

# How Social Media Will Impact Marketing Media

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## INTRODUCTION

The world is changing; technology is ubiquitous and it is impacting society with each rapid change it undergoes itself. A few decades ago, television was the most exciting technological development, and it transformed society in an unprecedented manner. Today, we're seeing a similar transformation via the Internet and the rise of social media. In fact, social media is poised to transform society in an even more fundamental manner.

It is easy to underestimate the true disruptive potential of social media, a moving target which is hard to pin down due to constant innovation. For example, as a consequence of the widespread adoption of social media, the distinction between the public and private spheres of life is quickly eroding. Whether one is a CEO, the president of a country, a member of the British royalty, or a commoner, everything about one is on social media: personal information, likes and dislikes, and other mundane activities. In fact, everything said or done is now a matter of public record, and nothing can remain

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hidden anymore. Besides the doom and gloom surrounding social media because of this lack of privacy, however, there is a bright side as well: social media has led to a drastic increase in transparency in society.

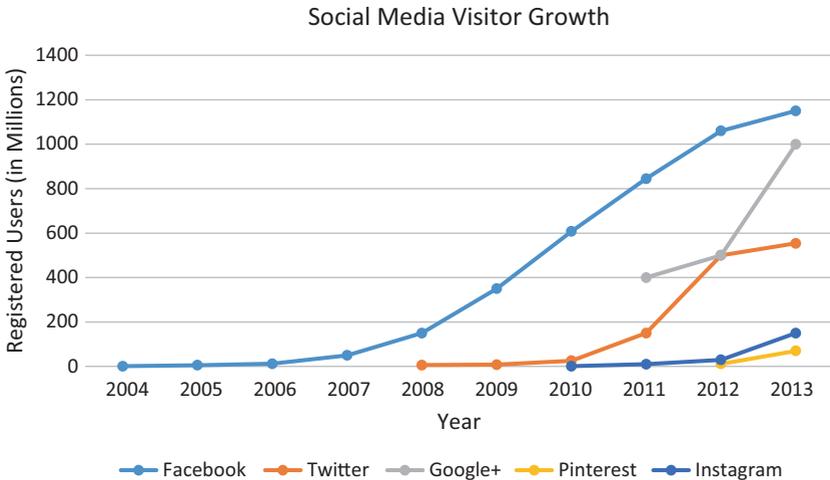
The focus of this paper is on the impact of social media on marketing media. Traditional media, consisting of print, radio and television, offer what can be called a shotgun approach: they represent one to many (passive communication). Therefore, in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies are utilized. Social media, on the other hand, are interactive in nature: they represent peer to peer relationships, or what is referred to as many to many (active communication). Additionally, since word of mouth (WOM) is so crucial in marketing, the paper will also discuss how traditional WOM influence will change dramatically in the world of social media.

## SOCIAL MEDIA: PLATFORMS AND USE

Social media is a blur of “likes,” tweets, shares, posts and content (Bullas, 2014). Its use is not limited to youth. Rather, it is universal and embedded in every corner of the web. The numbers are staggering: 72 percent of the all Internet users are now active on social media (Bullas, 2014). Eighty-nine percent of people eighteen to twenty-nine years of age use social media. Eighty-two percent of people thirty to forty-nine years of age are active on social media. Sixty-five percent of those fifty to sixty-four years of age use social media, while, of those over sixty-five years of age, 49 percent are active users (Pew Research, 2014). It is clear that regardless of their age, people are now spending a lot of time on social media, constantly sharing and browsing information.

When it comes to geography, it is US citizens who top the list of time spent on social media with sixteen minutes per hour spent on the Internet. Australians follow them with fourteen minutes and Britons with thirteen minutes (Experian, 2013). The use of mobile technology to access social media is also increasing rapidly, with 71 percent of the users of social media using mobile devices to access it (Bullas, 2014) (Fig. 1.1).

