

Social Media Overview

Engaging Audiences in Digital Promotion

Learning Objectives: This chapter examines how to

- Differentiate between social versus other digital media
- Create effective social media content
- Capitalize on user-generated content
- Organize and staff social media activities
- Employ key types of social media software programs and analytics

Defining “Social Media”

The term *social media* is widely used, but there is no agreement about the exact meaning of the term.

For example, some messaging tools, such as Twitter, are considered “social media” while email and text messaging are not. Organizational websites that allow visitors to share comments and submit materials similarly are considered publishing tools, not sites where people might gather to hook up with friends. Although YouTube and Flickr include tools that can foster a sense of community among their users, they are primarily used for media sharing (not primarily social) purposes. Online games that engage players from remote locations similarly are highly interactive but do not always fall within the social media description.

Social media can be defined narrowly as Web 2.0 or mobile technologies that encourage dialog or other interactions between organizations, groups, communities and individuals. Social media depend heavily for their success on audience contributions. Use of social media has become extensive in recent years. Two-thirds of Americans are on Facebook, fully half visit watch videos on YouTube and one-sixth of the population has joined Twitter.

The accompanying figure shows five ways that an organization might interact with audiences. The top two schemes are based primarily on a unidirectional flow of information (monologic and monologic with limited feedback) and are typical of Web 1.0

strategies. Examples include email, website, digital advertising, videos, e-publishing and online publicity.

By contrast, social media rely on dialogic, participatory or sponsored-interactive patterns.

Dialogue involves the direct sharing of ideas between an organization and audience members, often in media that the organization *owns*. Examples include blogs and podcasts. The conversation is two-way, and audience comments play an essential role. Often times the conversation might be prompted by a post by the organization. However, audiences also might initiate the exchange.

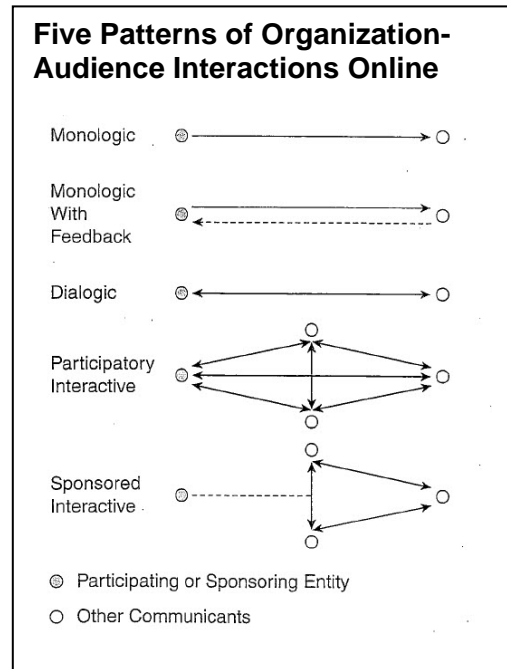
Participation entails an organization engaging audiences by joining in a conversation already taking place among people in a public space online. Instead of directing the exchange, the organization is a co-equal member in a *shared* medium operated by a third-party. Examples include discussion boards and chats, social media sites, wikis, and virtual world sites.

Sponsorship involves the organization operating an online venue primarily designed to facilitate conversations among audience members. Examples include forums and chats intended to encourage interactions and the exchange of ideas among customers, members, employee, social activist supporters, or citizens. The organization plays a minimal role as a participant and might not even interact with audience members. The advantage to the organization accrues from being recognized as the sponsor. Organizations also can benefit from improving the involvement, effectiveness or satisfaction or audience members through opportunities to express themselves and from the intelligence that can be gathered from the conversation.

The notions of *participation* versus *sponsorship* apply across a wide range of the social media discussed in this book. In addition to acting as participants in public venues as Twitter and Facebook, Wikipedia and the blogs produced by others, organizations can create their own blogs and podcasts, social networking sites, forums and chats, wikis, entertainment games and virtual world sites.

Six Uses of Social Media

Similar to other digital promotion tools, social media can be used to build awareness, foster positive attitudes and prompt actions that move people toward actions that benefit both the audience and the sponsoring organization. As two-way communication tools, social media enable organizations to learn about their audiences while also communicating with them on a relatively low-cost basis. Unique features are social media's ability to capitalize the on the immediacy of moment through real-time



exchanges and to extend the reach of their messages through the multiplicative effect of users passing along content to others.

Broadly speaking, organizations can use social media five ways:

- **Sharing information and updates.** Unlike online advertising and publicity, which rely on a process of incidental exposure, social media are not particularly good as prospecting venues where the purpose is capture the attraction of people who have no familiarity with an organization. Instead, social media are mostly used by organizations to provide updates to audiences who *already* been some form of affinity to and who choose to “follow” the organization by receiving updates. Shared information increasingly includes commercial promotional messages featuring product offers and discounts on venues such as Twitter and Facebook. These posts are often quite brief. However, the reach of organizational is extended when recipient chooses to share information with family, friends or others. Moreover, social media provide opportunities for feedback or dialog with the organization. Microblogging and one-to-one personal messaging services are prime examples of how social media are used to share information (Chapter 10).
- **Express opinions and promote ideas.** Social media such as blogs and podcasts (including vodcasts) are excellent platforms for organizations to position themselves as thought-leaders or experts in a particular industry or about a particular topic or issue. These social media often can used to promote new insights, innovative ideas, or contrarian perspectives on current events that provoke conversation or even controversy. Organizations thus leverage the interactive character of social media to engage audiences, stimulate their thinking, and possibly prompt action. Blogs and podcasts are examples of opinion- and idea-driven social media (Chapter 11).
- **Build and maintain relationships.** Social media can go beyond merely sharing information by fostering or strengthening the affinity or bond between a user and an organization. Although updates are often the mechanism used to trigger contacts, the ultimate purpose is to engage audiences or stakeholders in an ongoing series of valuable organization-related activities that promote a sense of shared identity and loyalty. Some social media now feature paid advertising with “hard-sell” messages, but social media have been proven to be specially effective when organizations speak to audiences as a *friend* (not as a salesman) and maintain that friendship through offers, groups, events, discussions, interactive apps and the sharing of fun

