

includes debate by practitioners and academicians on a contemporary topic

Social Media and Business

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KEY WORDS

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Online Purchase
Crowd-sourcing
Engagement
Social Media Marketing
Co-creation
Spark the Rise
Innovation
Entrepreneurship
Movement Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Rajesh Lalwani

As I write this note, Google has just launched a new initiative egging people on to 'take action' and 'join together to keep the internet free and open', even as 'some governments try to increase censorship and regulate the internet'.

A headline in a marketing newsletter I receive every morning, announces, 'Social media is revitalizing the future of TV'. Indeed it is, as the world gets divided between *leaners* and *potatoes*, both live-casting their commentary and opinion on TV programming, albeit one watching programmes on call, the other still following a more analogue approach to TV viewing (even as the content itself could be in a digital format).

Social media has, on one hand, energized some equations, but on the other, has also reversed many. As a case of the former, consider research and insights. Where months were required to draw inferences from gathered data, today we can achieve the same in real-time, through the river of data, content, and news available to analysts.

To understand the reversal of equations, let's look at how the powerful today, are the most vulnerable, in terms of impact on reputation. When you don't have a reputation, all you want is attention, I often say.

Politicians, journalists, cinema stars and large business groups are all under the scanner, and are at the mercy of individual, and, group attacks from stakeholders and pressure groups, but also from trolls. Motivations may vary from *bonafide* to absolutely malicious.

It is a new world - a world where everyone has the ability to influence opinion; a world where everyone has the ability to influence purchase; a world where distances are down to zero; a world where voice has speed greater than light; a world that pushes away any attempt to regulate it, except through mechanisms of self-regulation; the world that is today, is a world shaped by social media and the free-flow of conversations that the phenomenon enables and endorses.

Juxtaposing this fast-paced change on business, marketing, communication, research and content, however, is not seamless. There are no clean-cut transitions in the real world. No start points, no finish lines.

Technology changes far more rapidly than human behaviour, so adoption takes longer; now add to that the complexities of organizations, their businesses, processes, people, cultures, relationships and multiple stakeholders, and it is not difficult to imagine the complexities of adapting to this change in the context of business.

The good news is, things are beginning to settle a little – the revolution is well set, it's time for evolution. This Colloquium is an attempt to gather distilled learning from industry leaders on several aspects of social media in the context of business.

“This curious meeting of personalized timelines with a capacity to share, and the intermingling of institutional news with direct tweets and updates from public figures as well as common citizens, is where news begins to resemble the abstract dimensions of quantum physics.” One of the most prolific minds known to me is *Madhavan Narayanan*, who forever bathes in the river of news and information as part of his vocation as a career journalist. His rich understanding on the subject of ‘Digital Media and the Future of News’ makes it really easy for the reader to understand the context, impact, and the direction of what is ahead.

This is exemplified by Barack Obama’s simple confirmation of his win in the recent US presidential elections, *“Four more years”*, which has so far received 817,151 ‘retweets’ and has been ‘favourited’ 299,273 times.

In his piece titled, ‘The Economics of Attention: Social Media and Businesses’, *Sitaram Asur* of HP Labs takes a deep dive into brand influence on Twitter through a case study.

Social commerce, crowd-funding, socially relevant ads are some of the concepts being discussed by *Arun Nair*

in his piece on ‘Contemporary Trends in Social Media’.

Given that Facebook is ubiquitous in every marketer’s social armoury, a piece by *Sachin Rao* of Facebook, shares a simple four-step process to use the channel effectively.

One of the questions practitioners and buyers (marketers, reputation managers, brand owners) are today confronted with, is how to best measure this medium. While traditional measures may not apply, the obsession with ‘vanity metrics’ such as Likes, Number of Fans, etc., leans towards the absurd.

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How can we instead measure impact on brand health, marketing success, revenues, and customer service? *Avinash Kaushik* proposes that we measure these via four distinct metrics: Conversation Rate, Amplification Rate, Applause Rate, and Economic Value.

Once upon a time, data was difficult to get, now data is everywhere, available in real-time. And, even as there are technology tools to help, *“real insight will stand up and be counted when we are able to put the human back into the data.”* *Dina Mehta and Shubhangi Athalye* of Convo share ‘The Future of Insights’.

Even if meaningless had less meaning, I could consider it, I sometimes jokingly comment.

You too will resonate with the piece ‘Defining Purpose and Meaning in Social Media’ by *Amita Malhotra*, which argues against vanity metrics, engagement for the sake of engagement and establishes the case for why we should all be looking at the social medium, and the value that the stakeholders might find in such an engagement with your brand/business. *“It is only when you know where you want to go, that you can figure out how to get there. And once the destination is in place, getting there is not difficult.”*

In August 2011, Mahindra launched its ‘Spark the Rise’ programme to enable positive change in the community at the grassroots level. The goal is to create a participative movement, which relies on the stakeholders

to create sustainable initiatives, and properties of significant scale and impact.

The digital medium is playing an important role in helping make Spark the Rise an 'outside-in' movement. *Akhil Almeida* from Mahindra shares a case-study on use of

social media. Step-by-step you create a movement.

I would like to sincerely thank my colleague, Kanksha Barman, who has helped immensely in the curation and coordination of this Colloquium. ✨

Digital Media and the Future of News

Madhavan Narayanan

News is not what it used to be. Perhaps it never was an absolute in the easiest of times. The old adage goes, "When dog bites man, it is not news; when man bites dog, it is news." In truth, the idea of news has always been central to the idea of a defined or assumed community and its values and expectations. A dog biting a man still makes news in circles where the civic responsibilities of the dog owners, or the significance of the bitten man in a community, is of more relevance, than a man biting a dog.

It is perhaps advisable to take a stand-back view of such peculiarities as we negotiate a new-new world of the Internet and social media — or broadly, what we may term as digital media. A bit of history is relevant before we peek into the future.

In some senses, things have not changed. If human beings still do what they always did — fight wars, build economies or engage in the pursuit of arts, governance or sundry other activities — the medium should only convey in a different way what was always news. But it is clear that this is not the case and would become increasingly so in the coming days.

The Internet and its emerging face, social media, have altered the dimensions and definitions of news, throwing up to the surface questions that always lurked in the background— on ethics and the politics of news judgement; on substance and style; on opinion and facts; and

on perceptions and truths. This is happening in a dynamic context where locally made, distributed and consumed news is giving way to instant, global dissemination of information. The defined communities are getting "mashed" in a collapse of global walls.

To this we may add that the very financial sustenance of news is being called into question. Advertising — which quietly but controversially supported news for the better part of the 20th Century, is itself facing a tumultuous shift in the age of the Internet, much more than it did in the television era.

It was Marshall McLuhan who proclaimed: "The medium is the message." As a storyteller-philosopher, the Canadian thinker had seen the rise of radio and television after growing up in an era of village artistes. It was not difficult for him to notice the difference in the way the story was perceived or understood when the medium that conveyed it changed.

"Content," the broad term we use to describe anything including data, information, news, opinion, entertainment and other forms of expression, has always been limited, defined or

enhanced by the state of technology and the medium that the technology defined. The Gutenberg press gave rise to the proliferation of books. When the press evolved, it turned out newspapers which had their own structures and definitions of news. The classic formula

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was a concoction of headlines, body copy, and black-and-white photos. There were editors who acquired the dour air of courtroom judges and a social standing that went with it as they judged the display of a newspaper. Along with it was a sacred wall erected between fact and opinion as exemplified in the separation of the news from the editorial comment or Op-Ed (opposite editorial) pages. Colour came slowly, and is still used sparingly in the main sections of leading newspapers.

Radio brought in the crackling voice of commentators like Ed Murphy. Live broadcasts converted news from recounted events to one in which the listeners felt closer to the happening. Television, and further on, colour TV, enhanced the experience even further. But still, viewers were at best passive witnesses. The arrival of satellite television with the Gulf War of 1991 saw the rise of CNN as a news leader. The intrepid, if controversial, reportage gave rise to what one might call a news voyeurism of sorts. India found its equivalent in the Kargil conflict of 1999. The “Breaking News” phenomenon that followed and its overuse imparted a permanent sense of urgency and pace on to the world. From Fox News in the US to India TV in India, the narrative changed — to a perpetual, restless, hyperactive mode.

It would make sense to look back on all this to understand the context in which the Internet arrived on the scene in the mid-1990s, and over the course of the next 15 years or so, altered the way in which we define and experience news.

In the early stage of the Internet, news was about surfing the websites of established media organizations. In large parts, it still is. In the second round, we saw the rise of “vertical” websites that spotted the opportunity to address specific industrial communities (such as Exchange4media.com and Agencyfaqs.com in India that address the advertising and marketing community or global sites like SatellitesToday.com that caters to the satellite manufacture and launch community).

As it happens, when a new medium arrives, in the first phase, it always tries to shape itself like an extension of the old. News websites did and still often do resemble

newspapers in their look and feel, with headlines and body copy. Early cinema in India in many ways was little more than “filmed theatre” in which cans could be transported to be projected to various audiences. The idea of outdoor location shooting, dubbing, playback singing and slick editing emerged much later.

News, in the Internet era, is evolving, much like cinema did, beyond its origins: in style, substance and narrative styles, in the audiences it addresses, and the way it engages the community.

The baby steps came in the form of some vertical websites that tried to give industry news, but the buzz began to happen in the “comments” sections that websites had. The parallel arrival of the chat room on sites like Yahoo added to the buzz. These were the early

years, in the late 1990s, when news stepped out of newsrooms to be broken anytime, anywhere. And, as it turned out, by anyone!

The reporter, the editor, and the publisher were the middlemen who surveyed and controlled the process of the news through the 20th Century. The Internet is challenging that order in a major way.

The first big step outside this “old media” framework happened with the arrival of blogs. Arriving humbling as the “web log” in the early days, blogs were little more than online personal diaries. But they have

since involved into a social phenomenon that spells a dynamism. Often, the word “blogger” is used in the same sense as one would say “activist” — although a significant number of blogs in reality are “vanity blogs” run by young professionals, students or home-makers trying to reach out to a larger world. Over the course of time, the proliferation of blogs aided by free online space and easy-to-use software from sites such as Google-owned Blogger and the independent Wordpress made blogging so easy that it created a new age activism.

Parallely, the same sites, particularly Wordpress, gave rise to niche publishing or “micropublishing” of news as well as opinion. Today, we have blog-based sites such as TechCrunch.com and GigaOm.com that have become

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financially active businesses. In India, we have sites like MediaNama.com, which covers the digital media industry, and VCCircle.com, which tracks venture funding, that are clearly inspired by the US counterparts. Through advertisements, job boards, and events, these niche sites also become businesses with revenue models.

Niche blogs created a dynamic model in which the “comment” space was often a source of new information — or it would serve as a pressure point to generate news afresh. Corrections and updates to news based on comments are now a mainstream habit. In other words, the reader/viewer of the age of newspapers and television becomes a “prosumer” (producing consumer). More significantly, she becomes a participant in the shaping of public opinion and news more than a passive witness. E-mails and comments now form an essential part of the news workflow.

As a corollary, a crucial contribution made by niche blogs in the evolution of news is the way it has deepened news with richer detail and more frequent updates.

Mainstream media houses have stepped in to even acquire blog-based businesses. AllthingsD.com, which chronicles digital life, is now part of the Wall Street Journal group. TechCrunch is now owned by AOL. Such co-option of blogs is going to be as easy as the acquisition of niche technology startups by larger giants in the Silicon Valley and elsewhere.

As blogs evolved, we also saw on the side the rise of algorithm-driven curation of news. Google News (news.google.com) created a model in which software-dictated choice of news based on defined criteria in effect “automated” the function of the editor — with questionable virtues but unquestionable success in a world where people quickly look up what is hot. The other fallout of this is the “personalization” of news based on defined sources or keywords.

If blogs and algorithms fragmented or “decentralized” the business of news even as they made it richer in detail, the real revolution happened with the arrival of so-

cial media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Although social media started out with sites such as Friendster, Ryze, and the Google-run Orkut, these fell by the wayside in the quest to create a huge, adhesive web of users sharing their experiences — in words, small-bite messages, pictures, and videos.

“User Generated Content” or UGC became a big buzzword after 2004, when Facebook was founded. Twitter happened two years later. Officially, Facebook is a network for friends, but it has generated community sites around topics that generate news. Mainstream news is further shared or discussed in personal status updates and Web links. Twitter, by introducing 140-character microblogging, has effectively taken the place of the early chatrooms.

Twitter now has 555 million users worldwide of which India accounts for only 16 million. But things are changing dramatically. India already has 130 million broadband connections. Indian celebrities including film stars Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh Bachhan and a host of political groups are now transmitting their views directly on Twitter, which is also being courted by corporates to survey the market space and engage in “conversation marketing” and customer relations management.

Following the rise of social media, the distance in communication between the personal and the social has become thin. It is now possible to get updates on a bomb blast and what one’s friend had for dinner in the same interface separated by centimetres and seconds.

A significant contribution in the evolution of news is Twitter’s generation of the “timeline” — a string of contributions from various persons or entities that one “follows”. The timeline has made news incredibly dynamic by enabling instant sharing of news in a web of connected people.

Facebook, whose user base has now crossed one billion (and which has about 60 million users in India), has effectively mimicked Twitter by introducing its own

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timeline. With a similar interface, Google Plus, launched by Google to counter the growing popularity of Facebook and Twitter, has 170 million users worldwide despite what is perceived as an insipid response. More than 12 million of them are in India.

The social media timeline, on close look, resembles a chaotic, group-curated ticker-tape. The ticker-tape, the successor of the telegraph, was for decades the mode through which agencies such as Associated Press, Reuters, Press Trust of India, and Agence France Press disseminated news to newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations around the world. Twitter, as it were, is now a dynamically, chaotically curated ticker-tape. It is important to remember that leading news organizations are directly part of Twitter timelines. What's more, by surrounding itself in conversations, Twitter is now creating a buzz that is formally captured in topic-based trends that carry hash tag marks. But the trends vary, from time to time, country to country. This curious meeting of personalized timelines with a capacity to share, and the intermingling of institutional news with direct tweets and updates from public figures as well as common citizens, is where news is beginning to resemble the abstract dimensions of quantum physics. On the one hand, many blogs dispense with the old distinction between news and commentary, going even beyond the notorious tabloid newspapers. On the other hand, social media feeds encourage and accentuate this character.

The gap between fact and opinion has clearly crumbled in the absence of the old-world editor.

