

# The rise of social media

[Media](#), [Social Media](#)



“ Man is a social animal”, goes the popular adage. Interaction with fellow beings is a vital part of being human. Community makes us feel complete through exchange of ideas and knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that we constantly try to find better and faster means of communication and information sharing. Our relentless efforts in these areas have led to a phenomenon whose far reaching impacts make it nothing short of a global revolution. That phenomenon is the rise of Social Media.

If the internet gave birth to a revolution in the way we stored and sought information, then social media has brought about a revolution in the way we exchange and use information. “ Social Media” is a term that is relatively young of age. It’s definition on “ Wikipedia”, which ironically is also one of its most glorious examples, reads - “ media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques”.

Examples of social media include weblogs, social networking sites such as Facebook and My Space, information sharing platforms such as Wikipedia or Twitter, and media sharing platforms such as YouTube. Before the explosion of social media, dissemination of information on a large scale was majorly restricted to “ mass media” such as internet websites, newspapers, television and radio. Broadcasting information using these channels required at least some level of technical or professional expertise.

Over the past few years however, development of web technologies that simplify mass collaboration has revolutionised the way content is produced and shared. Now anyone with a computer (or a mobile phone) and internet access has the ability to almost effortlessly share information across the

globe and make their views heard, right from their homes, without the need to have significant resources or technical skills at their disposal. The rise of social media has had a tremendous influence on the way I and billions around the world think, communicate, learn and behave as we take on different roles during a normal day.

Some of those roles being “ the social animal” , “ the global citizen”, “ the consumer”, “ the student”, “ the activist”, “ the professional” and “ the common man”. Me the social animal Looking back though, a lot of the social media platforms didn’t exactly start off doing what they do today. Sites such as Facebook or MySpace started off with a simple objective of allowing people to keep in touch with near and dear ones. My first experience with such a medium was through a networking site called “ Hi5”, as a means to keep in touch with friends.

Twitter started off as a simple web equivalent of text messaging. In those nascent stages these platforms allowed people to socialise and to be entertained, hence serving the social animal in all of us. However, radical changes in these mediums over the last few years have forever changed my perception of their usage and potential. Me, the global citizen Perhaps the most significant change these platforms have enabled is to level the playing field. No longer do I need to be a media celebrity or a seasoned journalist to make my views heard.

Mediums such as blogs and twitter give everyone a chance to stand up and be counted. What this has done is to make the world of information sharing truly democratic. The impact of this development has made those in high up places acknowledge the power these mediums hold. When US president

Barack Obama was inaugurated into presidency in January 2009, CNN and the Whitehouse collaborated on Facebook to stream the broadcast to a worldwide audience. I remember getting the Goosebumps while watching the stream that generated 600, 000 messages.

All those messages flashing endlessly on my screen brought about the feeling that I was a part of a global debate. The Obama administration extensively used twitter to reach out to people all around the world. What this has done is to change my perception of how election campaigns or political debates can be carried out. Over time I feel more and more leaders worldwide will need to embrace such mediums if they really wish to have a global outreach. Me the activist Social media has also changed the way we can promote social causes.

A great example of this is of “ Earthour. org” in 2009, when Facebook and YouTube were extensively used to co-ordinate a worldwide movement that encouraged people to turn off their electrical appliances for one hour to promote awareness about climate change. This remarkable concept managed to mobilize people from more than 4000 cities all around the world. The event which enabled people in any part of the world to come together and be a part of a global cause has radically changed my view of how global movements can be initiated.

All one has to do is to choose a cause and they will have multiple mediums at their disposal to spread the message. Me the consumer In the commercial space, Social media marketing has grown leaps and bounds. Dell attributed \$6. 5 million worth of sales to twitter in 2009. What has made corporations adopt such mediums so readily is the opportunity to reach directly to me,

their consumer. What's significant is that now instead of being a spectator; I can also provide my feedback, suggestions or grievances about a product directly to the people that make it, instantly.

Not only does this empower me as a consumer, it also provides corporations a very effective medium of targeting the right demographic and audience, optimising their production and efficiency in the process. Me the student Since its very inception, Social Media has held tremendous potential in knowledge sharing. As the world gets smaller and smaller, more and more students look to study in universities across the globe. This makes it critical that the institution reaches out to me, the student; to provide the right information at the right time.

