Research Paper Management

Social Media- Benefits and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Social media is becoming highly accessible and an important tool for interaction and collaboration. There are multiple forms of social media. Benefits of social media are immense as which have led to its phenomenal emergence. However the same social media is also under scanner for a lot of disadvantages too. This paper attempts to describe the various types of social media. It further discusses reasons for popularity of social media. It also aims to highlight problems and dangers associated with use of social media.

KEYWORDS Social media, types of social media, popularity of social media, problems with social media

Social networking is coordinated innovation that permits clients to create their own unique content, share views and interests with others through various communities. Social media is an innovation that relies on sharing and integrating across a set of communities that people form on the internet. There are different types of social media that have evolved over a span of time having different uses, characteristics and target interest groups. Social media has become increasingly popular all over the world gaining support across regions, age groups, countries and backgrounds. Innovative forms of social media continue to be created to reach out to as many people as possible. Individuals, organizations and institutions are using social media for achieving dramatic benefits by using these tools to reach out to other individuals, customers and community members in new ways.

Types of Social Media

There are different types and incarnations of social media cropping up all over the internet. The users can choose one or more on the basis of their likes, interest, age and convenience. Discussed below are the most commonly accessed and popular types of social media

Social networking- It is a website that allows its subscribers to connect with and share content with a set of people who have similar interests and backgrounds. Social networking is also considered a more casual form of the many forms and types of social media. The purpose of most social networking sites is to socialize with friends, classmates, people working in same organizations, or people with similar interests. These sites work by find a friend, add a friend, read friends blogs or notes, see what friends are up to with real-time updates, and unite with like-minded people. Some of the websites are general while others, like Linkedin, connect you with people in the similar profession so as to build networks and communicate with organisations that are similar to the one you want to work for.

Bookmarking sites- These websites are used by subscribers to save and organize links to the various online books, websites and other forms of web resources. The users can highlight the links called as 'tags', making the search easy to share with other subscribers and also search later. Social bookmarking sites help save your favourite websites and share them with your friends. They help you search specifically what you want based on the bookmarks rather than search hundreds of pages on the web. The most viewed and most popular searches are saved which help narrow down your search as per relevance and end up saving time. These bookmarking sites suggest content similar to the links or images you have already saved on the network.

Media sharing sites – These websites allow users to download, upload and share videos, pictures and music files with other subscribers of the site. Almost anyone can share and add content on these sites by accepting the copyright and privacy policy. You can upload information content, do it yourself videos, comedy events and shows. These media sites are also used by business houses to promote their products, services and build the brand. Media sites offer small amount of personal storage space and additional storage can be bought through paid subscriptions.

Discussion forums/ Blog- It is a website or a web page which is constantly written and updated by an individual or a group of people who maintain it. Blogs can be about sharing views, opinions and interests, or can be about sharing information. Blogs are generally updated on regular bases by the creators. They also acts as discussion forums where information is constantly updated and added related to the domain area of the blog. Some blogs are also being run and maintained under the multi author category where people keep posting articles, information and opinions and is edited by professionals. Such blogs are commonly maintained by media houses, newspapers, etc and are referred to as multi author blogs.

Micro blogging- This is also a form of blogging but is limited by short and limited messaging often up to 200 characters. It is nearer to texting or messaging. The blogger puts these short messages for other subscribers of the micro blogging site, to be viewed by a specific set of people he wants or open to all the subscribers of the site. These messages are called as microposts, which can be uplooaded through the cell phone or from the computer. It can lead to sharing of information and events instantly. It is commonly also a tool to know general public sentiment on certain issues and events through the trend of posts that subscribers share.

Reasons for popularity of social media

Social media has gained immense popularity amongst people young and old across the globe. It has changed the way people relate and interact with each other. There are various factors that have led to the phenomenal acceptance of social media world over.