The New York Times is known for its catchy tagline, "All the news that is fit to print." Its publisher once said, readers paid the paper not for the news but for the judgement (by its editors) of what constituted news. The growth of social media has challenged that order squarely in more ways than one.

First, active bloggers have become "citizen journalists" who sometimes offer raw fodder for mainstream media

and at others, question, taunt and challenge the news judgement of the mainstream/traditional media. The rise of tweets and the trends around them are now dictating the agenda for mainstream newsrooms. In the world of instant status updates and tweets, news — whether broken by a newspaper, its website, a radio station or a TV channel or a blog — travels almost instantaneously to the social media, and becomes "viral" at a dizzying speed when recognized by the community to be significant. In the early days of TV news, its agenda was dictated by newspapers. Then what was seen as the tail became the dog as TV news set the agenda for the next day's papers. Now, it could be argued that social media sites are driving the agenda for both — or fast on their way to doing that.

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In fact, the profusion of content in a fragmented manner across thousands of TV channels and hundreds of thousands of websites has given rise to a phenomenon called "The Long Tail" of content. This is a pain for advertisers brought up on the holy grail of mass viewership or readership, such as circulation and TRPs (television rating points).

Several barriers have crumbled along the way in this evolution, which, given its phenomenal growth in the short span of 15 years since the Internet browser became popular with Netscape, is in fact a revolution. A web page breaks the barrier between sound, pictures, video and text, bringing in elements of radio, TV, newspapers and magazines in a single interface.

Social media has broken the barrier between the average citizen and the official journalist. The source can now be a reporter by merely using a handphone to announce something on Twitter. The manner in which the discourse in news is conducted has in turn blurred the editor-driven distinction between what constitutes news and what does not, and at a deeper level, between the ethical and the not-so-ethical dissemination of news.

At the same time, celebrity bloggers and tweeters — including public figures such as politicians, economists,

and movie stars — now have direct access to whoever they wish to address. This dispenses with the need for an editor in the conventional sense of the term. In fact the most active among celebrity tweeters view the work of editors as “filtered,” “sanitized” or “censored” versions of the news they wish to disseminate.

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News gathering processes are changing. Journalists engage social media both as agents of expression and as interactive listeners and conversationists. The “citizen journalism” phenomenon and independent blogs are increasing the variety and diffusing the definition of what constitutes news. New genres of news consumption are arising to challenge a century-old idea of dour, balanced journalism. Sites such as Huffington Post (which has 40 million unique users visiting it every month) have become hubs of public discourse, bringing together comments and a variety of commissioned bloggers in new forms of engagement. We have independent sites such as NowPublic.com and India-based Instablogs.com that are attempting to make “social news” mainstream by creating virtual hubs for citizen journalists. The sharing of Web links and tweets and voting of news items through “Like” marks on Facebook or “Retweets” on Twitter are making editors out of common citizens. The paradigm has shifted from policy-driven news to popularity-driven news. “Social curation” is now a clear leitmotif in the transmission of news. Surveys, hashtag-based conversations and Facebook pages are making interactivity hyperactive in real-time, perpetual events tracked across the planet. Research tools have emerged to sift through chaotic updates to measure the social dynamics of information.

The rise of smartphones and tablet computers such as the iPad that are enabled for independent applications (apps) means a further opportunity for news to be supplied in different genres, flavours, styles, language and attitude.

New challenges are emerging in the form of hate speeches and rumours that spread fast on social media, giving national governments and law enforcers new challenges within the structure of democracy.

News media has traditionally been the watchdog of society — or perceived to be so. Social media increasingly does that role as a “watchdog of watchdogs” as it were.

The fact that India has more than 900 million mobile connections, combined with the sustained fall in the cost of smartphones and the emergence of the cheaper “smart feature phone” have profound implications. Sites like Facebook, Google Plus and Twitter will be increasingly accessed in multiple languages, by hundreds of millions of Indians.

All this, given the advertiser’s tendency to go where the attention is, is giving rise to new paradigms in market research and brand management — the activities that financially sustained news for the better part of the 20th Century. New business models are imperative.

Rupert Murdoch, chairman of News Corp., arguably the world’s single biggest aggregator of TV news channels and newspapers, has been a worried man, arguing against free content on the Web. UK-based *Financial Times* and *The New York Times* have achieved limited success in getting readers to pay for their content. While on the one hand, credible news involves expenses in news gathering, travel and other costs, the decline of advertising for news offerings is a worrying sign. The Web has emerged as a leading source of news across the planet, but news on the Web is still a viable option in economic terms.

Electronic payment, mobile money, and paid-for apps could be the future. But that is a future which is yet to emerge. Nevertheless, there could be some promise in this because electronic and mobile payments ease up the logistics of payment. Subscription-driven models for news are already being tried out and apps seem to be a natural fit for this.

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Finances apart, new challenges are emerging in the form of hate speeches and rumours that spread fast on social media, giving national governments and law enforcers new challenges within the structure of de-

mocracy. As the Indian government has seen, regulation of content on the Internet and social media results in activist protests that see regulators as obstacles to free speech and democracy. On the other hand, unsubstantiated facts, outright lies, and morphed videos traverse the Internet. If the Arab Spring was aided by Facebook pages, showing an arguably positive democratic impact of social media, the spread of rumours on the social media that resulted in a painful, avoidable exodus of Northeast Indian students from Bangalore showed the ugly underbelly of social media.

In such a context, publishers, advertisers, journalists and citizens/consumers have to redefine and reorient themselves for a new age. And to some extent, they are. These involve professional, financial, ethical, and social dimensions. Each has to be tackled.

In some ways, social media sites making news seem like a salsa-dance party — with citizens involved in a happy tango with mainstream news, offering feedback and getting instant access to mainline journalists. On the other hand, their challenging the conventions of newsrooms resembles a wrestling match. We could call this the Salsa Wrestling Syndrome.

The future could see five distinct trends – which one can call the five Cs: co-opetition, co-option, crowd-funding, countervailing, and community policing.

The rise of independent digital media sites could on the one hand offer competition to established media companies and on the other, could be acquired in a mode of co-option in an industry consolidation. This has already happened as best exemplified by the acquisition of Huffington Post and TechCrunch by AOL.

But independent blogs and niche “indie” (independent) news sites will emerge and vanish in a constant act of creative destruction. These sites will fill, in substance or style, the felt needs of the moment and be part of an ecosystem involving “co-opetition” with traditional/big media. Conventional, established media sites can and will gain by partnering or otherwise engaging these sites

as sources of information. This could lead to an increasing digital “verticalization” of news — much like magazines did in print.

To finance such sites, apart from niche commercial models, we could see the emergence of “crowdfunding” — or not-for-profit models based on donations, contributions and subscriptions. There are sites like Pro Publica ([www. propublica.org](http://www.propublica.org)) and Mother Jones ([www. motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)) in the US that have smartly used the Internet in non-commercial models to take the space historically occupied by mainstream media. They engage in critical or investigative journalism, without a commercial agenda.

More such sites could emerge in the future, across nations. Whether they are commercial or not-for-profit, niche news sites or apps could acquire an ease of deployment through easier payment models such as e-payment and mobile money.

The rise of social media and the buzz it creates has already begun setting the agenda for TV channels and newspapers through their “trending” or “viral” impacts. A forceful aspect of this is the instantly visible face of public opinion. When organized consumer power emerged in the West, John Kenneth Galbraith propounded the idea of their “countervailing

power” against established businesses in getting better deals. Social media activism and its direct interaction with mainline journalism will perform pretty much the same role in a new context. It may not be in an economic sense, but perhaps more in terms of social pressure. News media has traditionally been the watchdog of society — or perceived to be so. Social media increasingly does that role as a “watchdog of watchdogs” as it were.

The countervailing power also results in community policing. Authorities in India, China, and Iran have faced controversies and opposition to state controls, regulations or restrictions on social media.

India has seen court cases involving the dubious use of social media. While some see government action to regulate content as a legitimate and legal exercise in main-

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taining social peace and order within the definition of the Constitution, others see it as an intrusion into free speech and democracy, or worse, a witch-hunt of political critics. The contradiction is best resolved by “community policing” in which transgressors are identified, shamed or prosecuted within the four corners of law based on a broader social consensus than any high-handed government action.

What we could see in the coming years is a chaotic realignment of forces that through the 20th century saw a

monolithic comfort in the convergence of big machines, big advertising, and large corporations. To draw a political analogy, the last century saw a “presidential” model of media culture that saw a few titans rise and set the agenda. The emerging landscape is more akin to a parliamentary system involving a fractured polity. What we will witness may resemble loosely structured “news coalitions.” A lot of it is already happening, but financial viability may be the critical factor in determining a steadier pattern. ✨

The Economics of Attention: Social Media and Businesses

Sitaram Asur

Web 2.0 has radically broadened our perception of the online universe. With the advent of social media giants like YouTube (2005), Facebook (2005), and Twitter (2007), millions of people all over the world have gained the ability to connect like never before, and more importantly, create and share content of their own without much effort and in a timely manner. Massive participation in these social networks is reflected in the countless number of videos, comments, news, and status updates that are constantly posted and discussed in social sites such as Facebook, Digg, and Twitter. The effect of this proliferation is evident from the numbers that these websites boast of as well as the global demographics that engage these services on a daily basis.

We are in, what is known as, the Information Age, defined as “a period that will be characterized by the ability of individuals to transfer information freely, and to have instant access to information that would have been difficult or impossible to find previously”¹. And in this age, where information is readily available in mammoth quantities and types, there is a new brand of economics, which is eloquently described by Richard Lanham in his book ‘The Economics of Attention’². The basic principle is as follows: If economics is about the allocation of resources, then the most precious resource in our new information economy is certainly not information, for we

are drowning in it. No, the important commodity is the attention to make sense of that information. We have more content than we can experience, which makes our attention selective.

Thus the wide spread generation and consumption of content has created an extremely competitive online environment where different types of content vie with each other for the scarce attention of the user community. In spite of the seemingly chaotic fashion with which all these interactions take place, certain topics manage to attract an inordinate amount of attention, thus bubbling to the top in terms of popularity. Through their visibility, these popular topics contribute to the collective awareness of what is trending and at times can also affect the public agenda of the community. It is these mechanisms which award popularity to certain items that is of prime interest to the community of social media researchers as well as companies and individuals who wish to take advantage of them to promote their content.

When social media websites first began to become popular, it was mostly due to individual users who began connecting and interacting among themselves. It is only in recent years that this particular brand of online attention has come to the forefront, as companies have begun to take note of the large number of eyeballs that are accessible through these websites. When Google began to dominate search in the early 2000s, it did not take long for them to discern a then unique model of

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Age

² Lanham, Richard A. (2006). *The economics of attention: Style and substance in the age of information.*

monetization of search, through online advertising. Traffic began to transform into revenue. It was only when they became public that it was disclosed how much revenue they were garnering from advertising and the world realized the potential that online attention can generate.

What made search so profitable was the sheer number of people who spent enormous amounts of time searching. That number has been far eclipsed by the users of social media. It has been reported that one billion users are active on Facebook (Sep 2012) and it was earlier reported (Jan 2011) that the average user spends average of six hours and 35 minutes on Facebook per month³. This is nearly double the time (3:20) spent on Google. This statistic has led to unprecedented excitement for advertisers and for Facebook that they could structure a business model on ads similar to Google.

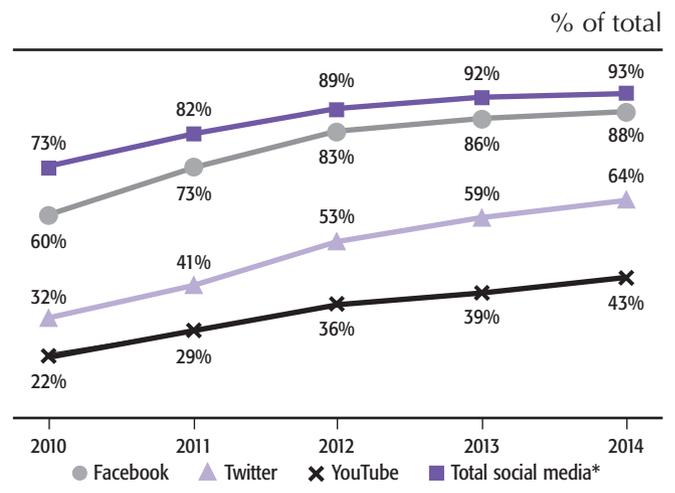
And it does not have to be the same model. Apart from advertising, companies have facilities through social media to create their own pages and have users subscribe to their feed. It is a seamless way for users to interact with businesses. And for the business, this is essentially free forum that is constructed for them where they can get in touch with their customer base and advertise their products to millions. This can provide them the unique opportunity to interact directly with their customers and gain an understanding of what their products are rated, and have deals and coupons that they can provide to increase the popularity of their brands. They can also observe what their competitors are doing and how they are engaging with their customer base.

An additional advantage that social media provides for advertisers and businesses is the availability of user profile information. Users of social media services like Facebook usually provide demographic information as well as information regarding their preferences. This makes the task of advertising in this medium far easier to advertising on search. On search, the only real information available is query keywords and navigational content over time whereas in Facebook, one can find the users' location, gender, their sexual orientation, their likes, dislikes, and who their friends are.

Viral marketing is a popular brand of marketing designed for online use. The idea is to target certain individuals in a network with promotional campaigns, and

let them propagate the messages through the network. The initial choices are made to optimize the spread so that they can access as many users as possible with the message. This is more efficient than sending the message to each individual independently as that only contributes to spam. The task of selecting the initial targets is a hard problem and there have been various heuristics proposed in the research literature to handle this. As I mentioned above, one of the strong advantages of social media is the fact that there is enormous information that is available about users, their preferences, previous posts and their friendship links. Despite concerns of privacy, users tend to provide far more information than they need on social media websites. Thus it is possible to discern the product preferences of particular users which makes it easier to design viral marketing strategies and in particular, improve the selection of targets. Additionally, the relationships of users with their friends can be determined through inspection. Users who are extremely popular and have many friends are usually good targets for campaigns. In the later section, I will describe how influence can be measured in a network such as Twitter. Social Influence has been recognized as a critical factor for viral marketing as it concerns the task of propagation of information through a social network.

US Companies using Select Social Media Sites for Marketing Purposes, 2010-2014



Note: Companies with 100+ employees; includes use of any of the proprietary public-facing social media tools for marketing purposes on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube; * includes blogs, microblogging, photo- and video-sharing, podcasting, ratings and reviews, social games, social networks, virtual worlds, widgets and applications, wikis, etc.