Currently, Facebook is the “biggest kid” on the social media block, with 1.49 billion Facebook users (Statista, 2015) and more than 100,000 web pages are accessed with the Login with Facebook feature (Lafferty, 2014). Twenty-three percent of Facebook users login at least five times a day (Romeri, 2014). Facebook also has a lot of influence on the buying decisions of customers, as 47 percent of Americans say that Facebook is the number-one influencer of their purchasing habits (Romeri, 2014).



**Fig. 1.1** The growth of social media (Data source: [www.jeffbullas.com](http://www.jeffbullas.com))

Since Facebook has so much influence on people, it isn't surprising that 94 percent of business-to-consumer (B2C) marketers and 82 percent of business-to-business (B2B) marketers today use Facebook for customer acquisition (Stelzner, 2014).

But Facebook isn't the only large player in the social media space, as there are a number of other platforms that are quickly amassing users. For instance, Twitter, which took the social media world by storm with its 140-character limit, now has almost a billion registered users (Koetsier, 2013) and 316 million monthly active users (Twitter, 2015). As is the case with Facebook, where people spend their time, marketers are soon to follow, and 34 percent of marketers use Twitter to generate leads (Bullas, 2014).

Other popular social media platforms include WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vine, Tumblr, and SlideShare. With their impressive user base, these platforms are also gaining more and more attention from marketers.

## WORD OF MOUTH (WOM) VERSUS SOCIAL MEDIA WOM

What follows is a discussion of the WOM phenomenon in both its traditional context and on social media. Specifically, the emergence of WOM, its impact on marketing, and other characteristics are considered in both contexts (Table 1.1).

### *Emergence of WOM*

The origin of WOM communication can be traced to the origin of trade itself. It was most powerful in the agricultural age, when the producer and consumer interacted closely. The milkman who delivered milk to one's home, the butcher who delivered fresh meat daily, and the grocery store delivery person knew everything about their consumer families and their preferences.

The services they provided were characterized by much more than a mere transaction of goods. Family customers confided in these goods and services providers, who knew the family dynamics, and were even privy to the family's finances. In fact, the grocery storeowner often acted as a money lender to the family if they didn't have money to pay for the groceries at the end of the month. This financing service would be underwritten in the "good name" of the family, something akin to the modern credit score. This was a multigenerational relationship, with the children continuing to avail themselves of such services and even taking up unpaid family debts.

With the dawn of the industrial age, however, came the separation of production from consumption, and the rise of middlemen and trading. As a result, the economy became more transactional as opposed to relational, as it had been in the past (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

Counterintuitively, social media is bringing us back to that bygone agricultural age. In those days conversations were "recorded" by the barber and hairstylist who knew more about anything and anyone in the community. People discussed politics and their religious beliefs at the local diner where everybody got together. It was here that they discussed com-

**Table 1.1** Characteristics of traditional WOM vs. social media WOM

<i>Traditional WOM</i>	<i>Social media WOM</i>
Local	Global
Voice	Text and video
Gated community	Viral
Trickle down	Circular
(Opinion leadership)	(Network effect)
Passive recipient	Interactive recipient
Marketer in charge (targeting)	Recipient in charge (shot gun)
Episodic feedback	Continuous feedback
Brand Stewardship	Brand alteration
Measurable impact	Diffused impact

munity events and what was happening in their lives as well. With the rise of social media, we are back to recording conversations today, albeit digitally, and this time it is more tangible and permanent as (almost) nothing is erased from the web.

### *WOM Marketing: The Holy Grail of Marketing*

The explosion of social media services over the last few years continues to have a significant impact on advertising, as consumers' reliance on word of mouth (WOM) in the decision-making process—either from people they know or online consumers they don't—has increased significantly.

