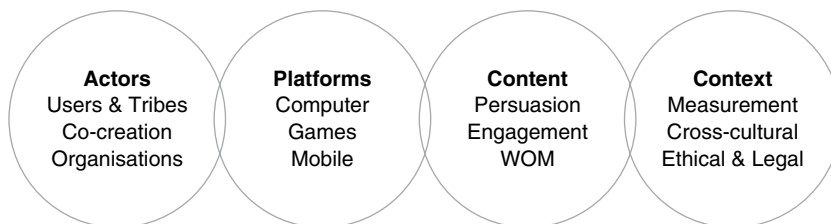
Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media apps. Consumer and interest groups did not arise following the ‘introduction’ of social media. Groups such as the **Boston Computer Group (BCG)**, founded in 1977, were active long before social media or even the widespread adoption of the Internet was conceivable. BCG would later on become a Macintosh User Group. These groups, popular in the 1980s, co-created computer consumption experiences of the emerging Apple computer technology. Consequently, web technology probably enhanced and increased visibility of such behaviour, but it has not created a new form of ‘social media behaviour’. Before the first World Wide Web browser, Mosaic, was released in 1993, the Internet had already been characterised as presenting a ‘growing diversity of user communities’ (Hart et al., 1992: 683), and two years after the 1995 development of the first Internet Explorer, scholars remarked that ‘the Internet is as much a collection of communities as a collection of technologies’ (Leiner et al., 1997: 106).

What can be said with some certainty is that the widespread adoption of communication technology has increased the speed of and lessened the effect of geographical boundaries on information exchange. This book aims to contribute to a more informed debate about the real impact of social media by looking beyond the hype and examining how current theories can be used to explain social media, and particularly, how such theories can help to develop effective and successful social media marketing campaigns.

To examine the questions, the book is divided into three parts: Actors, Platforms, Content and Contexts as shown in Figure I.2.

Part 1 looks at the actors and their immediate activities, and how these shape, or are shaped by, social media. The first chapter examines consumers and their motivation to form tribes and engage with other, similar individuals in various media forms. This is followed by a look at the process of co-creation in Chapter 2, looking at the processes that emerge when organisations and customers work together. Chapter 3 then focuses specifically on organisational actors, specifically from a branding perspective, and investigates the increasingly anthropomorphic nature that brands adopt as co-creators and content-providers in a user-generated environment.

Part 2 examines closely the media platform in which these actors are operating. Reflecting on the increasing convergence of different media types, the three chapters of this part chart the development of computer-based social networking, game-driven social networking and finally mobile and location-based social networking.



**Figure I.2** Structure of the parts in the book

In Part 3 the chapters examine different aspects of communication taking place amongst the actors in the various channels. Persuasion is the focus of Chapter 7, while Chapter 8 focuses on engagement. Chapter 9 then combines much of the discussion from the previous chapters and applies it to the most important aspect of user-generated media: the exchange of word of mouth.

Finally, Part 4 examines the contextual elements of social media marketing. Chapter 10 critically reviews measuring social media effectiveness, while Chapter 11 discusses cross-cultural aspects of social media. Chapter 12 focuses on important ethical and legal aspects of social media marketing.

The book concludes by taking a look towards the future, and how new technological developments will shape future communication between users and organisations – and how theories discussed during the course of the preceding chapters can help to guide marketers, by making sense of the changes and by being active participants.

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# **PART 1**

## **Understanding Actors in Social Media Marketing**