Source: eMarketer, Aug 2012

³ <http://thesocialskinny.com/100-social-media-statistics-for-2012/>

In the last two years, businesses have flocked to social media websites to begin their user engagement. According to eMarketer⁴, Facebook is the number one social marketing tool for brands at 83 per cent (88% target for 2014), followed by Twitter at 53 per cent. The projections show 93 per cent of companies will use social media for marketing by 2014.

Let us next examine these three popular social media websites and what features they offer to users and businesses.

Facebook

Founded in 2006, Facebook has become the most popular social networking website. Although not the first online social network, Facebook has transformed the value of social media websites through the sheer volume of users it has attracted. Starting with 50 million users in October 2007, they have grown to a staggering one billion users as of September 2012, despite the fact that it has been completely blocked in China. The user-base is also geographically diverse, featuring users from more than 200 countries. Although the US is No. 1 (167 M users) in terms of users, it is interesting that over 83 per cent of the user-base is outside the US⁵. India is ranked 3rd in terms of total number of users, with 59 million users, which is almost the entire Internet population in India.

Facebook provides connectivity for users and facilities for creating and sharing content in the form of pictures, posts, comments, videos and even check-ins. Facebook has also provided a platform for development, allowing developers to create apps that integrate with Facebook. For example, Zynga, the top online social gaming company has a unique partnership with Facebook in this context, with Zynga games being extremely profitable on Facebook with millions of users participating in games like Farmville and Poker on a daily basis. These

apps have been instrumental in adding to the growth of Facebook and accounts for a large percentage of the 700 minutes per month that Facebook achieves. Social gaming provides a means to engage users for long periods of time with activity on a regular basis. For instance, Farmville requires users to maintain their farms and crops. Other games require similar attention with users having to log on a daily basis. Social gaming also allows users to interact and share their performances with other users, introducing a competitive environment.

Facebook provides three main features for companies:

Fan Pages: Facebook allows businesses to create pages called Fan pages. Users can then subscribe and become fans of particular companies. They do this by liking the page of the company. They will then receive feeds from the companies and can share their voices.

Promoted Posts: Companies can pay for particular posts to be promoted across more people. Such posts are made visible at the top of news feeds for the users who have subscribed to the company. When users respond to these posts, they will be visible among their extended circles as well, increasing the overall visibility of the post.

Advertising: As previously mentioned, choosing people for particular ads is much easier on Facebook since the companies can get access to the demographic information about users. This is also useful for viral marketing when companies need to select specific users to target for the message to propagate through the network.

It is reported that 75 per cent of the Fortune 100 companies are on Facebook. However, apart from these companies, Facebook is also beneficial for small businesses as it allows them to reach their target audience with a personal approach. The typical model for companies to use Facebook fan pages is to attract as many customers as possible to the page through various campaigns. Such campaigns include viral recruitment, discounts and coupons, and offline promotions. It is common for a company to provide a discount that can only be accessed by

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⁴ www.emarketer.com

⁵ Geographic information for Facebook available at <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/>

liking their Facebook page. Recently, Frito Lay set a Guinness World Record⁶ for Facebook Page “Likes” within a 24- hour period, accumulating 1,571,161 “Likes” through April 11-12, 2012. They achieved this milestone by running many promotions at once, including a replica of the company’s Flavor Kitchen in New York City’s Times Square and live demonstrations on its Facebook Page. The company also tied in with Zynga’s *Farm Ville* and let players harvest sponsored in-game crops to earn virtual goods.

The benefits of having a large number of fans, apart from the reach it provides for their promotions, is that users can then recommend them to their friends. In a study on consumer behaviour by Constant Contact and Chadwick Martin Bailey, the key findings showed that 56 per cent of the consumers said they were more likely to recommend a brand after becoming a fan on Facebook. Additionally, 51 per cent of the consumers said they were more likely to buy a product after becoming a fan on Facebook. These are numbers that encourage companies to concentrate on social media advertising.

Looking at the top brands in terms of user engagement on Facebook⁷, we have Coca Cola, the top brand in terms of fans, which had an interesting route to the top. Their page was originally created by fans of the product, and Coca Cola co-managed it with them. Muhtar Kent, the CEO of Coca Cola reported last year that 20 per cent of their total media spend was towards social media. They made the transition to the medium much quicker than other brands and invested

Rank	Brand	Fans
1	Coca Cola	52545572
2	Disney	38522325
3	Converse	33239574
4	Red Bull	32335412
5	Starbucks	32211878

⁶ <http://mashable.com/2011/04/28/frito-lay-guinness-record/>
⁷ <http://www.socialbakers.com>

heavily which made them achieve gains in terms of brand popularity and presence.

In India, the top brands are as follows:

Rank	Brand	Fans
1	Tata Docomo	9422949
2	Kingfisher	4712609
3	Vodafone Zoozoos	4521494
4	Fastrack	4479947
5	Nokia India	4477816

TWITTER

Twitter is an extremely popular online microblogging service, which has gained a very large user base, consisting of more than 500 million users. However, the number of active users is far lower, estimated to be around 140 million active users. Each user submits periodic status updates, known as tweets, which consist of short messages limited in size to 140 characters. These updates typically consist of personal information about the users, news or links to content such as images, video, and articles. The posts made by a user are automatically displayed on the user’s profile page, as well as shown to his followers.

A retweet is a post originally made by one user that is forwarded by another user. Retweets are useful for propagating interesting posts and links through the Twitter community.

Twitter has attracted lots of attention

Twitter has attracted lots of attention from corporations for the immense potential it provides for viral marketing. Due to its huge reach, Twitter is increasingly used by news organizations to disseminate news updates, which are then filtered and commented on by the Twitter community.

from corporations for the immense potential it provides for viral marketing. Due to its huge reach, Twitter is increasingly used by news organizations to disseminate news updates, which are then filtered and commented on by the Twitter community. A number of businesses and organizations are using Twitter or similar microblogging services to advertise products and disseminate information to stockholders. Twitter provides the following for businesses:

Profile Pages: Businesses can create profile pages of their own and get people to follow them. They can then in-

interact with their customers by posting updates of products and services and other types of content. Large companies typically have multiple pages to increase their productivity in this space.

Promoted Tweets: This makes certain posts more visible in search results and for particular users. Twitter also provides geographic targeting to increase relevance of messages based on location.

Promoted Accounts: This is relevant for viral marketing. Promoted accounts are users who have been identified as potential influencers for companies to use to spread their messages effectively.

Promoted Trends: Promoted trends place content among the hottest topics on Twitter thereby amplifying their exposure.

Analytics: Twitter provides analytics for companies to determine information about their fans and activity on Twitter.

Twitter is more popular than Facebook for 87 per cent of the Fortune 100 companies using this service. The following statistics have been noted about Twitter and brands:

- More than half of the active Twitter users follow companies, brands or products
- 79 per cent of the US Twitter users are more likely to recommend brands they follow
- 67 per cent of the US Twitter users are more likely to buy from brands they follow

YouTube

YouTube began in 2005 as a crowd-sourced video uploading service. In 2006, it was acquired by Google. It has retained its popularity over the years with 800 million unique users visiting every month. It contains enormous amount of video content as well as comments. It is estimated that 72 hours of video are uploaded every minute and 4 billion hours are watched every month. It has global reach, similar to the other two services, with

70 per cent of traffic coming from outside the US⁸. Users watch and rate videos, through likes or comments. Users can also subscribe to particular channels to view content generated and shared by other users.

Although YouTube became popular as a crowd-sourced video streaming service, it is a powerful free tool for businesses and organizations to engage an audience with online video. Businesses can leverage the mass appeal of YouTube by creating their own public channel that their fan-base can subscribe to. They can then upload video promotions on their channel. This can be particularly beneficial for small businesses. YouTube also offers

free analytics that can provide information on who are the viewers, their demographics and the most useful—"discovery" data—info on how users came across the video, including the popular links they followed to get there.

Advertising is another avenue of revenue for businesses. Since YouTube was acquired by Google in 2006, it strongly features advertising in videos. Due to the large number of users watching these videos, running ads can be quite profitable.

A few years ago at HP Labs, we performed analysis of a massive YouTube data set which revealed that the productivity of those uploading videos strongly depended on attention, as measured by the number of downloads⁹. And it was found that

conversely, a lack of attention led to a decrease in the number of videos uploaded and a consequent drop in productivity, which in many cases was asymptotic to no uploads whatsoever. Most of the YouTube content shares this fate, as the consumption of uploaded content is highly skewed. Whereas most videos are never downloaded, a few get a disproportionate share of the audience's attention. This result offered insight into how contributors on YouTube treated the digital commons

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⁸ YouTube statistics available from http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics

⁹ Wu, Fang & Huberman, Bernarndo A. (2010). *A persistence paradox*. First Monday.

as a private good, in which payment for their efforts is expected in the form of attention from others. A later study on YouTube showed that initial attention was an important correlate of eventual attention, which meant that a user, who focuses on getting enough users to view a video as soon as it is released, has better likelihood of obtaining high popularity¹⁰. These studies are invaluable evidence of attention dynamics and relevant to businesses who want to exploit the resources that social media provide.

Case Study: Brand Influence on Twitter

We have talked so far about how, given the mushrooming popularity of Social Media, vast efforts are devoted by individuals, governments, and enterprises to getting attention to their ideas, policies, products, and commentary through social networks. But the very large scale of the networks underlying Social Media makes it hard for any of these topics to get enough attention in order to rise to the most trending ones. For instance, when the Vice Presidential debate happened on October 11, Twitter reported that 3.5 million tweets occurred during the 92 minutes of the debate. During the 2010 FIFA World Cup, fans wrote 2,940 tweets per second. Due to so many events occurring concurrently throughout the world, the amount of content that can be generated is phenomenally huge.

As a result, ideas, opinions, and products compete with all other content for the scarce attention of the user community. In spite of the seemingly chaotic fashion with which all these interactions take place, certain topics manage to get an inordinate amount of attention, thus bubbling to the top in terms of popularity and contributing to new trends and to the public agenda of the community. How this happens in a world where crowd sourcing dominates is

still an unresolved problem, but there is considerable consensus on the fact that two aspects of information transmission seem to be important in determining which content receives attention.

One aspect is the popularity and status of given members of these social networks, which is measured by the level of attention they receive in the form of followers who create links to their accounts to automatically receive the content they generate. The other aspect is the influence that these individuals wield, which is deter-

mined by the actual propagation of their content through the network. This influence is determined by many factors, such as the novelty and resonance of their messages with those of their followers and the quality and frequency of the content they generate. Thus gaining knowledge of the identity of influential and least passive people in a network can be extremely useful from the perspectives of viral marketing, propagating one's point of view, as well as setting which topics dominate the public agenda.

On Twitter, due to the limitation of 140 characters, most news organizations and companies tend to post content in the form of hyperlinks to videos, webpages, coupons, and promotions. Thus, a large fraction of tweets from these organizations contain hyperlinks. In fact, it has been reported in different studies that up to 15-25 per cent of tweets on Twitter contain hyperlinks.

In a recent study¹¹, we analysed the propagation of hyperlinks on Twitter over time to understand the mechanism of propagation and to study how influence can be determined. In particular, we considered all hyperlinks that had been tweeted and retweeted over a period of time. To our considerable surprise, when we measured the rate of propagation, we discovered that a large proportion of hyperlinks simply did not propagate through the Twitter network.

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¹⁰ Szabo, Gabor & Huberman, Bernardo A. (2010). Predicting the popularity of online content. *Communications of the ACM*, 53(8), 80-88.

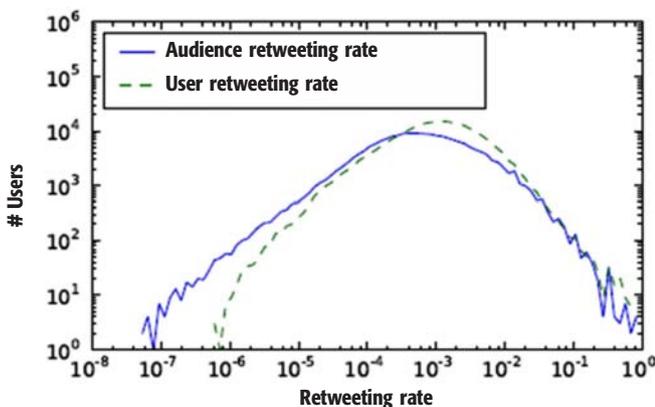
¹¹ *Ibid.*

We measured this propagation rate by two metrics:

1. **User retweeting rate:** The user retweeting rate is the ratio between the number of URLs that user i decides to retweet to the total number of URLs user i received from the followed users.
2. **Audience retweeting rate:** The audience retweeting rate is the ratio between the number of user i 's URLs that were retweeted by i 's followers to the number of times a follower of i received a URL from i .

The graph in Figure 1 shows the retweeting rate for both these metrics. We can observe that these values are universally extremely low. This shows that most Twitter users are extremely passive when it comes to propagation. They might consume content (i. e., visit links) but their propensity of forwarding is very low. This creates a difficult problem for advertisers and marketers to use Twitter as a propagation network.

Figure 1: Retweeting Measurements over Twitter Data



Influence on Twitter

There have been many metrics proposed to measure social influence on twitter. One of the common metrics quoted for influence is the number of followers a user has. The people on Twitter who have the highest number of followers are typically celebrities. Some companies also have large number of followers.

Twitter Counter¹² gives a daily updated list of the top 100 most followed users on twitter. The top ten as I write this are:

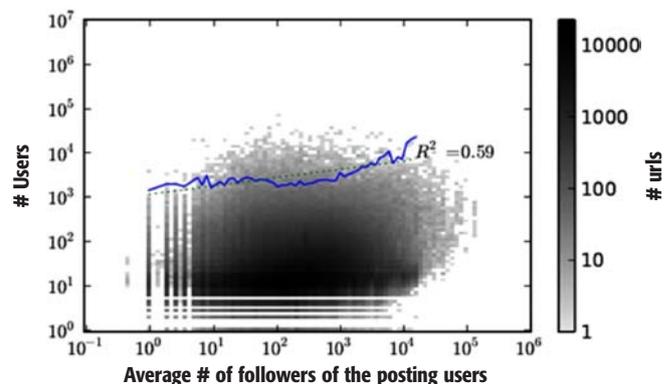
Rank	Name	Followers
1.	Lady Gaga	30, 329, 824
2.	Justin Bieber	29, 009, 478
3.	Katy Perry	27, 809, 610
4.	Rihanna	26, 260, 293
5.	Britney Spears	21, 110, 649
6.	Barack Obama	20, 887, 314
7.	Taylor Swift	19, 631, 453
8.	Shakira	18, 428, 856
9.	YouTube	18, 080, 010
10.	Kim Kardashian	16, 355, 819

We can see that apart from YouTube, this list is dominated by celebrities. The top company in the list of top 100 is Twitter itself which is at number 15 with 13,851,507 followers.

