Social Media History, Ethics, Uses, and Research Possibilities

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Abstract

Social media platforms have become central to modern communication, enabling individuals to connect and interact while playing increasingly innovative and dynamic roles. Researchers have focused on understanding the characteristics and behaviors of social media audiences to harness these platforms for effectively marketing and promoting products and services. The primary aim of studying social media is to gain insights—a profound understanding of user behavior—which aids in making sound business decisions. Success in marketing research depends on accurately understanding customers and leveraging the capabilities of social media platforms. The strategic use of digital data has become essential for achieving organizational goals. This article delves into social media's history, ethics, applications, and research opportunities.

Keywords: *Social Media, History and Ethics, Uses and Search Possibilities.*

Introduction

The historical dimension provided a vision of the reasons for the emergence of each platform and how its idea emerged to solve a specific problem or to facilitate communication with certain groups. These essential aspects helped researchers determine the type of platform they would use in their marketing plans, the appropriate messages, and the target audience. How can be persuaded? The historical dimension also sheds light on the stages of the development of the popularity of the platforms, how they began with a small number of followers, and how they reached millions of followers after a few years.

Alban (2022). indicated that data enable an organization to identify and develop an understanding of the audiences it must engage in to realize its objectives. Social media has gained high popularity after turning into smartphone applications. It has become an essential part of people's daily lives, and it has become easy for marketers to use phones to reach customers quickly. Internet use through the mobile phone has grown to include 65% of the total time (Sponder & Khan, 2018). Organizations have become dependent on digital media to spread their messages, attract audiences, and influence them.

Understanding the history of social media has helped define the unique characteristics of each platform and utilize their capabilities to engage with audiences effectively. It also provides insights into the technological evolution of social networks, highlighting how each platform introduced features that set it apart from its predecessors. The evolution of social media began with blogs in the early 1990s, becoming popular by the late 1990s**. WordPress (2003)0** facilitated blogging**, while LinkedIn (2003).** transformed professional networking and recruitment. **Facebook** (2004) grew into a major marketing and social platform, **followed by Yelp (2004),** which combined reviews and advertising. **YouTube (2005).** introduced video sharing, while **Twitter** (2006) revolutionized real-time communication

with microblogging. **Instagram (2010).** focused on photo sharing and branding, and **Snapchat** (2011). appealed to younger audiences with ephemeral messaging and innovative features. These platforms have reshaped communication, marketing, and content sharing globally.

Studying social media platforms contributed to analyzing their content and understanding their capabilities, increasing the number of participants. Digital communication researchers can use this information to determine the appropriate content for their marketing campaigns. The widespread popularity of social media and its growing user base necessitates laws and regulations to guide ethical practices, much like traditional media. These ethics focus on ensuring respectful communication, protecting dignity and privacy, and fostering positive interactions. Regulating user relationships is vital for societal stability and progress. Researchers have explored key ethical issues, such as trust and credibility, compliance with platform-specific terms of service, and the importance of thoughtful content planning before publication. These guidelines aim to promote responsible behavior and uphold the integrity of social media interactions.

Sloan and Quan-Hasse (2019). summarized the ethical challenges in three components: "methodological questions about data collection methods, respondents' consent to participate, and the quality of measures used in social media research" (p. 23). The ethical implications of these technologies resulted from the complex web of interactions between social network users, corporate communication practitioners, and governments. It is not easy to adhere to ethical controls, especially with the abundance of information on the platforms regarding quantity and quality. Therefore, there is a need to study the principles that organize marketing practitioners' work because of their impact on the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

What is the Ethical Charter that Can Govern the Use of Social Networks?

Freberg (2019). recommended avoiding bullying and lying, automation, accuracy in publishing information, preventing disclosure of respondents' data, violating privacy, defamation, using a fake account, and infringing intellectual property rights. The author also suggested ensuring employees know the terms of service for each platform, control content, respect others, comply with laws, and be professional in dealing with crises. Also, take responsibility for what the company creates and shares.

All these recommendations are related to the social responsibility of organizations in the current competitive environment on social media. Social responsibility occupies strategic importance because of its impact on the organization's performance, gaining customer satisfaction, strengthening loyalty, and achieving the dignity of all other stakeholders. According to this concept, the organization must also acquire the public's confidence because this helps serve its economic goals. One of the most important reasons for organizations' success is their commitment to credibility and ethical principles with their current customers. The latter will help them gain new customers.