Going beyond the normal website, phone and email, more and more institutions are establishing an online presence on sites such as Facebook that allow them to reach out to a highly active and driven audience. Taking Oxford itself as an example, Said Business School's Facebook page allows potential students to directly interact with representatives from the institution and also see what other students have already discussed. Not only does this simplify communication, it also reduces overheads of redundant emails or phone calls. Social media also provides a global platform for talented individuals to share their skills and knowledge.

A great example of this is YouTube. I had always had a keen interest in learning to play the guitar. However, a hectic work schedule and high costs of a private teacher meant that private schedule bound lessons were not a viable option. Instead, I started using the numerous video lessons available on YouTube put up by talented musicians with a view to sharing passions.

This is nothing short of a learning revolution as it gives anyone the chance to take lessons on anything from cooking to advanced maths free of cost, at a time and place that suits them the best, with option to play and pause as much as they like.

Me the Professional Professionally, social media has had a tremendous impact on the way I work. A few years back when Wikipedia came up, I and a few colleagues were hugely impressed with how it took collaboration to a whole new level. Inspired by the concept, we started experimenting with our own internal Wiki-based organisation wide information sharing platform that would promote collaboration between employees across different teams.

Upon its completion, it provided an easy to use medium for our associates to share, discuss and collaborate on topics ranging from technical concepts to HR processes to ideas for the next cultural event. Social media avenues such as blogs are also changing the way that managements communicate with their employees. In a lot of organisations including mine, more and more managers have started maintaining blogs where they share their views on a variety of professional and non-professional topics. I feel it's a fantastic way of really reaching out to your employees.

It is more effective and personal than the general “ CEO's message” emails that otherwise get churned out. By getting instant feedback on their blogs from enthusiastic employees, leaders can quickly feel the pulse of the organisation and use that knowledge to make better decisions. Me the common man If there is one aspect of social media that has influenced me the most in recent times, then it has to be its effectiveness in ensuring a

lightning fast flow of information in times of national calamities, unfortunate incidents such as terror attacks or political unrest.

Recently, platforms such as twitter have been critical in ensuring an immediate spread of information across the globe. When the unfortunate terror attacks took place in Mumbai in November 2008, frantic phone calls from anxious friends and family members to the city from had started saturating the cell phone networks, unable to reach my friends, I was reassured of their safety through their twitter updates. At the time, even news agencies were following twitter updates from citizens to get a view of the ground level reality.

Over time, we have seen such micro-blogging mediums play an ever increasing role as reliable mediums of breaking news. This development has revolutionised my perception of journalism. In essence, it allows the common man to become a reporter and provide his own perception of the latest breaking news to entire world. Two sides to a coin My Strong beliefs on the significance of social media however do not imply that I do not acknowledge the shortcomings of the social media revolution. There are two sides to a coin.

Some of the factors that make social media great also lead to some of its shortcomings. The widespread and free availability of social media often lead to an overload of content. Such high volumes mean that finding relevant and useful content often becomes a challenge. I believe that there need to be more efficient filtering mechanisms developed to enable faster sourcing of content that's relevant. The anonymity that the internet provides to

everyone makes social media platforms vulnerable to misuse. Examples of dubious elements harming naive web users are widespread.

There is a need to promote a more educated use of such mediums and to establish more stringent controls to help counter such misdoings. Social media has often also been criticised for the work/life balance that it tends to disrupt or the productivity concerns it raises when people use social networking sites at work. Spending too much time online cuts one off from real life and defeats the very objective of collaboration. I feel this is more down to the individual, and as is true of everything in life, a balance needs to be maintained. Tip of the Iceberg

To conclude, I feel what I've seen so far is only beginning and social media is only going to keep bringing about radical changes to what I perceive to be the definitive ways of information sharing and communication. Social media has proven itself to be a very powerful tool of empowering the individual to become a part of a global community. My beliefs in the potential of social media have only strengthened over time and I feel that the constant developments in this field will ensure that the way we communicate, educate, collaborate and trade will never be the same again.