So, the question is whether number of followers can be a correlate for influence. We performed an experiment evaluating the correlation between the number of followers and the clicks on hyperlinks propagated by them. Looking at the number of clicks is a good evaluation measure since influence can be characterized by the ability to get users to act, which in the case of hyperlinks, involves clicking on them.

We found that this correlation is quite low. The graph in Figure 2 demonstrates this relationship.

Figure 2: Number of Followers vs. url Clicks



The graph shows that this relationship is not strong and it is possible to have few followers and still have a high rate of clicks on your hyperlinks. Given this, we asked ourselves what a good measure would be for social influence.

The solution we arrived at stemmed from our earlier observation of the high passivity in the Twitter network.

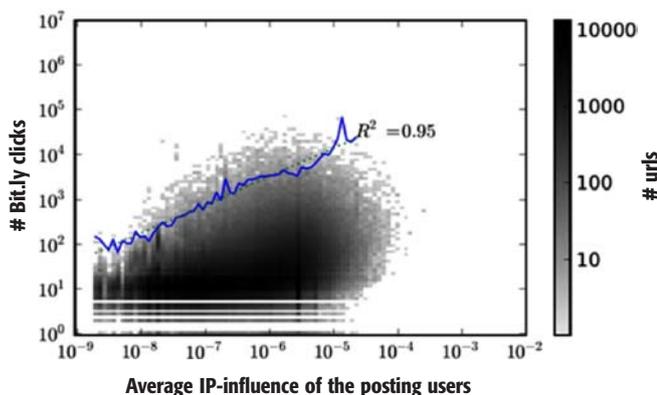
¹² www. twittercounter.com

To be influential meant that you needed to overcome the passivity of users in order to propagate your content. It is not sufficient to have 1,000,000 followers if they do not forward your content to others or act on it in any other way. The challenge of being influential is to be able to get people who do not normally forward content, to do so. In other words, we assume that the influence of a user depends on both the quantity and the quality of the audience she influences. We constructed an algorithm¹³ that used this same philosophy to quantify the social influence of all users of Twitter.

In general, our model makes the following assumptions:

- A user's influence score depends on the number of people she influences as well as their passivity.
- A user's influence score depends on how dedicated the people she influences are. Dedication is measured by the amount of attention a user pays to a given one as compared to everyone else.
- A user's passivity score depends on the influence of those who she's exposed to but not influenced by.
- A user's passivity score depends on how much she rejects other user's influence compared to everyone else.

Figure 3: Our Influence Measure vs. url Clicks



¹³ Romero, Daniel M., Galuba, Wojciech., Asur, Sitaram, Huberman, Bernardo A. (2011). Influence and passivity in social media. *Machine Learning and Knowledge Discovery in Databases*.

It is the responsibility of companies to ensure that they keep the user's interests at heart when they design suitable engagement policies. Their profitability depends on users being willing to participate and share content on online social media websites.

Our algorithm works in iterative fashion and computes the influence and passivity of all users in a large network such as Twitter. We evaluated our algorithm once again using the clicks that influential users can generate using real data.

We observed that our influence measure correlated very strongly with the number of clicks, and can even provide an efficient prediction of the upper bound of clicks for urls (an R-squared of 0.95). In our paper¹⁴, we also compared this measure with several other measures of influence suggested in prior literature including

Page Rank and found that our measure far outperformed all the others.

Once we have a score of influence, we can find out who the most influential companies are on Twitter. We have a tool that ranks all users by influence over a 7-day window. So, the 10 most influential brands for the week (Oct. 7-14, 2012) are:

Rank	Twitter Handle	Brand Name	Influence
1	mcdonalds	McDonalds	21.22
2	pepsi	Pepsi	12.25
3	ford	Ford	3.18
4	nokia	Nokia	2.88
5	amazonmp3	Amazon	2.06
6	appleinsider	Apple	1.78
7	microsoft	Microsoft	1.68
8	chevron	Chevron	1.53
9	newyorklife	New York Life Insurance	1.06
10	bing	Microsoft	0.98

Note that this is only the list for companies that are influential. We can observe that Twitter, which earlier we noted at #15 in terms of number of followers, is not on this list.

McDonalds

Let us look closer at the posts of McDonalds over the past week. The top 2 retweeted tweets over only the past week for McDonalds are:

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

Tweet	# of Retweets	Influence Gain
Go for the WIN! What does your MONOPOLY at McD's victory dance look like? #McDMonopolyNOPURCHNEC. C Rules: http://t.co/E2irknHe	139	16.78
Tweet #AmexMcDs, get\$5 back on next \$5+ in storepurchw/syncedAmexCard! (Exp 10/31) Terms http://t.co/9QaAcSWq	18	2.23

Both these tweets refer to promotional campaigns that McDonalds is running. The first is McDonald's monopoly game which is running from September 25 to October 22. The second refers to a promotion in relation to American Express which is valid from September 10 to October 31.

Pepsi

For Pepsi, the top retweeted tweets are again campaign-related. They refer to a new ad by Pepsi that brings to-

Tweet	# of Retweets	Influence Gain
Retweet if you saw our new #1DB spot on TV tonight during #xfactor! If not, check it out here: http://t.co/bRKijtsq	66	6.27
#1DB makes it on TV tonight during #xfactor! Check out @DrewBrees and @OneDirection together: http://t.co/myBVdbgw	33	3.18

gether popstars, One Direction and NFL quarter back Drew Brees. Pepsi is thus using the popularity of these celebrities to attract users and get them to propagate the message which is basically an advertisement.

Our research has provided interesting insights into mechanisms by which attention and influence are garnered in social media. These insights should prove valuable to businesses as they attempt to exploit the potential that these social media services offer to them. Social influence is crucial for viral marketing strategies. It is important for businesses both small and large to fully understand the facilities that are available and determine the best way to exploit them to their advantage. It is possible that further levels of engagement can be reached which can prove even more profitable. However, before I conclude, I should note that there is another side to this engagement, which is privacy. There has been a furore recently about Facebook's irreverent policy with respect to user privacy. Users are happy to use social websites due to the content and connections they provide. Many of them are not aware yet of the usage of their activity data for targeted advertising and user profiling. It is the responsibility of companies to ensure that they keep the user's interests at heart when they design suitable engagement policies. Their profitability depends on users being willing to participate and share content on online social media websites. 

Contemporary Trends in Social Media

Arun Nair

Social media has changed the world for good, and the repercussions are felt far and wide. For a start, it has levelled the playing fields for consumers and organizations of all sizes and niches, democratizing creation, exchange, and collaboration of media. Organizations today are waking up to the untapped potential of the medium as can be seen from the unprecedented levels of interest, usually driven from the top. However, social media, as we know it, is still a fairly recent phenomenon evolving rapidly as we speak, morphing into its various avatars. This article will scan through the social media landscape and present contemporary trends, revelations and give you some interesting food for thought.

Interesting Insights

It has been tough times for Facebook after the botched up IPO, and mounting pressure from investors demanding an organizational restructuring (or specifically, asking Mark Zuckerberg to step down). However, the silver lining in the cloud is Facebook's recent ascent to 1 billion users. This is unprecedented in the history of media of any form to have a billion users, and that too in such short a time. To put it in perspective, Facebook users now account for nearly half of the global population. If Facebook were a nation, it would be the third most populous after India and China! This growth has also come at an undiminishing pace, despite its com-

petitors' foray into social. Suffice to say, Facebook is THE platform for social app developers and thanks to the Facebook OpenGraph, the Facebook ecosystem is in an accelerated pace of evolution.

According to a recent study by InSites consulting, on an average, people join one or two social networks and there is very little room for the third, no matter how disruptive it may be. A case in point is Google's failure to make a dent into Facebook's pie despite years of priority investment into carving its presence on social media. Though Google+ looks promising as a platform, the interest levels have waned over time and adoption is very low. That said, however, consumers are willing to join unique social networks like Instagram and Pinterest that have carved a niche.

Pinterest is an online pinning board where users pin photos and videos of interest, and share content and follow other users. Pinterest is now the third most visited social media website in the world, ahead of Google+. According to Experian marketing services, weekly visits to Pinterest's website from North American users increased by over 2,000 per cent, in just a year (July '11 to July '12).

Here is another amazing statistic – a majority of Pinterest users are women, making it the only big social network that is driven almost exclusively by women. This popularity with women can be attributed to the fact that much of the “pinning” is around content that women find appealing. The About page summarizes it well - “People use pinboards to plan their weddings, decorate their homes, and organize their favourite recipes.” Pinterest is also a hit with brands. According to one estimate, 41 per cent of the Pinterest users post brand related content.

For brands and businesses on social media, the statistics are heartening – By various estimates, over 55 per cent of the social network users are connected to brands. An average consumer follows 11 brands on social media, of which 7 brands are followed actively, 5 of which are being engaged with. People like engaging with these brands because they respond in a timely manner, pro-

vide relevant information, and post content that is entertaining and friendly. Users are also excited about promotions so long as the offering is unique to the medium.

A sense of ownership also features high on the list; brands that collaborate and co-create content with the community of followers have a high level of user engagement. Food, retail, fashion, luxury, media/entertainment are the most followed sectors because of the attractiveness of the content and a user's repeated exposure to these brands. However, the No. 1 driver for engaging with a brand is actual usage of the brands since a high level of user satisfaction triggers affinity to the brand on social media.

In the early days, the race was to gather the maximum number of followers at any cost, no matter where they came from or if they really mattered at all to the brand. This resulted in a bloated balloon of followers with ridiculously low levels of engagement. There is even a term associated with this frenzy – “the follower fallacy”.

However, this trend is beginning to reverse and there is a shift to squeeze engagement rather than blind growth. The follower count is not the measure of influence – it is the ratio of engaged followers to the total count.

Speaking of influence, those who wield high clout on social media are being rewarded. Influence is now shifting from media to individuals as can be seen by the number of brands that are directly engaging with these influencers.

e-Commerce goes Social

Traditionally, purchase behaviour on e-commerce websites like Amazon.com has been driven by searches or recommendations powered by the website algorithm based on past purchase patterns. In the collaborative world of web 2.0, it is only natural that e-commerce goes social. Social commerce leverages the power of social networks and the community to power intent and transactions.

You even have the 3C's of social commerce...

Facebook users now account for nearly half of the global population. If Facebook were a nation, it would be the third most populous after India and China! This growth has also come at an undiminishing pace, despite its competitors' foray into social.

- **Conversation** - The book "*Cluetrain Manifesto*" noted that marketplaces are conversations. The converse is also true - conversations are marketplaces. Conversations on social media invoke a lot of discussion (sometimes debate) about a potential buy. The buying process is accelerated because these conversations are recommendations from trusted sources accumulated over a short period of time. Brands that generate a high amount of conversations are also highly proactive on social media.
- **Connection** - e-commerce websites are now recording the associations between people and subsequently determining interest and purchase intent. It is not uncommon these days to see a stream of product recommendations displayed based on patterns from the user's social network. The associations, the scope of individuals associations and also the interactions between people really are the foundation for the actions of Social Commerce.
- **Community** - Organizations are harnessing the power of the community to influence commerce. Starbucks' ran a campaign on Facebook called the "Pumpkin Spice Latte Challenge" that asked users to compete to bring the Pumpkin Spice Latte to their cities a week before the drink's official release date. The campaign was a massive hit to the point that the Facebook app crashed from the overwhelming participation. Another example of community-based transactions are group buying websites like Groupon.com that offers products and services at reduced prices on the condition that a minimum number of buyers would make the purchase.

Socially Relevant Ads

Social Advertising consists of serving ads based on the social context of the user (what it knows about the user's social network), as opposed to traditional advertising where the ads are targeted based on what the advertisers know about the individual. Already, social

ads are starting to challenge traditional advertising. In developed countries, Internet ad spending is already closing the gap on TV ad spending. Social media is shifting money from Internet ad spends, with the fastest growth year-on-year, cannibalizing on display and search ad spends.

Take the case of Facebook - according to an infographic by *The Wall Street Journal*, Facebook charges advertisers \$8 each time a "sponsored story" is viewed 1,000 times in the main news feed. Hence if an ad generated 125 million views, it would cost the advertiser \$1 million. Here is what a million \$ could fetch you in traditional advertising...

Brands that collaborate and co-create content with the community of followers have a high level of user engagement. Food, retail, fashion, luxury, media/entertainment are the most followed sectors because of the attractiveness of the content and a user's repeated exposure to these brands.

- Two 30 second commercials on prime-time television (American Idol slot on the US Network Fox, 19.5 million viewers).
- 6.5 colour page ads on *People Magazine*. (Circulation 3.5 million).
- 10 full page colour ads on the *New York Times* newspaper (Week day print circulation around 780,000).

Twitter, that was chugging along without a revenue source has now turned it around with focused socially contextual advertising that targets the users based on interest categories (derived from what or who they follow). "Promoted Tweets" for example, now appear directly in the timeline of users based on their preference for brands or conversations.

Crowd-funding

Ideas are spawned exponentially in a connected world, with intellectual diversity and wealth of knowledge available at your disposal. These ideas need funds to see the light of the day, and fortunately there is a new avenue for sourcing in the funds - crowd-funding. Crowd-funding leverages the power of communities (closed or disparate) to help people raise funds for their ideas, business or charity. People pitch in their ideas or business plans (usually in the form of videos) along with a fund raising goal and set a deadline for raising the funds.

Various stories have emerged about how crowd-funding was the vital ingredient for successful projects. Case studies of artists, film-makers, designers, small business owners amongst others leveraging the power of crowd-funding to fund their projects have inspired more to tap in.

The important differentiator is that unlike a VC, the donor is funding the idea and not investing in it. This is a great alternative to VC or angel funding, and in time this will play a far greater role in fuelling ideas. Forbes anticipates the annual crowd-funded contribution to grow to \$3 billion (from the \$1.5 billion just last year). The big players in the space are Kickstarter.com, Indiegogo.com, and RocketHub.com.