Freberg (2019). found that social media drives the bottom line of sales, revenue growth, community building, and lead generation for brands and users, which explains why marketers use social media in their advertising campaigns. Christakis (2022) describes how and why humans gather in social networks. If researchers want to track something that spreads through a network, they must set up sensors on central individuals within the network and monitor them to see everything that extends through it. The network of communication between individuals through influencers influences others easily; analyzing social networks contributes to understanding human behavior. This idea makes it easier for researchers to use platforms to achieve their marketing goals.

Why is it Important for Marketing Practitioners to Use Social Media?

Understanding the characteristics of social media contributes to making the most of its capabilities, as each platform has a different usage pattern. For example, Facebook is interested in texts, images, and news. At the same time, Twitter focuses on using a few words, while Instagram focuses on photos more than text. Therefore, knowing these features helps marketing practitioners to choose the right platform which fits their work. So, organizations are increasingly creating social media apps designed explicitly for collaboration activities, such as Enterprise, which uses social media tools like blogs, wikis, and group messaging software to allow employees and customers to connect and share information (Sponder & Khan, 2018). In general, marketing practitioners use social networks to enhance brand preservation and customer loyalty, obtain new customers, face increasing market competition, improve the number of website visitors, and facilitate access to information. Also, getting immediate and rapid public feedback about products, services, and company performance and quick response to customer service achieve customer satisfaction and contribute to the organization's success.

Social media provides users various opportunities and challenges, such as multilateral dialogue, visual storytelling, brand awareness, sending strategically targeted messages, responding to customer inquiries, and providing crisis updates (Freberg, 2019). Thus, using social media in marketing is an effective way for companies to reach their customers. This prompted researchers to study these platforms and analyze their content and audience characteristics to support marketing research and develop effective strategic plans. The research aims to obtain data to understand current or future customer behavior, improve decision-making, and reduce risk. The key to success is a deep understanding of the customer (Ladd, 2015).

Research in the virtual world presents significant challenges due to the diversity of customers' ideas, beliefs, and cultural and cognitive backgrounds. This variation makes it difficult for marketers to understand and address the needs of an invisible and heterogeneous audience, complicating efforts to create effective, targeted strategies. Communication research tries to study these users from several aspects to develop a comprehensive framework that combines their characteristics to facilitate the task of marketers in designing the content of their messages and answering the central question: Who is the organization's audience? What are their characteristics, and how are the messages designed? According to Freberg (2019), research in social media contributes to an understanding of overall strategy from a marketing and communication point of view. It helps the strategist understand what is happening, why, and how behaviors, actions, and societies occur.

However, Why is the Content of Social Media Studied?

The researchers focused on studying platform content to see how it affects the audience and whether it influences them by changing their behavior. Since the main goal of the media message is to change behavior, the scholars seek to answer the question: Was the content able to change the customers' behavior? Studying social media has allowed brands to explore core audiences and broaden their exploration to include what people like, what posts and brands they interact with, and define audience behaviors and actions (Freberg, 2019).

The Obstacles Facing Research

Haythornthwaite (2018). indicated that obstacles impede the possibilities of searching on social media. Obtaining a representative sample is difficult, so research requires more comprehensive data on behavior. Sloan and Quan-Hasse (2019) found that not all social groups are represented; there are still segments of the population absent from the Internet. Therefore, sending marketing messages to social media audiences does not mean it reaches all people; there are still groups that do not use these platforms, and

marketers must realize this by distributing their messages through other media.

Social media research concerns the future rather than the present or the past. For example, there are (MOOC) studies of large-scale open online courses and multiplayer role-playing games (MMORPGs) that serve as testing platforms for behaviors to determine the rules of interaction in the future (Haythornthwaite, 2018). Social media research contributes to understanding the public and following up on trends that will later shape its behavior. For example, it is possible to predict customers' purchasing behavior based on the percentage of their follow-up, comments, interaction, and interest in the product or service. Collecting this data on customer trends makes it easy to anticipate their purchasing behavior in the future. Data collection and analysis are essential for understanding and predicting human behavior. By tracking interactions, online activity, and purchases, organizations can uncover trends, gaps, and opportunities. This systematic analysis provides actionable insights for addressing challenges and forecasting future behavior (Christakis, 2022; Freberg, 2019).

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