The uniqueness of social media as well as its far and quick reach have been two major reasons resulting in its popularity amongst people from all age groups and across the globe.

a. Opportunity to interact with people world over

Social media allows its users to access profiles of people all over the world with whom they can connect on the basis of similarity of interests and liking. It is easy to connect with

people from any where in the world and one is not bound by geographical and time boundaries. It opens doors for understanding differences between cultures and languages far and wide

b. User friendly websites
The social media websites are user friendly making them convenient to use and subscribe. Subscription to these websites is generally free adding to their popularity. Moreover these websites are convenient to navigate and do not require much technical knowledge. They can be accessed anytime from your mobile phone or your computer leading to easy accessibility thus adding to their cult following.

c. Quick response
You get quick and immediate responses to your queries and interaction. It leads to quick feedback and immediate clarification of any miscommunication and misinformation providing with almost the same advantages as face to face communication would bring.

d. Creating and joining interest groups
Most social networking websites allow to create groups on the basis of interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes which are open for new members to join. This helps users to explore, enhance and share their interests with a large number of like minded people. It also fulfils the desire of people to connect to others and build communities

e. Have a voice
For people who are not extroverts and are not able to speak and share their views in public, social media is a platform where they feel they can have a voice of their own on. Moreover people feel freer while talking on social media as it takes them away from the anxiety of facing a large crowd

f. Useful for business
Social media has evolved as a very useful business tool. Right from hiring the new employee to gaining inputs directly from the customers on new product launch. Even before launching, companies may come to know about the percentage of people interested in the business idea. It has immense reach. It increases your business exposure, increases visits to your site, helps build a customer base for what you sell, and gives you the opportunity to offer great promotional schemes. Organizations can build customer loyalty by having direct contact with the customers, leading to better business relationships and including customer suggestions into the product and service offerings. It can help organizations fight competition better.

All the factors discussed above have led to the emergence of the social media era all over the world. While on one hand we celebrate the coming of age of the social media, the problems associated with social media can't be ignored either. These problems or issues involved with social media are taking huge proportions as the usage and reach of social media increases with every passing day.

Discussed below are the problems and challenges associated with social media.

Advantages of social media
One of the major criticisms of social media is that it is acting as deterrent to social interaction. Most people have developed addiction to social media so much so that the actual socializing with friends, neighbours and peers has come down tremendously. People prefer to spend time with friends on social media than people around them, leaving little time for real world interaction. This is leading to behavioral issues amongst youth with them not being able to relate well with those around them. Real world relationships are suffering and virtual world is taking over. Families are experiencing lesser bonding amongst themselves as members are choosing to spend more time on social media than with the family.

The absence of face to face interaction in social media is limiting the use and evolution of interpersonal skills among people. The unrestrained freedom to like, dislike or comment on the social media is making people less tolerant to contradicting and divergent viewpoints of others. Trolling is the best examples of this phenomenon. Communication amongst people is becoming more abusive and less cultured, as in absence of face to face communication people are insensitive to the choice of words used for communication. Cyber bullying is another major problem experienced by users of social networking websites. People have gone to the extent of committing suicides or being forced into committing them because they could not cope up with the pressure created by the rejection of large number friends on a particular media site..

Privacy is another major issue involving social media. With the freedom of uploading and sharing any and everything on the web, one is not sure who might upload information about you on any of these media. Social media is encouraging people to share more and more about their personal lives leaving the society confused about what and how much needs to be shared with others.

Social media also leads to an inflated sense of belief among people that they are connected to a large set of friends without actually being able to differentiate between real and casual relationships formed on social media

Even the businesses that have benefited immensely form social media, are debating the problems that social media brings along with it. The employees at the workplace are spending more time on the social networking sites than focusing on the performance. Research has shown that usage of social media often acts as a distraction for people which is leading to reduced spans of attention, less concentration on the work at hand and thus leading to decreased productivity at workplaces. Many organizations have gone to the extent of blocking the use of these websites during working hours to overcome the challenges associated with its usage. It has also been observed that many a times the company image suffers in case some negative information goes viral on social media. Further more, it becomes almost impossible to control and check this spread of information. Another issue is the freedom that people have, to share their feedback about various services and products offered by companies, often leading to a dent in the company image and goodwill. Some times these bad reviews are also put up by competitors on the social media websites thus negatively influencing the brand image of the company.

Social media, like most other innovations, bring challenges and problems, along with the immense benefits that they deliver to mankind. The future of social media lies in identifying ways and measures to minimize these negatives and harnessing its benefits to the fullest. Self restraint and respect for other people's freedom may be two of the most important ways to overcome problems associated with social media.

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