Alternative Purposes of Social Media and Key Tools at a Glance

Share Information

Microblogging
Personal Messaging Systems

Express Opinions and Share Ideas

Blogs
Podcasts and Vodcasts

Build/Maintain Relationships

Social Networking Sites

Solve Problems/Collaboration

Forums (Discussion boards)
Chats
Wikis

Presentation and Document
Sharing
Intranets and Extranets

Engage Users Through Interaction

Entertainment Games
Serious (training) Games
Online Contests and Promotions
Virtual World Sites

experiences (including multimedia). Social networking sites are a primary example of using social media to build and maintain relationships (Chapter 12).

- **Share and heed advice.** Certain social media involve promotional strategies that are driven primarily by the desire of users to seek or share advice about online resources or personal experiences. Organizations interested in promoting themselves or their causes often take a secondary role in these advice-focused sites. Examples include social bookmarking sites and social news sites, where users direct others to valuable online content. Review sites are venues for sharing personal experiences in an effort to seek help or provide help to others on personal or professional matters. Forums and chats are sites which evolved from being places primarily used to socialize to discuss issues and sharing advice on particular topics of concern to them, such as how to cope with a health condition (Chapter 13).
- **Perform tasks through collaboration.** Some social media, especially those used at work, bring people together to solve problems or perform tasks through the sharing of useful information. Similarly, many professionals rely on discussions to share insights about their work or to solve problems. Forums and chats, wikis and the project coordination tools found on many organizational intranets and extranets are examples of collaborative information sharing using social media (Chapter 14).
- **Heighten user engagement through interactivity.** Finally, some social media primarily are employed by organization because of their ability to increase consumer, employee or member interest or involvement in an organization or idea by providing fun or engaging interactive experiences. These often involve competitions or interactions involving other people, and thus are social in nature. However, fostering relationships between participants is not the purpose per se. Entertainment games use a social strategy primarily to build brand awareness and allegiance. Training games incorporate competition to foster learning and self-confidence in performing specific tasks. Online promotions and contests foster brand loyalty. Virtual world sites provide opportunities for both brand awareness and interactions with organization. Games, online promotions and contests and virtual world sites are all social media tools that are especially used to engage digital natives (Chapter 15).

Evolution of Social Media

From their beginning, digital promotion tools were social. In fact, the earliest Internet tools used clunky DOS-based systems with limited functionality and dial-up phone connections to play games, share files, and engage on group discussions and chats. It was only after the commercialization of the World Wide Web 1994 that digital promotion took on the character of more traditional publishing, publicity and advertising as organizations sought ways to adapt traditional promotional concepts to this powerful promotional environment.

The social character of the Internet soon reinserted itself as the interactive features of the Web were enhanced, and as a broadband capacity and increased speeds made

online exchanges easy and convenient. The turn of the 21st century saw the advent of blogs as online diaries (1998), review sites (Epinions, 1999), social networking sites (Friendster, 2002), media sharing sites (Flickr, 2004; YouTube, 2005), and microblogging (*tumblelogs*, 2005; Twitter, 2006). Notably, a large number of popular social media venues were created but subsequently closed, merged or transformed from their original format. The social media landscape continues to undergo change.

Social Media as Promotional Tools

Similar to other digital tools, such as email and websites, organizations of various sorts have seized upon social media as promotional tools. Social media need to be used in tandem with traditional or other digital promotional tools, but using social media effectively also involves adopting a different mindset. Most users don't want to be "customers" when using social media. Zealous marketers need to overcome a relentless "buy now" mentality and take a longer-term, low-key approach to be favorably received.

Deploying social media also requires giving up much of the *control* over message content and timing of individual messages. Many of the very best opportunities are *situational*, i.e. based on events or circumstances that cannot be anticipated or planned. Adroit social media staffers must seize opportunities, work with minimal supervision, and use good judgment to adapt an organization's strategy to spontaneous situations.

Marketers use social media (and content marketing more generally) to build brand awareness, foster loyalty and retain customers, generate leads, generate website traffic, position the organization as an expert or thought leaders, facilitate leads, and nurture leads.

Fully half of the U.S. consumers don't see any reason to "friend" a brand online for its own sake. So why do consumer engage in social media? Simply put, they seek *benefits* that enable them to be better consumers – information that will help them make better choices, learn about the experiences of others, obtain product information, receive a discount or offer, or solve service issues. Consumers want brands let them choose how and when to communicate with them – and fully one-third want brands to respond to their feedback or comments, whether positive or negative.

The Rise of Paid Promotion in Social Media

Since their inception, social media have focused on creating effective *organic* ("natural") content where organizations and their constituents share ideas in an environment that thrived without commercial advertising.

In recent years, however, many of the major social media venues – Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram and others – have sought to cover their costs

American Adults' Social Media Use September 2014

	Online Users	All Adults 18+
Facebook	71%	58%
LinkedIn	28%	23%
Pinterest	23%	22%
Instagram	26%	21%
Twitter	23%	19%

Online users include the 81% of Americans who use the Internet.
Source: Pew Research Center Internet Project Survey September 2014.

and generate profits from their operations by incorporating commercial messages in their organic content and by promoting advertising appearing in secondary positions on their sites. These efforts to *monetize* their operations have largely redefined the workings of social media – and what it takes to employ social media effectively.