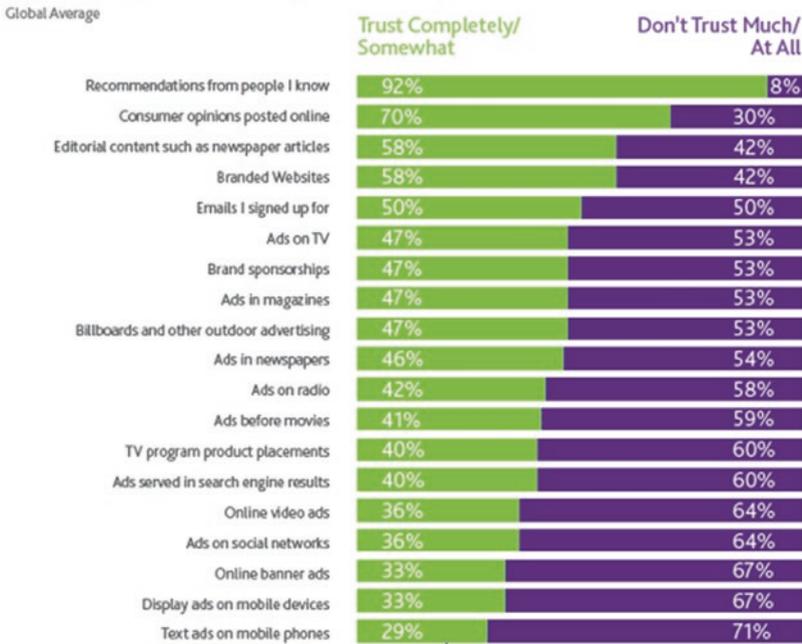
According to Nielsen's *Global Trust in Advertising* report issued in 2012, 92 percent of consumers around the world say they still trust earned media, such as recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising—an increase of 18 percent since 2007 (Grimes, 2012). Online consumer reviews are the second most trusted source of brand information and messaging, with 70 percent of global consumers surveyed online indicating they trust messages on this platform—an increase of 15 percent in four years (Grimes, 2012) (Fig. 1.2).

Today, we can gauge a significant increase in the impact of WOM on social media. Now, let us turn to an overview of the WOM phenomenon in the traditional context as well as on social media.

Traditional media refers to conventional means of mass communication, such as street theatre, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, the tabloid press, and other print publications. Traditional WOM is limited to a local impact. This form of publicity takes place on an ongoing basis when people attend to their daily chores. For example, it is at a park, salon, or supermarket that people are most likely to have conversations about their experiences with, and expectations of, any product or services. Publicity here, whether good or bad, is limited to particular communities that are formed at particular places.

Hence WOM is local and lies within a “gated” community of neighbors. The medium is primarily voice, where one's experience is referred to by every other member within the community. There is a trickle-down effect of one opinion to several recipients (i.e., a one-to-many relationship). A key influencer will influence every other recipient here. Thus, WOM here is driven by a single opinion maker, with the rest being passive

To what extent do you trust the following forms of advertising?



Source: Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey, Q3 2011

Fig. 1.2 Consumer trust in advertising

recipients of it. This is reflected by the theory of diffusion whereby a handful of opinion makers in a community influence the masses.

*Who Is in Charge?*

To generate WOM publicity via traditional media, the marketer is in charge of targeting the right audience with the right message about the company and/or its products and services. The feedback in this case is, thus, episodic in nature, where market research is primarily done periodically (for example, a particular Neilson Corporation dataset).

The brand is very closely managed in this case. Marketers are extremely particular about their trademarks and logos so that brand perception is consistent and remains intact in everyone’s mind. Moreover, the impact of WOM is easily measurable in this case.

### *WOM on Social Media*

With the growing number of smartphone users and access to the Internet, social networking services have also become increasingly accessible and user friendly. People talk to each other, people make recommendations, and people make suggestions on social media with ease. The global reach and flexibility of social media is indisputable. One can share not only text but also photographs, rich content such as videos and graphics interchange format (GIF) files, and connect with the masses in a very short period of time. WOM on social media is not just restricted to a particular community; it has the possibility of going “viral”: it travels all over the world, where neither the sender nor the receiver is necessarily well acquainted with one another or within close proximity.