Recruitment is Going Social

Social media is proving an ideal platform for recruitment too, and going by the numbers, the potential is immense. According to a study, social media has become the chief source of talent for companies and recruitment agencies worldwide. According to the 2012 Jobvite social recruiting survey, 70 per cent of the employers have successfully recruited a candidate through social media and over 43 per cent of the companies have seen an increase in the quality of recruitment.

When it comes to platforms, LinkedIn with its 150 million individual profiles and more than 2 million company pages is probably the best. LinkedIn has evolved over the years, introducing new tools and services for individuals and companies. Individuals, for example, can now exhibit their profiles in a far more comprehensive manner than a conventional profile, displaying recommendations, skill sets, etc.

Employers and recruiters are also scouring social network or public profiles to evaluate candidates and form of an assessment of their fitment into various roles. Though LinkedIn is the undisputed choice amongst recruiters for hunting candidates, Facebook and Twitter are also used extensively.

Other tools for social recruitment include Identified.com a recruitment service that assigns a "score" (based on

their social connections, experiences, and perceived skills) intended to provide an accurate pairing between recruiters and job seekers. The system works by taking the best of social and game design to help people plan and track their careers in a fun, engaging, and interactive way. According to their page, "...what Facebook did for your social life, Identified is building for your professional life."

Search and Social

Search engines started off as simple lookup services to website listings, progressing to complex algorithms that threw up results based on what the search engine felt was relevant. The results got better with time as algorithms got more intelligent and refined, but they still lack the ingenuity of human intuition. The answer lies in social media and the evolution of search engines is a convergence of the two. After all, Search and Social media are the two most popular features of the Internet, or as some would say the primary reason for Internet's proliferation.

The search results will be more humane, contextual and powered by the collective. Here are two important features that I foresee as a result of this evolution...

In developed countries, Internet ad spending is already closing the gap on TV ad spending. Social media is shifting money from Internet ad spends, with the fastest growth year-on-year, cannibalizing on display and search ad spends.

- **Real time information patch:** The gargantuan amount of user generated content churned every second to be shared and discussed is a treasure trove for search engines. Search engines will consume news and information as it happens from a variety of sources and with the help of intelligent syntax engine, mash it up for you. However, the accuracy of the content will vary with the sample size (just as a normal curve smoothens out with a larger sample size) and search engines may not mash up data if the sample isn't significant enough.
- **Socially relevant results:** As discussed earlier, search engines in the past were programmed to throw up results that the algorithms thought relevant. The algorithms calculated the relevance based on the semantics of the content and the number of links flowing in (a measure of the popularity of the page).

However, these results may not necessarily be the most interesting to the user resulting in high bounce rates (the % of users leaving the website without traversing further). Social media is just the solution to this problem because you are more likely to be in agreement with human choice than with a logic engine (no matter how sophisticated). Results with more “likes”, “retweets”, “votes” etc. , will rise to the top of your search results. Results will also rise in relevance if they are relevant to your social network.

Memes

An Internet meme may stay the same or may evolve over time, by chance or through commentary, imitations, parody, or by incorporating news accounts about itself. Internet memes can evolve and spread extremely rapidly, sometimes reaching world-wide popularity within a few days. Internet memes usually are formed from some social interaction, pop culture reference, or situations people often find themselves in. Their rapid growth and impact has caught the attention of both researchers and industry. Academically, researchers model how they evolve and predict which memes would survive and spread throughout the Web. Commercially, they are used in viral marketing where they are an inexpensive form of mass advertising.

A meme (a word coined by Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene*) is defined as an idea, behaviour or pattern of behaviour that spreads throughout a culture either vertically by cultural inheritance or horizontally by cultural acquisition (information or entertainment media, peers). An Internet meme may take the form of pictures, photos, hashtags, words or phrases. Memes are often a reflection of popular culture and tend to spread from person to person via social networks, blogs, or news sources.

Can businesses exploit the power of memes? Well yes. A smart brand is a meme. When your product or idea becomes a cultural unit passed between humans, you have the currency to fuel an awareness campaign to

drive actions. Alternatively, you can also use a popular meme to fuel interest, get noticed, and increase audience engagement. Take, for example, Hubspot; the marketing software company created separate Sales and Marketer versions of the popular meme “What people think I do – What I really do”, and shared them on HubSpot’s Facebook page. The memes generated over 900 likes, 110 comments, and 590 shares!

What NOT to do on Social Media

We have seen the various trends on social media and the benefits they accrue for the brands and organizations. Social media provides the opportunity to engage in conversations, develop a rapport with the audience, foster a community, accelerate sales and much more. However, amidst the bounties, there is disaster lurking if you are not careful and brands have paid the price for their indiscretion.

I end the article by enumerating 5 checkpoints/pointers to ensure that your social media campaign avoids the disasters (that others ran into)...

- **The message is sacrosanct:** Your message theme is the most important component of your social media campaign. It is absolutely essential (I can’t emphasize enough) that your message isn’t in any way offensive, discriminatory or

outrageous. An example of a messaging gone wrong is the GoDaddy incident. A video of Bob Parsons, the CEO of GoDaddy shooting an elephant in Zimbabwe created a furore, causing the domain registry company to become a trending topic on social media and a subject of intense criticism. PETA, the animal rights group, responded by shutting down its GoDaddy account and asked others to do the same. Sensing an opportunity, GoDaddy’s competitors sneaked in to poach customers. NameCheap.com even ran a promotion offering to send 20 per cent of the proceeds to SaveTheElephants.com! Such campaigns, though unlikely to have made a dent in their profits, have certainly tarnished the brand and reputation of Godaddy.

- **Responsible social media managers:** Remember, all that is required to ruin the best managed social me-

Trending topics on social media are a great way for brands to get a pulse of what’s the latest and the hottest. However, never ride back on a trending topic, especially if it is about a calamity.

dia campaign is an imbecile of a social media manager. Get your best people behind the job, because there is very little room for error here. And when errors happen, hell breaks loose as was the case with the Chrysler's Twitter F-bomb, where a social media contractor (for Chrysler) posted an obscene tweet on the Chrysler brand's official account. The debacle resulted in Chrysler Group ending its relationship with the social media agency. Subsequently, the employee behind the Tweet was also fired.

- **Don't ride on a trend:** Trending topics on social media are a great way for brands to get a pulse of what's the latest and the hottest. However, never ride back on a trending topic, especially if it is about a calamity. Fashion retailer Kenneth Cole jumped on the back of the Egyptian riots to promote a clothing line by riding back on the hashtag #Cairo. Predictably, this resulted in a massive backlash and outrage for Kenneth Cole's insensitivity to the issue.

- **Timing is everything:** A lot depends on when you time your social media campaign. A campaign launched in the midst of an organizational crisis will only fan the fire as Qantas discovered. Qantas, the Australian airline, announced in its official Twitter page about a competition to win a pair of Qantas first-class pajamas and luxury amenity kits. Qantas asked users to use the hashtag #QantasLuxury to describe what their "dream luxury in-flight experience" would

If you have been less than honest with your business practices and ethics, chances are you don't have much of redemption on social media. On the contrary, customers will use this as an opportunity to rip you apart.

be. Incidentally the campaign was launched at a time when the airline's relations weren't too good with the union, and there were a series of ongoing industrial relations dispute with its workers. The result was a deluge of negative and sarcastic comments on Twitter with the hashtag that was intended for the campaign.

- **Are you honest?** This is perhaps the most important question organizations should ask themselves before venturing out on social media. If you have been less than honest with your business practices and ethics, chances are you don't have much of redemption on social media. On the contrary, customers will use this as an opportunity to rip you apart. McDonald's latest disaster on social media is a prime example of this point. Recently, McDonald's launched a Twitter campaign using the hashtag #McDStories hoping to inspire thousands with their heart-warming stories about Happy Meals. Instead, it was just the opportunity the McDonald's detractors were waiting for! There were a flood of tweets bashing the company (bash-tagged as some would say) over nightmarish experiences with McDonald's. To put it in perspective, there were over 72,000 negative mentions around the campaign!

Thus, in spite of the best of your efforts, things could go wrong; hence it is best to have a contingency plan to tackle the situation. And lastly, when things do go wrong, DON'T get defensive and be the first to apologize and accept the mistake. ♡

Facebook for Businesses

Sachin Rao

It's a Social World!

According to Nielsen, though India's consumer confidence declined by four points in Q2, it remains among the highest globally – second most optimistic country

after Indonesia. As such, it has never been more important for businesses to establish a meaningful and lasting connection with both existing and potential customers. The good news is businesses have far more innovative tools at their disposal today than a few years back.

Some businesses consider social media to be a fad that will fade soon. On the contrary, social media is increasingly becoming critical for businesses. According to a study on online activities in India by comScore, Indian Internet users are spending a whopping 25.2 per cent of their online time on social networks. That's 1 out of every 4 minutes spent online. With its unique ability to facilitate authentic dialogue both among friends and among brands and consumers, social media holds huge potential for businesses. It can help businesses to connect with new customers, engage and foster long-term loyalty with existing customers, and drive real growth even in difficult economic conditions.

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With social media platforms like Facebook at their disposal, business owners can now build their presence for free and reach new customers in cost-effective ways. In fact, in a recent eMarketer survey, small business owners found social media to be one of the most effective marketing tactics, ranking it above paid search, direct mail, and traditional advertising channels like TV and radio.

Beyond taking advantage of the sizeable audience of popular social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, businesses now have the ability to get granular in how they reach and acquire new customers. For example, Facebook recently rolled out page post targeting, a free feature requested from businesses, big and small, giving them the ability to ensure that the relevant audience is seeing their posts in people's News Feeds. Also, Twitter just announced its version of interest targeting, a big step forward for businesses reaching customers on its platform.

This ability to segment an existing customer base with specific messages and find new customers that you know have interests aligned with your company is something that had never existed before social media. If you're a

With the rise of social media and with the scaling of personalized interactions, small businesses for the first time can cost-effectively do brand marketing online.

tour operator in New Delhi who sells adventure tours, you can now easily reach people on Facebook with relevant ads that target people who live in the area, and have liked adventure sports/travel categories on Facebook. This kind of precision in targeting is unprecedented.

The other unique feature of social media is that it's, well, social. For years, local businesses have relied on word of mouth and personal connections to attract and retain customers. People take to heart the recommendations of others – a new restaurant to try, an auto repair shop to take their car to – undoubtedly more so than any other communication medium. For example, consider this promoter of music festivals – Only Much Louder. When they used Facebook to promote their event 'Eristoff Invasion,' they found that 35 per cent of all ticket buyers were invited by one of their Facebook friends to the event. Indeed, social media turbo-charges this word-of-mouth engine, not only facilitating interactions between friends and businesses at a larger scale, but also furthering discovery of new businesses through these interactions.

I would argue that with the rise of social media and with the scaling of personalized interactions, small businesses for the first time can cost-effectively do brand marketing online. Over the past decade, large businesses have dominated brand advertising, with the goal of moving brand awareness and perception metrics across a large online audience - much like print ads in magazines. A majority of the brand advertising on the net was driven through banner ad. A banner ad, however, lacks the ability to listen, respond, and take part in real conversations with consumers.

Social media has not only given brands that ability; it has also levelled the playing field with efficient, local targeting at scale so that small businesses can connect and engage with their customers and let their brand

personalities shine in the same way bigger brands do, like in more expensive mediums such as TV. We have seen successful businesses follow a simple four-step process on Facebook. As you would imagine, it all starts with a Facebook page.

Build a Facebook Page

A page is your mission control on Facebook. It not only allows you to express your unique identity but also lets you build lasting relationships with your customers. It provides the perfect platform for businesses to create content and celebrate key milestones with your customers. Successful pages have rich information about the business and use timeline very effectively to showcase key moments in their history.

Connect with Existing and Potential Customers

Start by inviting friends and family who may be interested in your page. Use Facebook Ads to reach a large audience with a well-targeted ad campaign. There are multiple targeting options that businesses can leverage to ensure they are reaching the right audience. Successful ad campaigns use a combination of demographic targeting and interest targeting to garner relevant fans. They then use the connection-targeting feature to reach friends of fans.

Engage your Audience

Now that you have acquired a strong base of fans, you

should engage your audience with quality content – updates, photos, videos, contests, etc. Pages that have been very successful at engaging their fans usually create a conversational calendar that helps them plan the timing and themes of posts. They check reporting data, 'Page Insights, ' and constantly tweak their posting strategy to ensure they are giving their page an authentic and consistent voice.

Influence the Friends of Fans

Every business, large or small, knows that people are the most powerful medium and word-of-mouth endorsement is the best form of advertising. Social media platforms in general and Facebook in particular are very well placed to help businesses harness the power of virality. Successful businesses on Facebook increase the visibility of their audience's engagement by sponsoring the most engaging and compelling posts to the friends of fans. They use sponsored stories ad units to promote fans' interactions with their page.

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Regardless of the industry you're in or the size of your budget, consider social media as a part of your marketing strategy. Social media ad targeting is precise and cost-effective; it comes with a large, built-in pool of potential customers; and if you know how to use Facebook or Twitter for personal use, using them for your business is just as intuitive. Just make sure you bring that same personal touch you use in store when you go online. With social media, you finally can. ✨

Best Social Media Metrics: Conversation, Amplification, Applause, Economic Value

Avinash Kaushik

Social media is evolving at an incredible pace. Most of us have no idea how to participate optimally in this unique channel – we are doing TV on Twitter. The

impact on the data side of the ecosystem is that a massive amount of data is being generated and much of what goes for measurement in 'social media tools' is pro-

foundly sub-optimal. We have IT-minded people engaging in massive data puking (one report with 30 metrics anyone?) and marketing-minded people who are using lousy measures of success (“I got 158, 632 Fans! Hurray!”).

I want to propose a framework that can be used to measure success using metrics that matter for one simple reason: They actually measure if you are participating in the channel in an optimal fashion.

Isn't that revolutionary? Use data to incentivise our companies to do the right thing by measuring what matters, what makes this channel so unique.

No more embarrassing your brand on Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube. And we build out a loyal cadre of followers, friends, subscribers to boot!

So, what actually matters in social media?

Not the number of friends, followers, or subscribers. Not the number of posts or tweets. Not the ridiculous followers to following ratio. What matters is everything that happens after you post, tweet, participate!

Did you grab attention? Did you deliver delight? Did you cause people to want to share? Did you initiate a discussion? Did you cause people to take an action? Did your participation deliver economic value?