- In order to gain prominent exposure for their social media messages, organizations are being pressed to purchase various kinds of ads through the automated, self-service advertising programs operating by these sites. These generally follow procedures comparable to Google AdWords (see Chapter 5).
- Ad formats include regular content that resemble regular, unpaid posts. These forms are examples of *native advertising* (see Chapter 5) that are labeled with terms such as Promoted Tweet (Twitter), Sponsored Post (Facebook), Sponsored Update (LinkedIn) and Promoted Pin (Pinterest).
- Social media managers now need to be knowledgeable about the various forms of paid exposure that are available on a particular site. This is a daunting challenge because advertising offerings that are being continuously transformed as venues and sponsor organizations use trial-and-error to determine strategies and tactics that work best.

In examining social media, this book addresses how advertising can be employed on several of the largest microblogging and social networking sites. Still unclear is whether social media managers will be responsible for all involvement by client organizations in these venues. Social media managers are probably best suited to determine strategies and to manage budgets for native advertising (sponsored content). However, advertising duties for regular text or display advertising might best be split with managers already overseeing advertising expenditures for search engine marketing, brand promotion or employee recruitment.

Effective Organic Social Media Content

Social media content most often appears in the forms of short posts or announcements on microblogs, social media networks, blogs, forums and chats. Longer forms include podcasts (20-60 minute audio programs), wiki entries (which can be up to several thousand words), contributions to collaboration tools at work, and interactions in virtual world sites.

The critical creative skills required are the same as for other digital platforms:

- Writing crisp, succinct, compelling and accurate copy
- Shooting, selecting and posting engaging still images
- Producing and editing engaging videos
- Creating attractive visuals, graphics and other multimedia

Special knowledge includes how to use hyperlinks to connect users to more detailed information, how to incorporate tags and hashtags to help users easily locate content and how to deploy social/sharing buttons and tools to extend the reach of messages.

Friendly, Conversational Tone

Regardless of which social medium is employed, a distinct characteristic of social media is the *conversational* tone. Indeed, many experts contend that the purpose of social media is to engage others in *conversation*.

Encouraging dialog requires organizations to adopt the *persona* of an individual and to abandon the formality and often stilted style found in other organizational communications. Organizations must talk in the language of their target audience, yet speak with a consistent voice. They should drop any suggestion of pretentiousness, authority or control in order to reduce the social distance that might separate the organization from users. The parties in a true conversation are co-equals, and successful organizations need to encourage participation and the open exchange of ideas.

Some creative strategies used in social media to foster conversation:

- Use first or second person voice (“I” or “we”).
- Purge unnecessary industry or organizational jargon
- Explain less familiar ideas or terms, but never talk down to the audience.
- Tactfully correct errors of *fact*
- Recognize the validity of differing *opinions*
- Avoid criticizing or attacking others
- Avoid any suggestion of retaliation
- Welcome comments and dialog

Smart organizations use social media to gain insights about people. They incorporate the feedback in organizational policies, practices and procedures. They also let people know how they are making changes – and how the organization has listened to them.

Brevity, Precision and Accuracy

Even more than email or websites, social media writing places a premium on brevity. Research suggests that the most effective social media posts are not longer than 100 characters and spaces (even though text messaging and microblogs actually allow longer posts). See the chart at end of chapter.

Haste—How to Destroy Your Organization’s Credibility

Spontaneity and immediacy are two of the most valued features of social media communication. However, the ease with which content can be easily and quickly posted often has unintended consequences.

The social media sphere is replete with examples of blunders made in a staffer’s zeal to quick or cute. Problems range from egregious grammatical errors to failing to understand the contextual nuances of hashtags and cultural insensitivity toward individuals or groups. Mistakes also occur when content is posted on the wrong platform or when staffers unintentionally post items on behalf of the organization instead of on their own personal accounts.

Always use care when creating social media posts to avoid embarrassing mistakes. Some tips:

- Ask a second person to proof all posts for grammar, accuracy and misinterpretations.
- Verify all links and hashtags.
- Withdraw an errant post immediately, if possible.
- Suspend additional postings temporarily (including already scheduled posts) that might trigger unwanted comments.
- Post a simple apology, if required. Avoid deprecating the organization with statements such as “We were stupid.”
- Tell managers about the gaffe.
- Be prepared to respond to ridicule – it will happen.

Social media content also needs to be direct, precise and accurate. Every word needs to count and say exactly what is intended. Many social posts incorporate links that must be created and checked with care. Broken links prohibit users from accessing the information they want and the ideas that social media sponsors want to promote.

Authenticity, Transparency, Believability and Credibility

Users develop quick but often lasting impressions about organizations based on their initial social media contacts. And because most users are already familiar with the organizations they follow, they have expectations about the quality and kinds of messages they will see in social media posts. In some cases, they expect edgy, offbeat, or zany posts (but not offensive, insensitive or vulgar language). In general, the tone content must be consistent with organization's culture and demeanor.

Authenticity refers to social media messages being real and genuine and connotes truth and accuracy. Authentic messages sound like they come from the genuine source and strive for verisimilitude (a sense of realism that resonates with the user's experience).

Transparency is a critical element in authenticity because people today expect organizations to be open, candid, truthful and avoid deception – to tell it like it is.

Messages that are both authentic and transparent are more *believable* and thus more likely to be accepted by users. Evidence suggests that people counter-argue against claims that are contrary to their personal experience and that the absence of counter-arguing is essential for effective persuasion. Authenticity, transparency and believability are also critical to positioning the organization as *credible*, i.e. attractive, expert, independent, dependable and/or trustworthy. Social media posts must strive to enhance an organization's credibility, not destroy it.