Social media is highly interactive in nature. In fact, the larger the number of interactive recipients, the larger the number of opinions. Here one sees a network of influencers—a many-to-many, peer-to-peer relationship (as opposed to a one-to-many relationship in the case of traditional WOM). If one communicates with another, the other, in turn, is both influenced and influences the sender; there is no opinion leader or laggard. Thus, WOM in social media is circular in nature and effectively builds a network effect. Networks of different opinions are formed, giving the recipients a better picture of the brand.

#### *Who Is in Charge?*

Unlike traditional WOM, the recipients are in charge of generating WOM on social media. The marketers need not identify the target demographic and then communicate or design the product accordingly. Rather, they can simply devise the product and “throw” it, or disseminate it widely on the web. Somebody will buy it, but the marketer will not have a pre-existing idea of who the customer or user of the product or services will be. Consequently, the traditional concept of market segmentation, targeting, and positioning is obsolete here.

A promotional campaign for products or services on social media covers as wide an area or population as possible (i.e., a shotgun approach). Then, it is up to the recipients to initiate, build and hold conversations about them on social media. The conversations are not limited to a certain group of people for a certain time period. Rather, they are open for anyone to react to, give feedback and modify. This means the marketer must

constantly react to the feedback on social media. Thus, we have a continuous feedback cycle.

People also express themselves through their possessions (Belk, 1988). In the digital world, one can create one's own avatar and collect digital possessions (such as trophies on Sony's PlayStation network) and, thus, there is no need to acquire physical objects in order to derive happiness or enjoyment (Sheth & Solomon, 2014). Virtual communities such as Farmville have formed online, and about eight million people log in to it daily—one rushes to milk one's cow in time (Sarkar, 2013). That is the nature of the virtual world, where the concept of kinship is almost extinct. People no longer meet their family or neighbors in person. Rather, people are moving toward virtual friendships on social media. The telephone had a similar disruptive effect in the past: one could call one's neighbour over the phone, and talk to one's friends and relatives across the country. The telephone thus displaced conversations in person due to its sheer convenience.

Social media is likely to give rise to brand alteration. Consumers can take liberties with a brand and the company will have a hard time enforcing its intellectual property rights. In the worst-case scenario, there is a possibility of the brand alteration going out of control. This, in turn, would have an impact on marketing, advertising agencies and brand management in general. This impact will be nonlinear by nature and diffused, and, thus, may not be easily measured. And this, in turn, could create anxiety among the marketers. What we have, essentially, is a black box scenario. This is the nature of the diffused impact of WOM on social media.

## THE FUTURE OF MARKETING MEDIA

Marketing media has seen two shifts due to the rise of social media. First, from mass communication (one-to-many) relationships, marketing media has shifted toward the more apt and convenient social media (peer-to-peer network) relationships. Second, traditional media is passive whether print, voice or video, while social media is more interactive. Traditional media is firmly situated in the one-to-many paradigm: It follows the broadcasting model, whereby it transmits the message it wants to convey through broadcast television, print, radio, or signage. Traditional media is thus limited in creating engagement as social media does (Fig. 1.3).

With the shift to the more interactive social media, marketers are now adopting digital marketing tools to market their products and services