I'm proposing four distinct social media metrics we should measure, independent of the social channel you participate in.

1. Conversation Rate

When I say most brands do TV on social media what I mean is that we do the same uninformed shouting and pimping on social media that we do on TV. We know little about who is on the other end of the TV set and the medium places limits to what we can do. So, to make our marketing more efficient, we shout more loudly, more frequently!

We don't have to do that. We can get a very good sense of who is subscribing to or following or friending us. We can measure if what we are saying connects to them (in near real time!). And unlike all others, this channel has the word 'social' in it! Social as in talk and listen and discuss.

So, why not measure that?

Conversation Rate = # of Audience Comments (or Replies) per Post

One beautiful thing – you can measure this on every social channel on the planet. Blog. Twitter. Facebook. Google Plus. YouTube.

A high conversation rate requires a deeper understanding of who your audience is, what your brand attributes are, what you are good at, what value you can add to your followers and the ecosystem you participate in.

That is why I love this metric. It forces you to do the right thing right away. And it is a lot of work.

So, aim for a higher Conversation Rate. Build your own watering hole in the digital universe. Have meaningful conversations with your audience.

That's marketing that money just can't buy.

You can always be provocative, say silly things and get a high Conversation Rate. Pick Sarah Palin for your topic. :) But that would not be accretive for your brand equity, would it?

Remember we do not measure to manipulate the metrics; we measure to know if we are adding business value.

2. Amplification Rate

Every channel has inherent limitations, often exhibited by the number of ads you can buy. On Google (paid search), on Facebook (display ads), on Radio (audio ads), and all other channels you can think of.

But social media has a profound advantage you can tap into.

What actually matters in social media?
Not the number of friends, followers, or subscribers. Not the number of posts or tweets. Not the ridiculous followers to following ratio. What matters is everything that happens after you post, tweet, participate!

Not only do you have a network, but every node in your network has a network of its own! If you follow my advice and post something ‘incredible, relevant, of value’ to your audience, then they can allow you to break free of the limitations of your network and spread your word around to a more massive audience!

Take me as an example. I have, as of today, 87k followers on Twitter and around 88k on Google Plus. That’s the limit. Even if every single person who follows me reads every single thing I write, I can at most reach 87k people on Twitter.

But the size of my second level network (the unique people who follow the people who follow me) is 6.3 million. My real ‘reach’ turns out to be 6.3 million, not 87k!

So, measure Amplification, the rate at which your followers take your content and share it through their network.

On Twitter: Amplification = # of Retweets per Tweet

On Facebook, Google Plus: Amplification = # of Shares per Post

On a blog, YouTube: Amplification = # of Share Clicks per Post (or Video)

(Share clicks as in number of times your social media buttons were used to spread the content.)

As you post and tweet and you rock and you roll, measure what pieces of content (type) cause amplification (allow your social contributions to spread to your 2nd, or even 3rd, level network). Understand times and geo locations and topics and things.

Then do more of the type that increases amplification. You’ll get more sharing and spreading of your content. But this is very, very important: You’ll be giving your audience content they consider to be of such incred-

Aim for a higher Conversation Rate. Build your own watering hole in the digital universe.

Have meaningful conversations with your audience. That’s marketing that money just can’t buy.

Social media participation, done right, adds value to the company’s bottom-line.

Some of it can’t be computed. That is okay. But some of it can be and it is your job, nay duty, to quantify that.

ible value that they want to share it (and hence you’ll know what your audience wants/loves).

Over time your 2nd level network becomes your 1st level network

Marketing, relationships and a reach that money, honestly, can’t buy.

3. Applause Rate

My intention here is to force you to understand your audience (and not just plug your agenda in social media).

One powerful, more immediate way, to understand them is to measure Applause.

On Twitter: Applause Rate = # of Favourite Clicks per Post

On Facebook: Applause Rate = # of Likes per Post

On Google Plus: Applause Rate = # of +1s per Post

On a Blog, YouTube: Applause Rate = # of +1s and Likes per Post (or video)

You want to know what the audience likes (to use the Facebook terminology) and what they don’t. You get a much deeper understanding of what your audience likes so much that it will +1 your content (or contribution) and allow for that to be then shown to others in their social graph.

And consider this, if you were to +1 a blog post that I wrote, you’ll not help me understand its relative quality, but when someone in our extended social graph does a search on Google for Social Media Metrics, your endorsement of this content will show up in the search results. That’s reassuring to your social graph, and it is great for me because your endorsement makes this post stand out over others and I get a relevant visitor/customer.

Your selfless social media contribution comes back to assist you in driv-

ing valuable business outcomes.

That's why you measure Applause. It matters in ways you can't imagine!

4. Economic Value

It is foolish to believe that just Conversation Rate, Amplification Rate, and Applause Rate will get you the eternal love and gratification (and perhaps budget!) of your company's leadership. Yes, they care a little bit about this 'social media thing'. But if you want their adoration (and let me repeat: budget), you are going to have to quantify the economic value created via social media.

You don't participate in social media to only drive business outcomes. I cannot stress that enough. If that is your primary objective, you are not going to be successful.

But.....

A small per cent of the people in your company/brand's social graph will come to your main digital outpost (usually your company website) and choose to do business with you. Some of them will buy something, others will sign up for your email marketing list, others still will order a catalogue or write reviews for products on your site or sign up as an affiliate or create wish lists or marriage registries or phone your call centre to order something or buy your products or services in your supermarket/store/real world thing.

And you know what all of those things are? Macro and Micro Conversions!

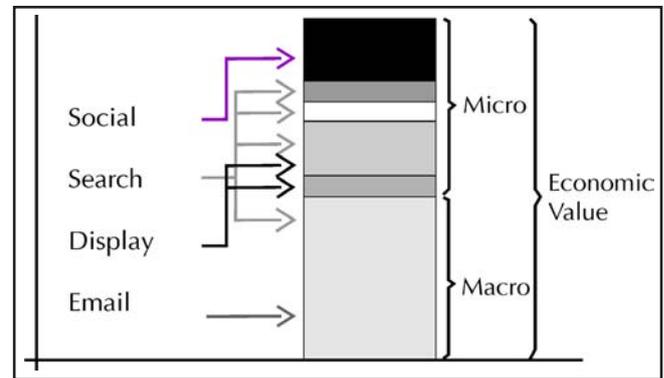
And you know what you can do with macro and micro conversions? You can measure Economic Value!

On all social media channels:

Economic Value = Sum of Short and Long Term Revenue and Cost Savings

Social media participation, done right, adds value to the company's bottom-line. Some of it can't be computed. That is okay. But some of it can be and it is your job, nay duty, to quantify that.

How can we quantify it?



Your job is to identify that coloured arrow, and the black box (what it stands for and what the amount is). It is not very hard, just takes a little patience and imagination.

And here is the incredible, amazing, magical thing. Once you have your highest level segmented view of the acquisition strategy, above, you can in two seconds segment down to individual channels you participate in.

Google Analytics can provide metrics for each channel that you participate in.

Social media presents an incredible opportunity to rethink what it means to connect with and influence customers. You need to forget what has worked in the past. You'll have to rewire your brain.

Now, not only can I tell my CEO what the small amount of direct value added to the business is, I can also report to her/him exactly which channels are contributing how much. You can't be in every social channel that pops up. The above data can give you guidance on where to be.

You do Economic Value and you will never, ever have to beg for investment in social media.

And just to repeat one more time. A vast majority of value your business or brand gets from social media will

be owning your message, building the watering hole I've mentioned, having a direct relationship with your customers and so much more. But showing some direct economic value will get you permission to do more of that. Without it you are just another 'smarty pants' promising 'vague outcomes' via 'the next hip thing'.

Conversation Rate. Amplification Rate. Applause Rate. Economic Value. Four simple measures that get you to focus on the right thing from a social media participa-

tion perspective, help you understand how well you are doing at it, and quantify the business impact.

The challenge is that thus far it is hard to pull them all together in one place. Excel can be extremely helpful in this, and my hope is that vendors will stop creating tools in silos (just do Twitter or Facebook or Google Plus or YouTube) and start to think of real world needs of brands and businesses and pull together metrics we need into one place (from all social channels).

What about Social Media Advertising?

If you are engaging in brand advertising on social media channels, then the metrics you should solve for should be the first three. If you do a Promoted Tweet or Facebook Like campaign or whatever Google+ decides to come up with, then you want to measure resulting Conversation, Amplification, and Applause.

If you are engaging in direct response advertising on social media channels then the fourth metric, Economic Value delivered, comes into play from a strategic perspective. It covers both the immediate value (revenue via macro conversions) and the longer term value (economic value via micro conversions).

For tactical reporting of your direct response social media campaigns, the metrics you'll use will be the ones I've recommended for all other advertising channels. Here's that picture, applied to SM DR campaigns:

Our Glorious Marketing	Google+ Campaigns	Facebook Campaigns	
Clicks	50	200	} Cute Toddler
Avg CPC	\$1	\$1	
Company Impact (Cost Per Acquisition)	\$5	\$20	
Conversions	10	10	} Rockin' Teen
Revenue	\$1,980	\$2,490	
Company Impact (Rev Per Acquisition)	\$198	\$249	
Macro + Micro Conversions	17	14	} Adult (Ninja!)
Economic Value	\$5,750	\$3,700	
Company Impact (Value Per Acquisition)	\$338	\$264	

Focus on having a great social media presence and buy ads on Facebook, but remember to make your products and services so amazing that people can't help talking about them on social media platforms. The impact of this organic (free!) activity will blow your mind.

Value per Acquisition. Shoot for that.

It will be hard. The enchanting temptresses that are Clicks and Impressions and Avg. CPC will try to lead you astray. Resist their charms.

Social media presents an incredible opportunity to rethink what it means to connect with and influence customers. You need to forget what has worked in the past (and that is why this is so incredibly hard to do. The biggest brands in the world embarrass themselves every day on social media). You'll have to rewire your brain.

In presenting new metrics for you to measure, what I'm really trying to do

is provide a very small assistance in helping you think differently.

As closing thoughts, here are two important social media lessons:

1. *Don't have a social strategy: Create products and services that compel social activity.* At the end of the day, it is important to remember that the social media engagement you create, the amount of traffic you can get from Facebook or Twitter or Google Plus (to your online or offline presence), will rarely match the engagement, reach, and outcomes that people who love your products will create for you.

So, focus on having a great social media presence and buy ads on Facebook, but remember to make your products and services so amazing that people can't help talking about them on social media platforms. The impact of this organic (free!) activity will blow your mind.

Ultimately, social is not just about how social your company is. It is about how many social ripples your products or services create.

Don't believe me? Just ask Apple. :)

2. *Social media success does not guarantee business success.* Dippin' Dots crossed five million Facebook Fans a couple of days before they filed for bankruptcy in November 2011. (They were recently rescued from bankruptcy, no not by their Facebook fans. :)).

Pepsi is one of the most active social media participants, including on Facebook. Yet year over year, they have continued to lose market share to Coke.

The examples are numerous.

In the end, business success (amazing products and services) can be hugely amplified by social media. Social media success can rarely make up for core problems with your business, business strategy, or products and services.

Please keep these two humble lessons in mind.

I'm a huge insane fan of this amazing evolution of how we influence people. I can't wait for the era of non-contextually shouting on TV, radio, and magazines to die. I can't wait for irrelevant badly targeted interruptive advertising to die. Our ability to reach the right person at the right moment with the right message is turbocharged by a combination of social and mobile. That makes me so happy. I'm deeply excited about utility marketing, again powered by social and mobile. ♡

The Future of Insights¹⁵

Dina Mehta and Shubhangi Athalye

One of my early assignments as a researcher involved going off into the interiors of Uttar Pradesh (UP) to get insights that would make villagers use soap to have a bath. We went to different zones; selected villages, studied users *vs* non-users, and ensured that we covered different caste groups to avoid bias and met with *aanganwadi* workers and teachers, recruited as influencers. On the field, we did a few interviews with a few focus groups, looked around the village for 20-30 minutes, and left feeling we had many new insights. We got back to the office and did content analysis and fed some of the data into a larger quantitative study for measuring our insights.

Although our training was to look for inconsistencies, our innate desire to find patterns in the data made us ignore them. Our process then almost forced us to flow away from the person – it was more about extrapolation from linearity and measurement – no marketing decisions were made without them. “Insight” in those days was more like an interpretation, a “reading” of a given

belief, situation or behaviour. The attempt was to explain the situation in a new or different way.

Today, the internet, mobile, and social computing and media are reframing what Insights mean – particularly when you focus on insight that helps us understand our customers and their preferences, on insights that help us “market” better and solve problems.

Today, people live in a networked world where they communicate with other people through social media. Contextualizing our lives happens not only by geography or ethnicity or linguistically, but also through the culture embedded in our social networks.

We always thought we were the custodians of Insight, as qualitative researchers. When we began ethnographic approaches, we increasingly believed we owned Insight. We would locate Insight, and hand it over to our clients and their agencies to “innovate” or “activate”.

In this article, we present some of our observations and some notions of how business is morphing. Hopefully, they will provide a different lens through which you glimpse Insight!

What's Happening? Some Observations

Data is everywhere. The traditional business of data collection as the starting point for insights is changing. Data is everywhere. It is cheap. Everyone has it. Look at Census data, for example. It is an awesome body of work

¹⁵ Article based on a talk delivered by Dina Mehta at the India Social Summit 2012; Excerpts of the talk were published in *Pool Magazine*, November 2012 Issue.

that the government has collected, and could be in direct competition with data gathered by Market Research (MR) agencies. Moreover, governments can link this data to every individual in the population (and not merely to a demographic or psychographic segment like research companies do). So can Google, or Facebook or Telcos or providers of Apps. No one has ever had a bigger, wider, deeper, playground of data to play in, as Insight has today!! And this data is not static – it has flow. The issue today is not so much about capturing, processing, and sharing data but about managing, analysing, and extracting value from the data.

A networked world: The second observation is that today, people live in a networked world where they communicate with other people through social media. Contextualizing our lives happens not only by geography or ethnicity or linguistically, but also through the culture embedded in our social networks.

Where does our information seeking take place? What are our reference points? Where are the influences coming from? Where does meaning occur? Earlier, it was linear, and took place when people got together. This evolved to getting information over TV or the radio. The lucky ones then started searching for things on the PC with Google. Now I'm on my mobile - I take a picture and tweet it - and somebody gives me feedback on it instantaneously. The whole network of feedback and how we are informed is changing.