Message Targeting, Content and Frequency

Targeting. Social media involves using a variety of social media tools – don't limit choices to the most popular tools such as Twitter or Facebook. Target venues that are appropriate for the audience and message. For example, organizations can reach business people through LinkedIn, women via Pinterest, young males on YouTube, and young consumers on SnapChat.



Content Marketing Pyramid – 5 Components

Source: Content Marketing Institution

Varied Content Types. Another critical strategy is striking the right combination of content types. In its Content Marketing Pyramid (see figure) the Content Marketing Institute suggests that providing *relevant information* is the foundation of social media and content marketing programs. Upon this base are added components that focus on *instruction, conversation, inspiration* and *entertainment*. Although the CMI suggests relative frequencies for to optimize effectiveness (see figure), these will vary by client.

Frequency of posts also is essential. Social media managers need to post with sufficient regularity to assure that followers remain aware of the organization – but not become drowned with unwanted, annoying or trivial messages that might prompt them to unsubscribe/unfollow sender or to ignore the sender's posts. The ideal number will vary based on the venue and popularity of the organization, but can easily fill a social media manager's workday. Up to 10 Tweets a day is not uncommon, while Facebook posts often can be as many as 3-5 a day. Less frequency is common for sites such as LinkedIn (1-2 a day) and Pinterest (4-5 posts per week).

Other social media messaging tips:

- Make a commitment to maintain a presence once a social media program is initiated
- Have clear goals for the program and clear objectives for every post
- Take full advantage of organic opportunities, but advertise as needed
- Make it simple for users to engage with messages using easy-to-click buttons, links, hashtags, @mentions and comment boxes. Make links short and place them high in longer messages.
- Capitalize on the strengths and unique features of each tool.
- Think from the perspective of the user: Answer the question, "What's in it for me?"
- Provide adequate budget for staff, software, content creation, and paid promotion.
- Obtain and maintain management "buy in." Report regularly about accomplishments, insights gained, low-cost non-financial results obtained, and plans for calculating return on investment.
- Be creative. Make it a fun experience for staff and users.

Extended versus Direct Exposure Strategies

Similar to Web 1.0 tools, organizations use social media to directly reach users influence their behavior – how they buy, invest, donate, work, vote, avoid personal risks or adopt beliefs. However, a key difference from other digital promotional activities involves the degree to which social media aim to extend the reach of their messages by encouraging users to communicate with their families and friends after being exposed to social media messages.

Extended exposure can be fostered several ways:

Social/Share Buttons. Similar to their use on websites (Chapter 3) and news releases (Chapter 8), including "social" or "share buttons" can dramatically extend the reach of social media messages and facilitate feedback and engagement. (Download social buttons and the required embedded code from services such as AddThis.com and ShareThis.com.) An important benefit of social buttons and links is that user actions can be tracked. For example, use social buttons to prompt users to:

- post comments,
- rate ideas or messages,
- "like" or otherwise indicate their approvals, or
- review products and services.
- download a coupon

- ask an opinion
- buy or place an order

Requests. Organizations also can explicitly enlist the support of users by prompting them to use social/share buttons. Users can also be encouraged within texts to talk with friends or family, send emails, cross-post notices on their own blogs, or take other online actions. In such cases, prompts are not merely part of the message's infrastructure; they are purposely incorporated into messages as calls to action. Organizations need to provide opportunities and possibly encourage responses by offering incentives or rewards for people to tell others.

Media Publicity. Social media exposure also can be extended through editorial coverage by bloggers and journalists (Chapter 8). Media now routinely cover what's trending on Twitter, posts items on Facebook, and popular YouTube videos featuring exceptional human interest. Media publicity can provide additional exposure, but also primes users to then look for and possibly share particular social media posts. Just as it is difficult to predict whether a particular video will "go viral," it is impossible to predict what bloggers or journalists will find noteworthy. However, message sponsors can fuel media interest by producing provocative content, encouraging bloggers and journalists to follow them, and by publicizing their noteworthy social media activities. (*Metapublicity* refers to publicity about publicity.)

User-Generated Content

Engaging audiences to join the online conversation is the very essence of employing social media for promotion purposes. The central role played by users is readily evident when considering some of the defining characteristics of these tools. Social media:

- capitalize on the *interactive* nature of the Web 2.0 technologies and wireless
- feature content from a *diversity* of sources
- depend on *multiple participants* to sustain their "critical mass" and viability
- encourage the *free exchange of ideas*
- bring together people with *shared interests*, although their *opinions* on those interests might differ.
- often fashion themselves as *communities*.

User-generated content is the generic term for media content posted by audiences. UGC is also known as *consumer-generated content* (CGC). Although an essential element in social media, user-generated content now plays a vital role in media of all types. Indeed, users have evolved into the media content producers -- the people formerly known as "the audience." Organizations themselves can assume the user role by providing user-generated content to public media as part of their online publicity efforts (Chapter 8) and as member-participants in social media venues operated by others.

Credibility The value of user-generated content is grounded in the long-understood power of *word-of-mouth* promotion. Traditionally WOM involved ordinary people sharing news and information about products, services or ideas offline through everyday

conversations. Ordinary people thus have been vaunted by marketers for their ability to influence the behavior of others and have been labeled variously as *opinion leaders*, *market mavens*, *brand evangelists* and *citizen marketers*. WOM is also known as e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) in today's digital environment.

Research findings consistently suggest that user-generated evaluations are viewed as more *believable*, and the sources are more *credible*, compared to when exactly the same idea is expressed by a marketer or the promoter of a particular service or idea. Users are seen as being independent, with nothing to be gained by expressing their opinion. Indeed, a favorable comment by a user can provide a valuable third-party endorsement.