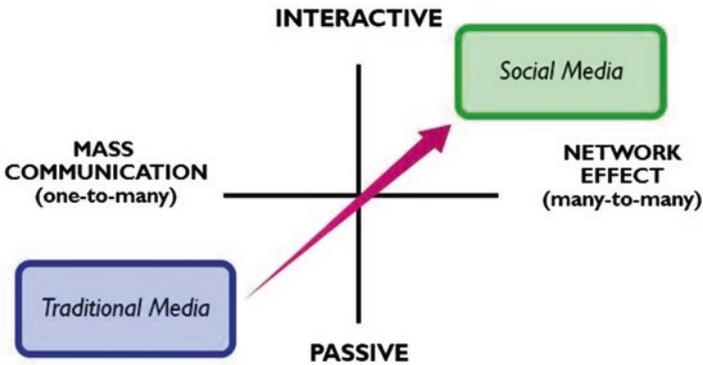


Fig. 1.3 The future of marketing media

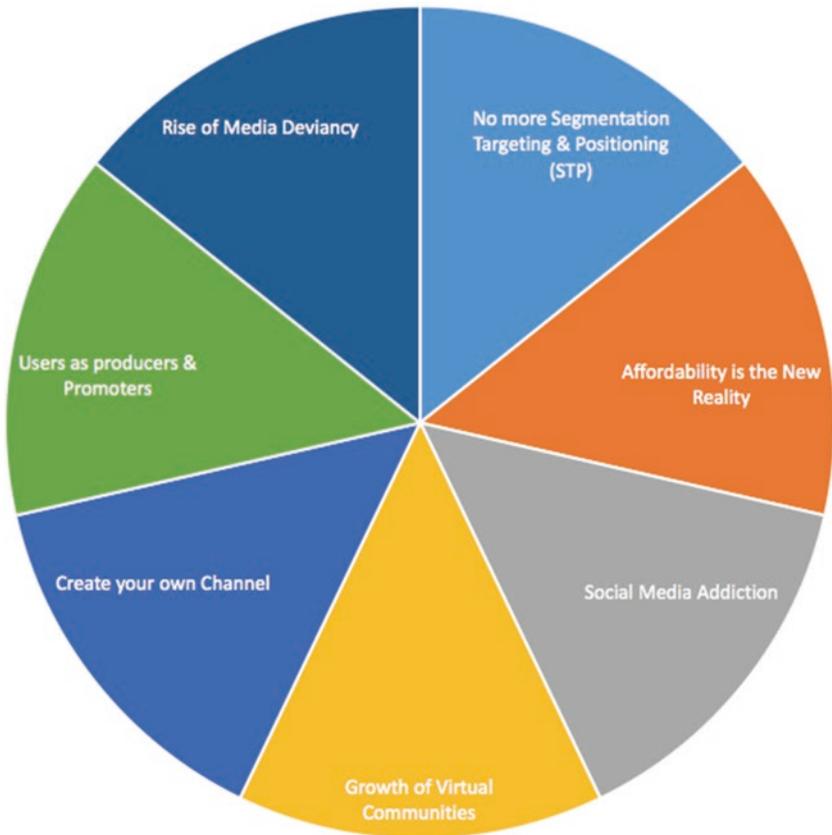
anytime, anywhere and anyhow. Where traditional marketing was limited by location and time, digital marketing has effectively removed these hindrances to present itself as a hassle-free marketing tool.

### IMPACT ON MARKETING

As explained above, marketing has been deeply impacted by the advent and widespread adoption of social media. Social media is no longer merely a platform for social interactions. Rather, it is transforming the way businesses work. Marketers are increasingly leveraging social media to influence customer decision making. Some of the specific instances of the impact on marketing are shown in Fig. 1.4. What follows is an elaboration of each of these areas of impact:

#### *No More Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP)*

One of the most important concepts in marketing is segmentation, targeting and positioning (STP) for any product/brand. Together, these enable a marketer to (a) determine the different types of customers, (b) select one of the group of customers that can be served best, and (c) communicate with the targeted group in the best possible manner. Hence it is a “sniper” approach because a “shotgun” approach can prove far too expensive and inefficient when marketing via traditional media.



**Fig. 1.4** Impact of social media on marketing

In the digital age, however, a product/brand has a worldwide reach. The Internet is also a very rich and affordable medium. Therefore, the aforementioned factors do not play as much of a role as they did in the past. Thus, traditional marketing is now being replaced by the more cost-effective and result-oriented digital marketing.

Accordingly, the question arises of whether STP will still hold ground or will lose importance in a world where market players are able to communicate the details of their products and also sell their products across demographic or geographic boundaries. Many e-commerce companies, including Amazon and Ali Baba, have amply demonstrated this.

The idea of a “relevant” target market is somewhat obsolete. For example, Apple iPads are used by everyone—from a five-year-old in the United States to a sixty-year-old woman in India. Hence, following the traditional STP tool for marketing might not be beneficial to the next generation of companies.