And it is not just about being quick and accessible – our networks actually bring meaning to our lives and decisions in new ways. They also fill the time in-between which can bring forth new ideas! Social media is truly interactive – networks, blogs, podcast, communities, forums, wikis reflect people's thoughts and feelings but also influence them. A good example of how media messages affect cultures, are memes. Memes are by definition, cultural messages passed on from one person to another. Today, agile social media like twitter and

facebook can make content go viral, e.g., the Angelina Jolie leg show at the Oscars or the Kolaveri di phenomenon.

We cannot ignore these networks when we study people and culture – regardless of whether we are considering a FB campaign or a Twitter strategy in our Social Media endeavours. Insight is embedded in people and cultures, and social media is increasingly becoming a platform where it is expressed. Ignore to your own peril!

Negotiation and purchase: We have never been afraid to wheel and deal and constantly ask – is this the best price you can give me? Today, however, we can check; we have information at our fingertips. We make our phones earn their keep. We look for coupons and offers online – in fact, they are often pushed to us as text messages. Our information search process too has changed. 'Word of mouth' has been replaced by user review sites; we trawl the web to make up our minds about the next smartphone or camera we want to buy. We seduce our social networks into working for us. But when we go to buy a microwave at Vijay Sales, we negotiate in an entirely different way.

Online purchasing has picked up fast in India and in addition to the metros, tier 2-3 cities too are catching up as they hunger for products and brands they cannot access through the brick & mortar retail channels. People are buying air tickets, books, life-

style items, electronic goods online. And yet, the industry runs offline purchase panels without integrating purchase habits online into them! We will miss Insight, if we are not careful.

Convergence in the context of media consumption. Currently, for print, there is IRS, for TV - TAM. Radio has its own RAM and there's WAM for Web Audience Measurement. For each medium, you work out reach-return, etc. The reality however is that the same person is actually "consuming" all of this media and in different and unique ways. As an Insights industry, we are not factor-

As a designer or manager how wonderful it would be to get 250 people at your fingertips all helping you uncover insight. You get answers back so much quicker. It is live and happening in real-time. Building and having an ongoing relationship with the community often helps insight bubble up organically and from within.

ing convergence into our Audience measurement systems. How do you factor in Youtube? Mobisodes? Flipboard – just to name a few. We question how long these standalone systems will continue to provide insight.

For Insight to be relevant, it must belong somewhere. Earlier we had very clear demarcations and definitions of our TG, Expert, Influencer, etc. , and how to contextualize them. Today these definitions are blurring and new power equations are forging new definitions of TG or target audience. Who do you interview or study when you want to develop a campaign for prescription drugs? Traditionally, we went to doctors. Is that enough today, when the patient increasingly becomes the doctor? Forums and communities have been set up and patients are able to and are taking informed decisions about their health and medication.

Communities are at your fingertips. There is a shift from an intrusive, interrogatory research framework to more listening-based and interactive research. The key is to listen and learning to listen with all your senses tuned in. For that, you need to be a part of the community. As a designer or manager how wonderful it would be to get 250 people at your fingertips all helping you uncover insight. You get answers back so much quicker. It is live and happening in real-time. Building and having an ongoing relationship with the community often helps insight bubble up organically and from within.

Designing and marketing many-to-one: Another observation is that over the last 10 years, there have been key shifts in approaches to marketing. Marketing many-to-one is the future. We are no more just a series of segments or data points or statistics marketers broadcast to. Especially with smartphones, you can track every single person and serve and target them on an almost individual basis. Everybody is after you. Data is being collected on you every second. Everything about you, your preferences, acquisitions, financial status, shopping habits, etc., is being tracked and often, it is invisible.

The most obvious example is of Google that every one of us uses. They are probably the largest data mining operation and depending on our search histories and Gmail track records, they throw the right kind of advertisements at us.

When you can target every single person in the population, Insight takes on new forms and can come from any one in that population with a virtual blueprint of their whole lives. There are dangers with regards to privacy and coercion and censorship and ethics; yet, it is happening.

Crowd-sourcing is one way of using social media in researching insights, bringing mobile, social into insight recognition. Here's where we see the rise of researcher-tweeters, bloggers, netnographers, etc. The researcher must engage with social tools and be 'present'.

How Does this Impact our Business of Market Research? What are we Doing Differently Now?

Where once, research agencies and market researchers were places people sought to uncover insights, today, we question whether a traditional market research agency is the future at all? Research is morphing, and so is our practice. Stretching our thinking from the now into the future will move market research into a different space, well beyond our current comfort zones defined by surveys and focus groups. The reality still is that users cannot, for the most part, imagine the future. And the future never turns out exactly as predicted. As researchers and insights gatherers, we have to help our clients ask better

questions and do it faster. Keep them curious. Spur their desire to fish around, and not just narrow focus on a particular problem.

For us to succeed, we will need to adopt many more skills – we will need to be ethnographers, trend spotters, netnographers, bloggers, mobile app experts, data visualisers, designers, facilitators, co-creators, foresight, analysts, etc. Also, while there is a strong case and need for analytics and tools like Radian 6 or Buzzmetrics or Klout, real Insight will stand up and be counted when we are able to put the human back into the data.

Remember the old debate about Mainstream media vs Social Media. Today they co-exist and both have mor-

phed. So, will research, marketing, advertising, and technology, as more traditional industries, add the byte to the offline.

How do we do this?

Immerse – Cocreate – Breakthrough: We don't just research our subjects like we did 20 years ago. We need to have conversations with and engage with our audiences in their time and spaces rather than in artificially created environments. We are developing and using synchronous and asynchronous mobile and online learning spaces for engaging with our participants and testers. We will allow agile immersions and direct and transparent interaction for our Clients with their customers. They were never allowed to directly interact with customers in our focus groups. Essentially, we are moving from:

- The Q&A format → immersive learning environments and conversations
- Content analysis or statistics → co-creation and participative models
- Field recruitment → accessing networks
- Single touchpoint engagement → multiple touch-points
- One-time studies → longitudinal study

Crowd-source: Crowd-sourcing is one way of using social media in researching insights, bringing mobile, social into insight recognition. Here's where we see the rise of researcher-tweeters, blographers, netnographers, etc. The researcher must engage with social tools and be 'present'. We must look for nodes and hubs of the new influencers and early adopters. Kickstarter is an interesting example of crowd-sourcing feedback and funding. It really does turn research on its head. For example, you come up with an idea, put it on a site, and then see who will pay money to support it; if you reach your target, you get funded!

Go Mobile, Go Social: We are developing an App for the mobile phone – remember those scrapbooks we printed in A3 size and got our participants to colour up – this is the same – just on the mobile. The App can be

downloaded on smartphones and people capture data in the form of photos, videos, audio recordings, text messages, and upload. What is also important is the fusion between getting individuals to do more... e.g., scouting for you. . . and the ability to capture and bring alive the context. Insight cannot exist without context.

In a recent study on healthcare, we had 30 diabetes patients above 60 capture the impact of diabetes on their lives on their smart phones and we got such rich granular data on everything from family reactions, home remedies, frustrations to how they deal with the physical and psychological impact the disease has on their lives.

We are also using blogs to add to the conversation – we call these Blographies. A typical project today combines direct inputs from participants; usually forms and scrapbooks and forums (mobile or PC enabled), which result in blog posts and updates to the common database. An example would be one that we did for Wikipedia where we had two spaces - a client space and a participant space. This study has been published by Wikipedia and is available online in full.

There is real value in getting people to think deeper about themselves over a period of time – whether it is a client or customer. You cannot do that in an instance and spaces like these allow us to do so in more reflective ways. And they can be much cheaper than doing multiple in-depth interviews or ethnographic observations.

Participant as Researcher, Researcher as Co-creator: Today's Insight is redefining who a researcher is. We are all researchers today. The tools are in our pockets. We need to begin thinking of our customers or TG as our researchers rather than merely a respondent or subject or customer. Reach them in different ways at different times in their spaces. Let them feel they are participating and contributing. The nuances are much finer now. It is important to find the individual within the group and go very narrow-cast. You then can co-create solutions with them. Gigwalk is an interesting example of this. Gigwalk helps businesses mobilize people anywhere to get their work done at a cost. The company harnesses America's vast army of iPhone users,

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enlisting them to complete various “gigs” when they are out and about.

Who Will Win – The Future of Insights?

Where once, market research agencies and market researchers were repositories of insights, we need to question whether a traditional market research agency is the future at all? What is research, is morphing. We are no more “data collectors”. That part of our model is breaking down – those jobs will be gone. The data is simply available.

The winners will be those who can access all this data bubbling up in different forms, analyse it, and make sense of it, those who can help create compelling experiences and narratives and those who can uncover insight embedded in this data. We will need to view research or insights along “grounded theory” or “empirical” approaches, which take the opposite approach of traditional research. They involve finding clues and opportunities, and letting that data guide the development of insights, instead of starting with a hypothesis that guides the direction. It reminds me of new mums we recently met for a study who said that nowadays, parents take leads even from an infant – rather than teaching or telling the infant what to do – they are learning from their little babies.

Tools and techniques will become critical needing integrated software and hardware solutions and multi-skilled researchers, with good networking abilities. Companies that experiment and build them today will be the future.

Suggestions

Approach: Grounded or empirical, much more individual yet very networked and social, co-creation

Practice: Participative, real-time, multi-layered systems, multiple touchpoints, longitudinal

People: Multi-faceted people - an MBA or a social science degree no more a passport

Tools: Offline and online – mobile and PC convergence across media.

The Dark Side?

A few sobering thoughts:

DIY Research: Possibly Google, Facebook, and other social media platforms will offer up massive panels of “users” and massive Insights playgrounds. Need a quick, global survey of young smartphone users? Women only? No problem. Google Survey will collect data for you in 30 minutes after you have posted your ‘5 questions or less’ survey. Need some collage-based qualitative research done in 20 countries on a new tourist destination? No problem. Just a day’s work.

Survey quality suffers, but the data is abundant. Insight? Well – it may just remain hidden!

Invisible Filtering of the Web and Data: Here’s what Eli Pariser said in his TED talk: *Facebook isn’t the only place that is doing this invisible algorithmic filtering of the web. Even when you’re logged out, Google uses 57 signals to personally tailor your query results - there is no standard Google any more and it’s hard to see – it’s invisible. The internet is showing us what it thinks we want to see, but not necessarily what we need to see. This filter bubble is your own personal unique universe of information that you live in online. But the thing is you don’t decide what gets in, and you don’t see what gets edited out!*

How accurate are these digital filters – they often claim to know you better than you do!

Privacy and Ethics: It is not just about who’s watching... but eventually, it will become about who owns me. Now that’s really scary. There is no denying that those in power are leveraging our tools to exert new forms of power over us. The same insight that brings you better products and services can also create bubbles and get you arrested.

Wolfram Alpha CEO Stephen Wolfram recently said: *“You run into a person (e.g. here at this Summit); your augmented reality system automatically recognizes their face, tells you your social network connections to them, plots the time series of when you’ve exchanged email with them, does topic modeling of recent material about them (or email you’ve exchanged with them) and compares it with things you’ve written recently and suggests interesting conversation topics”.*

Very scary! As an industry we will need to understand and deal with these issues. ♡

Defining Purpose and Meaning in Social Media

Amita Malhotra

As a practitioner, it is sometimes hard to believe how much social media has evolved and transformed in its very character in the past few years. The breed of social media that captured the imagination then has increasingly come to be seen today as 'utopian' or 'idealist' in its orientation.

One of my favourite memories from our early consulting days is a passionate argument in a client's office on a 'small' point around a Twitter contest. While the client insisted on building a step which required the contest participant to 'follow' the brand first, we felt this was not the right thing since the choice to 'follow' should remain with the user and would be of real meaning if the user decided to 'follow' the brand because of a genuine interest and not because it was obligatory to participate. We truly believed that the way to win customers or 'followers' was to create an engagement experience so compelling that they would naturally want to get connected with the brand for similar experiences in future. From the client's perspective, it was easy to assess the success of the programme from the lens of traditional metrics ('reach', growth in database, etc.) but the concept of building goodwill, long-term loyalty (which, we regarded and continue to regard as the true value of social media) was perhaps a bit vague. Let me clarify that by focusing on quality of the experience, we were not suggesting that numbers were of less importance, we had a strong hashtag strategy in place (on a different note, it's sometimes hard to explain how a hashtag strategy is much more meaningful and effective than @follow for a medium as Twitter). We believed that an implicit call-for-action for users (building a 'pull' through the experience) was of long-term value than an explicit push ('follow' us on Twitter).

In a world where 'follow us and win exciting prizes' contests by brands are the norm and users are happy to transact personal data and network for a potential ma-

terial gratification – our concerns then appear to be extraneous today. Or do they?

Vanity Fair – Gathering 'Fans'

In the recent global economic upheavals, from corporate scandals to entire nations on the brink of bankruptcy, if there is a common thread that is at the root of our current problems, it is the relentless pursuit of short-term success with scant regard for the long-term growth

The obsession with 'number of fans' and 'owning' more fans than the competition has become a key driver for brands online, almost akin to the quarter results paranoia in the real world.

or outcome. The obsession with 'number of fans' and 'owning' more fans than the competition has become a key driver for brands online, almost akin to the quarter results paranoia in the real world. A layman may question, why is the desire to gather a large pool of fans such a bad thing for brands? Isn't achieving a certain number of fans crucial to even justify 'investing' in a medium such as social media instead of say TV? The answer is yes and no. In our social media methodology, we have always emphasized the need to build a 'strong nucleus' and achieve 'critical mass',

and to that end, recommended to our customers the need to spend money that can enable inorganic growth (through ads, apps, contests) especially in the infancy stage of the social media programme. There are however two things to keep in mind:

- 1) 'Scaling up' has always been a 'means' for us to achieve a key business outcome and not an 'end' in itself. Given the fear and awe that the medium evokes often among senior management, the social media programme is often reduced to a 'vanity fair' of sorts which has no strategic linkage with the business goals. In a hyper-competitive environment, what ensues is a rat race with higher number of fans than X, Y, Z competitors, becoming an 'end' in itself.
- 2) Facebook, which is the preferred destination for businesses to set up presence, has made several changes in the platform in their own journey towards monetiz-

zation that has had an impact for brands and corporates. By their own admission, the average post by a brand only reaches 16 per cent of overall fans. More than the fan count, it is the engagement count such as 'People Talking About This' (number of people who engaged with the page in the past 7 days by liking, sharing, commenting, etc.) that is of relevance. Hence, fan count in isolation is the most misleading metric to gauge social media success

Is This What Engagement Was Supposed To Be?