Endorsements are central to the value of social media and why word of mouth is so valuable. An *endorsement* is an expression of approval from a third-party and can be either *explicit* (stated) or *implicit* (latent in the message but inferred by the user). In fact, endorsements can be general statements favoring a particular idea or topic. A popular example found in social media is a product user retelling her or his experience or sharing a personal story. As with advertising, the ideal endorsement focuses on how an experience transformed a person's life. But many endorsements fall short of an outright *recommendation*, which requires making an explicit suggestion or directing another person to take a particular action, such as making a purchase.

Why People Share Online

What motivates people to share their ideas online? Various explanations are possible:

- Altruism – a genuine desire to help others with common interests or concerns.
- Reputation -- advancing their personal image or self-interest.
- Social benefits -- gaining access or maintaining contacts with others.
- Collaboration – the challenge and opportunity to co-create a new idea.
- Winning – the competitive passion to have their beliefs prevail.
- Change – promoting behavioral improvements in other others
- Ego gratification – bolstering their own self-identity or self-image.

According to Marketo, these can be summarized in 7 terms: give, advise, warn, advise, inspire, amaze or unite.

When encouraging people to share their ideas, savvy social managers can tap one or more of these compelling motivations. For maximum success, always ask users to share at an opportune time and make the process simple and easy.

Endorsements have been an important tool in promotion for decades and take several forms – editorial page endorsements of political candidates or ballot propositions, critic's reviews of artistic performances open to the public, editorial reviews of new products or services, and (paid or unpaid) advertising spokesperson endorsements or products or causes.

With the exception of endorsements in the form of paid commercials or public service announcements, which are uniformly positive, many effective endorsements combine elements of what's positive and negative about a particular product, service or idea and draw a conclusion only after providing facts that allow audience members to make their own judgment. Research suggests that presenting both sides of an argument (but not an overwhelming amount of negative information) can be very effective to persuade individuals with high levels of involvement in a topic or when a decision is important.

Presenting two sides of an argument can also enhance source credibility by allaying audience concerns that a particular speaker is merely a confederate of a sponsor with something to promote.

Displayed Counts of User Actions. As suggested here, audiences can be influenced by the *quality of arguments* presented in social media posts. However, users also can be influenced (biased) by the reported *counts* of other user's actions reported on many social media sites and websites – reports of the number of comments, shares and likes and other actions taken online. These are sometimes referred to as *vanity metrics* used by organizations to smugly assure themselves of their success.

Persuasion research suggests that people with low levels of involvement in a topic can use displayed counts as *heuristics* or cognitive shortcuts to assess or make judgments about the content of social media posts – and that heuristics can be highly persuasive. Indeed, people unwilling to exert effort routinely use rules-of-thumb to make judgments in their everyday lives. For example, many people are easily swayed to follow the majority's opinion. In the case of social media, if a post has a lot of shares, or comments or likes, many people would assume that the post must be popular or important or at least controversial. The count is *sufficient* to note – and there's no need to actually read the post.

Counts are an overlooked form of user-generated content that are indirectly generated when displayed by the social media and other digital promotion software programs. Counters commonly tabulate:

- **Comments** – the number of replies to an initial post
- **Shares** – the number of times an item is forwarded to others
- **Likes** – the number of positive responses to a post

Various other counters can be displayed to compile data for:

- **Votes** – preferences when presented two or more options in a poll of users
- **User actions** – actual orders placed, reservations made, downloads, etc.

Totals for comments and shares can be used by users as cursory indicators of a post's popularity or importance. Counters displaying ostensibly large or impressive numbers might prompt users to pay read the content more thoroughly. But users must then scan the comments to get a sense of the majority sentiment.

Totals for shares are more difficult to interpret because it not known whether the user favored or disfavored the content, or shared it for another completely unrelated reason.

Totals for votes or user actions probably more straightforward because they measure actual actions taken. However, votes can be deceptive because only the people who were motivated to act are counted. In a similar way, the number of purchases made can be difficult to interpret without knowing the potential number of purchasers: A very large number might be very minuscule on a percentage basis.

Likes are probably the most difficult to interpret among all displayed counts. Despite the fervor with which organization encourage users to “like” them on Facebook and other

social media sites, the meaning of a “like” is uncertain. Some marketers consider a like as a permission to talk to a prospective customer. However, evidence suggests that people hit a Like button for a myriad of reasons. Is it because they liked the *organization*? The featured *offer*? Some *element of the content*, such as a cool image? A *featured celebrity*? Or because another *friend* liked the post? Evidence also suggests that once a user “likes” a post, only a small proportion interacts with the original post again. Revisits are mostly by a small core of truly devoted followers or “superfans” who account for the vast majority of subsequent engagement activities.

An often unconsidered issue is how many links or social buttons to evaluate when evaluating the response to a social media message. Evidence suggests that users will click on only one option in a message – they will either seek information or engage in conversation via a link, or share a message with a friend, or a simply like it. Thus it’s important for social media strategies to make a choice. Similarly, engagement rates (likes, shares, comments, linked clicked) can vary widely by type of the type of organization.

Negative User Comments. Although social media can be the source of endorsements and bolster an organization’s reputation, the dark side of user-generated content is the prospect of people posting negative comments, whether true or not.

One of the reasons that people attribute tremendous credibility to social media is because participants can be candid. This lack of control is what also lends credibility to location-marketing apps and product review sites (and similar venues in traditional media). A *negative recommendation* from a dissatisfied customer actually can be quite valuable to a user who wants to avoid the mistakes made by others. Only, a single negative comment can easily be taken out of context – or might reflect an isolated incident. Users must learn to discern fact from fiction.