### *Affordability Is the New Reality*

Social media has also disrupted the paradigm of production and the cost of distribution. In the realm of entertainment, or filmmaking, to be specific, a person today is not as dependent on a producer or a director anymore. A good storyteller is now capable of producing and directing a film of reasonable quality in a quick span of just two to three months, enabled by the hardware and software platforms of Apple and Sony, both of which have been highly affordable and produce good quality digital films. Similarly, in the realm of book publishing, we find that authors today are increasingly choosing to self-publish. A small company can scale up its marketing and offer products and services globally. The Internet is both a rich medium and one that has global reach.

### *Social Media Addiction*

Social media addiction (SMA) refers to a state of mind in which people feel the constant urge to keep track of their social media existence. Though it is not yet recognized as such, this might very well be seen as a mental disorder characterized by a compulsion to constantly check for social media updates, or even “stalk” other people’s profiles, among other things. Any kind of addiction is likely to be harmful to a person’s mind and body. Researchers at the University of Chicago have recently concluded that SMA can be stronger than an addiction to cigarettes or even alcohol, following an experiment in which they recorded the cravings of several hundred people for several weeks (Wilhelm, Vohs & Baumeister, 2012).

SMA is becoming so common that it is having an impact on social demographics: families are struggling with maintaining relationships as a lot of time is consumed by their “social” lives. Companies are now targeting consumers with “app-only” strategies and are cashing in on the idea that since smartphones are constantly being checked by users, this can be converted into revenue. In order to fight this addiction experts generally advise consumers to limit the number of apps on their phones, and parents

to keep a check on their children's smartphone use. The "real estate" on the smartphone has a premium just as retail store goods do.

Some people, however, run counter to this trend. They make the point that despite the fact that people are not interacting face-to-face, social media still remains a platform that facilitates widespread human interaction, which is normal and shouldn't be termed an addiction. Whatever one's view on the matter, social media is indisputably a very addictive medium. Addiction of the mind is very different from addiction to, or consumption of, physical objects. We have acquired knowledge about reducing addiction to consumables such as alcohol and tobacco, but we still need to learn how to effectively control the addiction of "mental consumption" that social media brings about. Digital detoxification and digital rehabilitation might very well be matters of real concern for the future generations.

### *The Growth of Virtual Communities*

A rise of virtual communities can also be observed across the digital world. A virtual community is a social network of individuals who interact through a specific social medium on topics of mutual interest, potentially crossing geographical boundaries. Society has been observing a gradual shift from kinship bonding to friendship bonding. The virtual communities' activities range from forming friendships, learning new subjects, and obtaining opinions on purchases to human experience in general.

Earlier, people had a very limited audience to help them answer their queries, but today the audience is unlimited; anyone can find someone to help solve an issue. People are no longer connected by the proverbial six degrees of separation. Reaching someone by name and location has been reduced to just one or two degrees of separation. Companies are leveraging this opportunity to target audiences. For example, there was a time in India when marriages were arranged with the help of relatives and one's immediate social circle, but today, matrimonial websites are giving families an opportunity to expand their social circle and yet stay within the boundaries of religion, caste, and creed, criteria that continue to dominate the Indian marriage market.

In China, *wang hun*, or online marriage, is a phenomenon in which people become friends online, then become online lovers, and, finally, have an online wedding without meeting in person. This concept is challenging the sanctity of marriage in society, something that has serious con-

sequences for the wedding business. In the long run, more and more people might prefer this type of arrangement over the real experience of a physical wedding, due to sheer convenience.

There are thriving virtual communities such as Second Life and Farmville, which let users access a virtual life satisfying real human emotions and desires. Professional executives have been known to rush home to milk their virtual cows in time on Farmville. These virtual communities satisfy human emotions to the extent that people are gradually shifting to an atomistic or autonomous lifestyle from the earlier nuclear (family of four) lifestyle. This atomistic lifestyle is mostly followed by people with a self-serving and self-sustaining mindset. Whether this phenomenon creates new opportunity for marketers is yet to evolve. Also, we don't know if a highly atomistic lifestyle makes one prone to impulse buying and consumption.