Negative comments also take the form of *rumors*, which are untrue or unsubstantiated claims leveled against an organization, product, service, personality or cause. Some rumors arise from speculation when verifiable information is not readily available. Other rumors are malicious efforts to malign an organization because of a grudge or dispute, or to gain a short-term competitive advantage (“dirty tricks”). Rapidly spreading rumors are frustrating and difficult for organizations to counter, but are a reality in today’s digital environment. Organizations generally need to be prepared to respond to unfounded rumors, but need to avoid over-reacting to isolated negative comments. Calling attention to the criticism often can generate more awareness than the original post.

Social Media/Online Community Management

The emergence of new digital promotion tools required various communications professionals to retool their skills to be effective in a new operating environment. Examples include advertisers, videographers, publications editors and publicists. In addition, a variety of new job categories have emerged, such as email specialist, webmaster, search engine marketer, and social media manager.

Social media manager is the generic term to describe communications specialists now assigned to create and coordinate an organization's presence on microblogs, blogs, social networking sites, forums and chats and wikis. Depending on the circumstances, social media managers might also be responsible for coordinating webinars and web conferences, games, online contests and promotions, and the organization's presence on virtual world sites.

Other titles for social media managers include *social media marketer* and (online) *community manager*. The latter moniker reflects the focus in social media on bringing together people with common interests whose participation can help advance the organization's mission or goals. Although most social media managers are full-time salaried employees, others are part-time or work for the organization on a contract basis.

Not surprisingly, social media are becoming an increasing important element in the digital promotion mix. Social media management is not a passing fad and is a serious endeavor that requires knowledge, insight and skill. Investments in social media activities are growing in the aggregate and in proportion to other promotional efforts because of the cost of staff, content development, software, and paid exposure. Similar to public relations, social media can be very time-intensive, with about 20% of staff time devoted to planning and 80% consumed by execution and assessment. This is the just the opposite of the mix associated with traditional advertising.

Organization of the Social Media Function: Centralization v. Decentralization

Centralized Units. Many smart organizations create a single *social media center* or unit that coordinates all social media activities of the organization and whose employees have skills in various social media as well as other areas of digital promotion and traditional communications. Social media specialists then work closely with other communications in units such as marketing, advertising, public relations and advancement or development (fundraising).

Written Social Media Policies

Most large organizations today have written social media policies. Such guidelines are especially important when an organization involves a large number of people in its social media activities. Social media policies typically address:

- Rationale for use, and role of social media in organization
- Authority for posting in the name of the organization.
- How to Identify organizational affiliation in all employees' personal social media activities
- Branding and style guidelines
- Accuracy, fairness, good taste
- Sensitivity to diversity concerns
- Non-disclosure of trade secrets or material investor information.
- Handling responses or queries from journalists, government officials or industry regulators
- Reporting extraordinary events
- Assistance available

Names given to these inter-disciplinary work centers include *social lounge*, *consumer engagement center*, *digital accelerator* and *social listening center*. Importantly, social media centers are usually separate from customer call centers (also known as consumer care centers) that are charged with handling individual customer concerns via email or calls on 800-numbers. The advantage of this centralized approach is the ability to coordinate all social media functions, across platforms and across organizational units.

Even more important, close collaboration enables social media personnel to build a brand or organizational persona so that the organization can speak with a single “voice”

Decentralized Units. Other organizations parse out social media management duties across individual operating regions, units and brands. Thus social media staffs can be separated by geography as well as time zones. This approach works best when an organization wants to pursue a multi-faceted approach -- such as a diversified package goods company that wants to maintain separate brand identities, court different segments, and/or focus on different social media. The result is sometimes a lack of coordination between units and inconsistencies in the knowledge and proficiency of units. However, as units experiment and then share their knowledge with colleagues across the organization, innovation is enhanced.

Similar to other marketing and promotion functions, some level of coordination is required in decentralized organizations. This might involve appointment of a senior social media manager with coordinating responsibility for the entire organization and whose duties include staff training and development. Many organizations use workshops, social events, blogs, newsletters, wikis, webinars and web conferences to encourage the sharing of ideas and experiences among social media staff members. They also encourage employees or members to participate by offering recognition and incentives. Another key tool is the having a set of written social media policies (see sidebar).

Common Duties of Social Media Managers

Four key functions are commonly performed by social media and staff:

- **Monitor mentions of the organization** across social media platforms to know what’s being said about the organization in real time.

In today’s fast-paced digital environment, organizations need to monitor activity 24/7/365 in order to identify opportunities or potential problems that merit a rapid response.

- **Plan and deploy savvy content** appropriate to the social media in which the organization chooses to participate.

Content creation involves producing original content, such as Twitter posts or replies to a blog. *Content acquisition* entails obtaining content from organizational sources that can be featured in social media – new ads, news releases, videos, new publications or reports. *Content curation* relies on repurposing digital assets previously posted by the organization or reposting or cross-posting items produced by others.

- **Speak for the organization** in conversations with community members who pose questions, lodge complaints, or post content.

Social media staff members are brand evangelists who also can serve as an important liaison or boundary spanner between an organization and social media participants. In so doing they also play a pivotal role in “personalizing” an

organization by putting a human “face” on the organization. Participants in an online community expect a reply or response, and the failure of the organization to acknowledge a comment (especially a question or complaint) suggests indifference.

- **Analyze social media activities and results** by identifying trends, potential opportunities or problems, and providing feedback to others in the organization.

Current comments by an organization’s online community are one of the best ways for organizations to take the pulse of the public, analyze public opinion, crowdsource ideas, and determine possible short-term actions. Social media staffers thus are one of the best possible positions to provide valuable market research and competitive intelligence and can serve as valuable “glue” that brings disparate functions together. In so doing, they can foster internal conversations, serve as customer/community advocates, and help resolve customer service issues.

What are the qualifications for the job?

A good social media manager or community manager must:

- Take initiative to become knowledgeable about the organization and its offerings, products or services
- Handle multiple tasks at once
- Understand what organizational content is relevant, trending and compelling to share
- Be an adept writer and content producer
- Demonstrate good listening skills.
- Possess an engaging “online” personality -- be outgoing and “conversational”
- Be tactful in dealing with difficult situations and or difficult people, especially when responding to customer service issues.
- Work independently and exercise good judgment
- Be a team player, work well with others
- Be flexible, adaptable and willing to experiment in when presented with uncertainty or ambiguity
- Be skillful in working with computer software
- Recognize the importance of analytics, think analytically, and become skillful in working with available numbers – raw scores, percentages and ratios.

Five Major Categories of Social Media Software

Social listening/social media monitoring software -- Compiles mentions of the organization or specified keyword across social media spaces. Examples: Radian6, Meltwater Buzz.

Social media engagement software – Allows responding to queries, engaging in conversations, and providing assistance across platforms on a single set of screens. Examples: Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Sprout Social.

Social marketing management software – Enables creating custom Facebook apps, launching promotions and managing creative assets posted on sites such as YouTube. Examples: Buddy Media, Marketo, Shoutlet, Short Stack.

Social analytics software – Measures effectiveness on specific platforms and of overall program Examples: Crowd Booster, Google Analytics.

Social influence software – Can help locate social media participants who are disproportionately interested in, passionate, or influential about a particular topic. Examples: Klout, Kred, Little Bird.

Notably, some community managers coordinate *offline* activities intended to solidify relationships with constituents – by coordinating meetings, conferences, happy hours and special events

Social Media Software

Social media managers need to understand how each of the social media platforms operates. In addition, they need to develop a command of one or more of the major social media management software programs now commonly used to manage the function. .

A dizzying array of special software program are now available that can serve as interfaces to manage social media activities. Some are incorporated within enterprise-level customer relationship management (CRM) systems used by larger businesses. Others are stand-alone programs that can be installed on local area networks or the desktop/laptop computers, tablets or mobile phones of staff members in medium-sized and small organizations. Some programs perform multiple functions across multiple platforms, while others offer limited functionality. In addition to installed programs, various services that operate on the Web that can help manage social media programs, such as Hootsuite. (See sidebar).

Other examples of Web-based programs include reputation management services that can help organizations track and respond to negative mentions. Examples include Profile Defenders, RemoveMyName, Reputation.com, and Brandify.

Analytics: Social media management is a data-driven activity, and virtually all social media software programs incorporate analytics to help social media managers understand trends and explain results. More than just about any digital promotion activity (except digital advertising) social media managers rely on data (raw counts, percentages, ratios) to help plan programs, monitor hour-to-hour activity, and evaluate results at the end of short-term projects, campaigns or longer-term programs.

Three general types of measures that apply to social media programs include:

- **Social media engagement measures** -- Likes, Shares, Comments, Retweets, Mentions, Favorites
- **Customer acquisition measures** -- Clickthroughs on hyperlinks embedded in social media, referrals recorded on website from social media
- **Increased brand awareness** -- Follower growth rates, Percentage Change Over Time in Followers, Twitter Sentiment, Reach by Region, Clicks by Region

Various other metrics apply to specific social media tools

Hootsuite: Versatile Social Media Software

For many smaller and medium-size businesses, the most valuable – and frequently used – software is Hootsuite, a Web-based service available for desktop/laptop computers. Hootsuite is also offers an app for tablets and mobile devices.



Hootsuite features an integrated dashboard that displays each of an organization's social media activities in separate columns -- and combines elements of several types of social media software programs.

Hootsuite enables social media managers to:

- Monitor user comments and respond to individual posts
- Schedule and manage social media engagement activities
- Facilitate collaboration by assigning messages, creating workflows and streamlining communications among organizational collaborators and clients
- Compile data and analytics reports
- Ensure data security for social media assets

The basic Free plan is available to individuals and allows managing 3 media social profiles and provides simple reports. The Pro plan for small to medium-size businesses allows managing up to 50 social profiles for a modest flat fee. Various optional enhancements are available on an a-la-carte, fee-for-service basis. The Enterprise plan for corporations, governments and other large organizations provides tracking an unlimited number of social profiles and provides numerous advanced features and full customer service support for a flat negotiated fee.

Promoting Social Media Use

Similar to other digital promotion tools, organizations should deploy social media in order to attain specified organizational goals (Chapter 1). However, some promotional campaigns have as their stated purposing enhancing the organization's presence in social media. Such efforts are actually communication objectives because they only contribute to attaining organizational outcomes.

Among the overarching communication objectives commonly related to social media use are: 1) to encourage user participation, 2) enhance the robustness of user interactions, including conversations, and 3) increase or maintain user satisfaction (which leads to continued exposure and participation).

Some specific outcomes important to making social media programs successful might include:

- Add new followers or members
- Increase the number of user posts
- Enhance the quality of user posts
- Leverage users' contacts with family and friends to extend the organization's reach
- Heighten levels of user engagement.

Importantly, increasing the numbers of comments, shares or likes serve as useful *metrics* for measuring these or other outcomes. However, they should not, in themselves, be the stated purpose for promoting social media usage.

The Elusive Idea of Engagement

Of all the ideas associated with social media and digital promotion none is more difficult to define than "engagement." For many practitioners, engagement simply represents the actions taken when users encounter social media or other digital media – as represented in likes, comments, shares and links clicked. To act is to engage.