### *Create Your Own Channel*

With the growth and nearly universal availability of high bandwidth, broadband Internet connectivity and other growing technological and communications infrastructures, all individuals today are empowered to put their message out to a larger audience. In fact, individuals have the ability to create their own media channel rather than depend on traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and television to transmit their message. They have the ability to take control of the entire process of production and dissemination. Over the years, we have seen the rise of bloggers, "Twitterati" and other social influencers who have emerged as celebrities in their own right. YouTube has clearly demonstrated this. It is very easy to create and manage one's own YouTube channel, as is evident by the presence on YouTube of celebrities, athletes, religious leaders, such as Pope Francis, and political leaders, such as US President Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This democratization of media has also enabled citizen activism. On January 25, 2011, Egyptians started organizing protests against their government and their long-standing leader, President Hosni Mubarak, through Facebook and Twitter. On a global level, not only has media been democratized by the advent of social media but, conversely, social media is also being used as a tool for democratization. Be it Filipinos' demonstrations against their President Joseph Estrada in 2001 or the Jan Lokpal Bill struggle in India, social media is helping change the political scenario

worldwide. It has the potential to encourage public policy intervention, as demonstrated by the Maggi quality issues in India and the recent Volkswagen scandal over fuel efficiency.

This has been made possible due to the easy accessibility of a platform where people can raise their voice in unity. There was a time when people used to wait for the morning newspaper to know what was happening in the world, but today, in an instant, YouTube videos, infinite tweets and Facebook updates start “trending” way before the news even makes its way to the newspaper editor’s desk.

### *Users as Producers and Promoters*

Cocreation is a very simple idea: it brings together independent parties, such as a company and its consumers, in order to jointly produce a valued product. For example, Nike provides online tools to customers to design their own sneakers. Cocreation is not just limited to product design; it expands to the creation of marketing campaigns as well. Recently, Converse persuaded a large number of loyal customers to come up with their own video advertisements for the brand. Also, Frito-Lay has successfully crowd-sourced from consumers for their Dorritos brand advertising at the Super Bowl. To accomplish such cocreation, companies try to tap consumer insights at the right point in the innovation process.

Cocreation enables brands to leverage consumers’ participation in activities that they undertake, for free, to promote as well as produce, and yet the product ownership remains intact. Brands have also started engaging consumers in brand promotions. It isn’t a one-sided communication anymore: the consumer has become a part of content creation and brand promotion, similar to the functions provided by advertising agencies. The voice of the customer today is being recognized, appreciated, and leveraged by brands to deliver better products and services, and to promote them.

### *Rise of Media Deviancy*

While social media has placed much power in the hands of users for positive purposes, such as social activism and fandom, it also has also given rise to media deviancy. Every technology has its pros and cons, and social media is no different. When there is too much freedom, as there is on the Internet, security is at risk, especially when there is no one to manage it.

Government and lawmakers have been late adopters of technology and the legal system is slow to adapt to the new technological environment. All this makes the system and its consumers more vulnerable to risk. For instance, recently, multiple cases of fraud and crime have erupted out of social media, making social media more ‘social devil’.

## CONCLUSION

The rise and widespread adoption of social media has changed society dramatically. In just a few years, social media has gone from being a platform for young people to connect with each other to being the lifeline of Internet users. Because of its pervasiveness in society, social media has also affected the way marketers connect with consumers and, in turn, the way consumers connect with brands and products. In fact, social media is a much more powerful force than radio and television. Marketers must learn to swim in these uncharted waters and be sure of how to reach the shore.

Social media will have an enormous impact on shaping the future of consumption culture. While social media benefits society in a number of ways, not all of the transformation it has brought about has been positive. In many ways, it is a double-edged sword, providing both positive value and negative repercussions for society. Social media addiction and deviancy are real issues, which should be addressed.

Marketers should be cognizant of the fact that social media allows users to alter a brand. Marketers must not only respond but also proactively shape social media to be a positive force for society. In sum, marketing media will be permanently transformed by social media.

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