For others, engagement is a more complex psychological concept that involves the degree to which a person thinks about, becomes knowledgeable, develops an affinity, forms positive attitudes, cares about, identifies, or spends time with an organization, product, service or cause. For them, simple online responses can thus imply greater meaning – but it is easy to be fooled by projecting more into the meaning of these numbers than what they actually say.

SIDEBAR

Timing Social Media Activities

Similar to publicists who must learn the conventions and work routines of the news media in order to improve their chances of obtaining exposure, social media managers need to be concerned with optimizing their chances of generating responses from online audiences.

Not all social media operate the same in same way. The accompanying table summarizes the ideal length of posts, and best days and best/worst times to post items in order to obtain maximum exposure. These guidelines are based on a consensus of experts across a wide variety of situations. The best results will vary by topic and audience. Use these guidelines as a starting point in planning social media activities.

Gaining Optimal Social Media Exposure: Some Guidelines

Social Media Platform	Ideal Length of Post	Best Day(s) to Post	Best Time (s) to Post	Worst Time(s) to Post
Twitter	Text: 70-100 characters Max: 140 characters Hashtags: 6 characters	Monday-Thursday Peak: Thursday; Weekends	1-3 p.m. followed by 9 a.m.-1 p.m.	8-9 a.m. Friday after 3 p.m. Daily After 8 p.m.
Blog Posts	Text: 300-800 words Max: None Headlines: 6 words	Monday-Friday	10 a.m.-5 p.m. Peak: 11 a.m.	11 p.m.-8 a.m..
Podcasts	22 minutes	None	None	None
Facebook Post	40 characters Max: 500 words	Weekdays: Wednesday-Thursday Peak	6-8 a.m., 2-5 p.m.	8 p.m.-8 a.m.; Weekends
LinkedIn Updates	25 words	Tuesday-Thursday	7-9 a.m.; 5-6 p.m.	10 p.m.-6 a.m.; Weekdays working work
Pinterest	100-200 characters Max: 500 words	Saturday	2-4 p.m. 8-p.m.-1a.m.	5-7 p.m.
Instagram	Image size: 640x640 pixels	Thursdays and Sundays most popular	Photos: None; Videos: 2-3 p.m and Evenings	
Google+	60 characters	Tuesday-Wednesday	9-11 a.m.	6 p.m.-8 a.m.; Weekends
Tumblr		Sunday-Tuesday; Friday	7-10 p.m.	12 a.m.-12 p.m.
YouTube	3 minutes Max: Generally 15 minutes	Thursday-Saturday	Weekdays 12-3 p.m.; Saturdays 9-11 a.m.	1-7 a.m.

Several social media attain *higher interaction* rates for posts distributed on weekends or evenings (blogs, Twitter, Facebook Posts, Instagram), even though the *exposure* is somewhat lower. Times shown do not necessarily apply to personal posts on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram by younger audiences, such as college students who share with friends late at night.

The ideal time to distribute email is Tuesday-Friday, 8-5 p.m. (Peak: 11 a.m.). Bulk text messages are best distributed Tuesday-Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Avoid sending bulk text messages during the morning and evening rush hours (unless urgent) because cell phone users who might be commuting,

SIDEBAR Types of Social Media Users – A Comparison of Two Models

What the common *personas* or personality profiles of social media users? Two consulting firms have proposed separate typologies of characteristics of social media users. The social media lifestyles or patterns identified are somewhat similar but not exactly alike. The two models provide bases for segmenting and better understanding social media users—and suggest their preferences and pattern of use vary.

<p>Forrester Research (2006-2010) Social Technographics Ladder</p> <p>Creators Create social media content for the world to see. Publish blog posts or web pages, upload videos/images/audio and share content online.</p> <p>Conversationalists Update their status and participate in quick conversations on Twitter and Facebook at least weekly.</p> <p>Critics Respond to content posted by others. Post ratings and reviews of products and services, comment on blogs and forums and contribute to wikis.</p> <p>Collectors Organize content for themselves or others using RSS feeds, social bookmarking, and photo or page tagging.</p> <p>Joiners Participate in social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter and maintain multiple profiles.</p> <p>Spectators Reads blogs, view user-generated videos (ex: YouTube), follow online forums, listen to podcasts and frequently search for user reviews and rating. The most common personality type.</p> <p>Inactives Goes online does do not participate in any form of social media. Doesn't post nor read user-generated content. Becoming rarer as more websites integrate elements of social media into their website.</p> <p>Bernoff, Josh (2010). Social technographics: Conversationalists get onto the ladder. http://forrester.typepad.com/groundswell/2010/01/conversationalists-get-onto-the-ladder.html</p>	<p>Aimia (2012)</p> <p>Sparks Embrace social media for self-expression. Work to control the online conversation but boast the most open social networks. Engage with brands frequently and are enthusiastic ambassadors for their favorites.</p> <p>Cliquers Active, single-network users, primarily on Facebook. Likely to be women who share photos, status updates, and comments. Active and influential within their small network of close friends and family.</p> <p>Mix-n-Minglers Participate actively on multiple social networking platforms. Follow brands to receive offers and the latest brand news. Meet many of their friends online and are influential in their networks.</p> <p>Newcomers Typically passive users of a single social media network. Reluctantly join Facebook in order not to feel "left behind." Use social media to enhance online relationships.</p> <p>Onlookers Lurk on several social media networks, but post infrequently. Rely on social media primarily to keep with on the online lives of others. Reluctant to share details about themselves. Want complete control of their online information.</p> <p>No Shows Haven't logged on to a social network in the last 30 days. Typically 65-plus males who exhibit low degrees of trust and have no interest in broadcasting their activities or interests to anyone. Aimia (2012). Starting at the sun: Identifying, understanding and influencing social media users. http://www.pamorama.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Aimia-Social-Media-White-Paper-6-types-of-social-media-users.pdf</p>
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