Now a lot of new media marketers understand that 'Engagement' is at the heart of a social media programme. Over the past few years, they have understood that this 'Engagement' does not come for free. To make the engagement 'scalable' and 'sustainable' (not even a social media army can keep a meaningful discussion going 24/7 with a million fans), brands employ a combination of contests, applications, and offers on one hand and on the other build a strong content marketing infrastructure. After all, brands are publishers now and behind every witty tweet or a visually delightful Facebook post, there are a whole host of web designers and copy writers.

Generating a 'like' or getting a user to 'share' is pursued with a missionary zeal. Sadly, this only helps achieve a semblance of engagement. There are a whole host of 'strategies' that help generate such 'surface' engagement. One favourite among marketers is using 'topicality' to drive conversations. From cricket, movies, current events to special days, a convenient choice to elicit a response/reaction from the audience is to talk about 'topics' that make for easy conversation. What is forgotten is the 'relevance' of the message. Another favourite term among

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activity is.....' and more 'likes' through updates such as "Like" if you've listened to the Beatles (the last one is a real example).

The real value of social content was to add 'meaning' to what the brand stands for. Unfortunately, today brands risk eroding their core value by facilitating chatter instead of enabling a meaningful dialogue.

Another 'risk' with the way social media marketing has evolved recently is that it seems to be regressing back to days of 'interruption marketing'. On the face, it is permission-based marketing; a brand can 'directly' engage with a user only if the latter has given 'access' (say by 'liking' a page). By granting access, the user also reposes their 'trust' in the brand. This 'trust' gets belied when the brand resorts to the same old interruptive techniques – when the focus shifts from interests of the brand's community to the brand's own self-interests. In the long-term, this can lead to users tuning-out completely and the entire medium getting discredited as a 'spam engine'.

The real value of social content was to add 'meaning' to what the brand stands for. Unfortunately, today brands risk eroding their core value by facilitating chatter instead of enabling a meaningful dialogue.

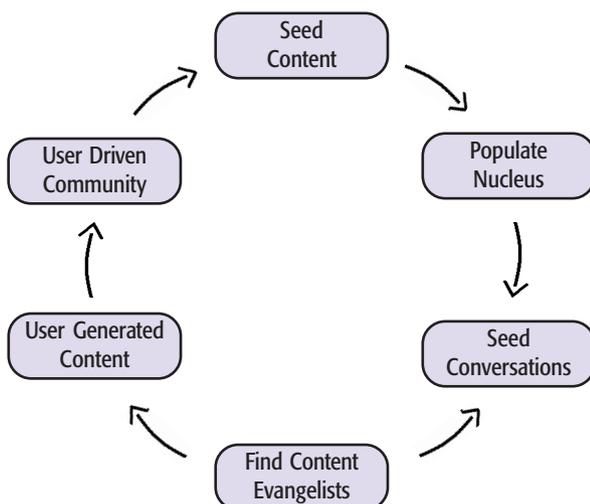
Social media is dead. Long live social media.

My colleague, Rajesh, often uses this line to speak of the extinction of the breed of social media that existed during its advent. In a recent blog post, “An Open Letter to Mark Zuckerberg”, he speaks about one of the aspects of this change:

“The promise of ‘intimate conversations’ has somewhere taken a back-seat, with the focus on ‘scale’ by most marketers, and perhaps, by channels like Facebook. While scale is critical for most large brands, the danger is that the social medium, and Facebook, run the risk of becoming like mass-media – overwhelming amount of marketing messages in which some content is sandwiched- that the audience were running away from. ‘Fans’ have ended up being a ‘mass’ rather than an individual or a group of ‘individuals’ that a brand could understand, and connect with deeply.”

Co-creation was heralded as one of the virtues of the new age marketing enabled by social media. However, co-creation of thoughts, concepts, ideas, and products can happen when the engagement with the community is deep and not superficial, when brands really ‘know’ their fans and not merely ‘reach’ them. Increasingly, the focus for marketers has shifted from community ‘building’ to community ‘management’.

A true community, by definition, is participatory and an evolved community is driven by users than really ‘managed’. However, in reality, communities seeded by brands tend to continue to be ‘driven’ by brands themselves, where they act as ‘gatekeepers’ instead of facilitators.



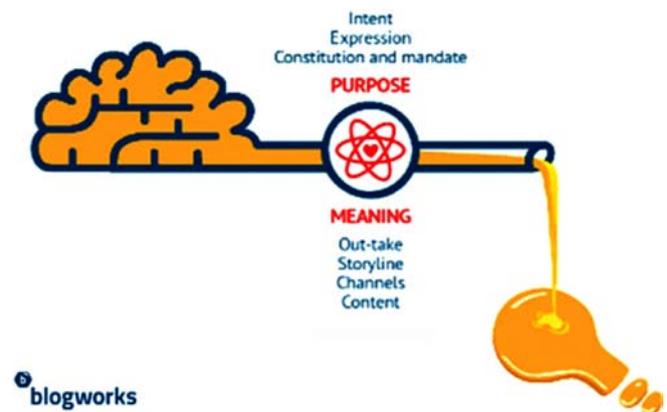
There is a need to re-look at the community, not as an entity that needs to be ‘managed’, but as one that lives shared values and can play an important role in problem solving.

I also feel that brands need to take their role as ‘publishers’ on social media with a pinch of salt. The ‘need for speed’ leaves little scope for checks and balances on the accuracy or introspection of ‘value’ of the message being shared. The anxiety to remain ‘top of mind’, ‘in consideration set’, ‘always engaged’ means frequency takes precedence over the ‘message’. This inflation of chatter and recession of message is of little value in the long term. It only leads to bringing the discourse down to suit the ‘lowest common denominator’.

Finally, there is an urgent need to re-look at how social media efforts of businesses are measured. Brands need to look beyond output generated (no. of ‘fans’, ‘engaged fans’) to more meaningful measures at an outcome level. There is a need to draw a co-correlation with impact on brand health, sales, and organizational efficiency among others.

Purpose and Meaning

It is absolutely imperative that brands and organizations first define their purpose for existing on social media, linked with their business objectives and goals. Who does the brand want to engage with? What does the brand hope to achieve from its social media efforts? How will this intent come alive on social media channels? Which initiatives will help attain these goals? These are questions that need to have answers in place.



The next step is to define what the value is, that the stakeholders will find in initiatives and in engaging with

the brand. Any interaction between the brand and its stakeholders must be of value of the stakeholders. This is how brands can remain relevant, and go on to become brands for the future.

It is only when you know where you want to go, that you can figure out how to get there. And once the destination is in place, getting there is not difficult. ♡

Movement Marketing: A Case Study on the Use of Social Media

Akhil Almeida

How Can Brands Make Sense of Social Media?

In February 2012, almost three thousand people descended upon the Leela Kempinski Hotel in Gurgaon to attend Ad: Tech Delhi. The gathering comprised of marketers, advertising agencies, publishers, media houses, and digital service providers. Over three days, participants from over 20 countries would use the event to network, learn, and understand how businesses could 'engage consumers' and take advantage of the fast growing digital medium. The event organizers called it the "largest digital conference in Asia". The fact that it was happening in India, a country with less than 10 per cent Internet penetration at the time, tells of the potential businesses seen in digitally enabled commerce. The speakers and panelists spoke on a wide variety of topics, but a common theme that emerged over those three days was how brands needed to engage stakeholders through storytelling. As a result, a lot of time was spent discussing the media channels best suited for such an exercise; so, it is no surprise that social media was one of the buzzwords of the conference.

Marketers tend to view social media as a new creation. A new way of hawking brands — and the products and services they represent. And who can blame them? Over the past decade, new behaviours have taken root amongst the general Internet populace.

"Every day hundreds of million people are flocking to the Internet to blog, tweet, IM, and Facebook. But when you look at the Internet on an evolutionary timeline,

everything we consider 'old media' is actually very new. Books and newspapers became common only in the last two hundred years, radio and film in the last hundred. If all of human history were compressed into a single twenty-four-hour day, media as we know them emerged in the last two minutes before midnight. Before that, for the vast majority of human history, *all media was social media*. Media was what happened between people—teaching, gossiping, making music, making each other laugh. Media was participatory, media was social. There was a brief period of time in the twentieth century when 'media' were understood as things created by professionals for others to passively consume. But this new 'mass-media' was so relentlessly one-way and isolating that our older participatory traditions, story-telling, music making, eating together as a family—fell away. Enter the Internet. As soon the technology became available, we began instinctively re-creating the kinds of content

Rise isn't just a word. It is a rallying cry which enables people to unify around shared ideas, values, principles, a way of life or a common goal. In other words, *Rise* is a value system and a call to action shared by people around the world.

and communities that we evolved to crave. We comment on Youtube videos, vote for contestants on reality shows, turn televised news events into live theatre. So what we're seeing today isn't really new, but rather the correction of a historical anomaly. The tools are different. But the behaviours come naturally¹⁶."

As a marketer and digital enthusiast, I've spent considerable time watching social media evolve over the past decade. I'm amazed at the pace of change. How quickly users tend to adopt new technologies, and discard them

¹⁶ Cohen, June (2012). The rise of social media is really a reprise. TED Talks, TED Conference.

just as quickly, as soon as something more interesting comes along. Given the amount of time users spend on social media, and the frenetic pace at which the environment is evolving, it is no wonder that many businesses today are still trying to come to terms with the nuance and potential of social media.

Building the Mahindra Brand

When Mahindra articulated its brand identity, *Rise*, in January of 2011, it was the culmination of a two-year exercise in self-discovery. We were convinced that a strong, unified brand was the key to achieving the group's ambition to become a global household name and to satisfy consumers' increasing desire to identify with the companies they buy from. So we conducted a deep-dive into Mahindra's culture, interviewing employees, customers, and communities in eight countries to understand what mattered to people. Again and again, people identified four qualities: a global mindset, ingenuity, social responsibility, and a challenger spirit. Taken together, they are a call to *Rise*.

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At Mahindra, we have always been aware of the incredible opportunity that major corporations have to drive positive change and have been doing this consistently for over six decades. We create products and services that people use to improve their lives, from rural housing finance to green real-estate. For example, we built the small Mahindra Yuvraj tractor to serve the vast majority of Indian farmers, who farm tiny plots of five acres or less. Priced at the cost of buying and feeding a pair of bullocks for one year, the Yuvraj is driving a mechanization revolution in rural India.

The big challenge for Mahindra was not distilling the brand—but communicating it. Branding was only beginning to gain importance in Indian business. Most

companies still focused largely on pure price competition, or simply overcoming infrastructure barriers to reaching markets. But for Mahindra, identifying the group with the human ambition to *Rise* was a key part of this forward-looking strategy.

Soon after revealing *Rise* as its brand identity, Mahindra set itself the ambitious goal of creating a campaign that would not only communicate, but also demonstrate the brand. The new initiative had to be participative. It also had to place the Mahindra Group as no more than one voice in the broader movement.

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The Power of Cultural Movements

In the two years that Mahindra spent developing and articulating *Rise*, a series of events took place. These events would change the way people and organizations viewed each other and the world around them.

- In the wake of the financial meltdown and the destruction of trust in much of the private sector, stakeholders were looking for companies they could respect and rely on. They were looking for institutions who shared their values and their goals for the future.
- People around the world were clamouring for change—in governance, transparency, and accountability, not only from organizations but also governments.

These 'movements to empower citizens' were rapidly moving from the fringe to the mainstream. Enabled by the Internet and fuelled by social media, they were gaining momentum and creating dramatic shifts in business and politics.

With *Rise*, we knew that we had tapped into something bigger than ourselves. We also knew that for *Rise* to be meaningful and relevant on the global stage, we had to look beyond our businesses and their immediate stakeholders. We needed to reach out to communities at large, empowering people to drive positive change in their own lives. By documenting these stories and

showcasing their successes, we could inspire even more people to take action, sparking a movement of our own – enabling people to *Rise*.

Spark the Rise

In August 2011, Mahindra launched its ‘Spark the Rise’ programme to support innovators and change-makers with the potential to creating positive impact for communities across India. (There are plans for expansion to other countries in years to come.) Successful entrants (or Sparks, as we call them) are awarded a grant from Mahindra. Additionally, we support Sparks by allowing them to use Mahindra’s brand and social media channels to spread the word about their initiatives. By connecting them with like-minded collaborators, including potential mentors, funders and volunteers, Sparks gain access to an ecosystem of partners enabling them to share resources and maximize their impact.

From the outset the programme was designed to be participative. “*You know what needs to be done,*” says the website at sparktherise.com. “*Now you can take action.*”

Users can submit entries under one of the five categories. In keeping with the spirit of sparking a movement, these categories were defined after conducting an extensive six-month survey. The survey asked people around the country to identify the key areas they felt needed most dramatic change when it came to the idea of nation-building in India.

The five categories that emerged were:

- a. **Technology:** Covering a spectrum of high-end innovations as well as frugal technologies that can have deep impact at the grassroots level.
- b. **Agriculture and Rural Development:** Solutions that help bridge growing divide between fast-growing urban India, and *Bharat*, the less glamorous rural sibling, home to the vast majority of its citizens.
- c. **Infrastructure and Transportation:** Solutions to meet the growing needs of communities across the country, both in urban and rural India.

- d. **Energy:** Utilizing a combination of solar, wind, water, and traditional fossil burning methods to provide cleaner, more efficient solutions. These included solutions that provide power to communities in remote off-grid areas.
- e. **Social Entrepreneurship:** An umbrella term that covered innovations in health, education, sports, arts and culture.

In its first season, over 6,000 submissions answered the call for action plans, with 1,473 meeting impact, feasibility, and innovation requirements for posting on the website. By keeping the evaluation criteria source-agnostic, ‘Spark the Rise’ allows both individuals and organizations (big and small) to participate. For-profit and non-profit entries compete on a level playing field.

Through the website, and Mahindra’s social media channels, these projects gained the visibility they needed to attract funding, volunteers, mentorship and press. Over a six-month period, 48 entries were also awarded grants from Mahindra on the basis of public vote and jury choice. The public voting mechanism ensured that innovators reached out to communities they were trying to help,

mobilizing them to garner support. The jury choices ensured that entries which suffered from a lack of access to social media and other viral-enabling technologies were still able to compete on an equal footing. At the end of its first season, ‘Spark the Rise’ had given dozens of innovators across India a chance to craft their own story and share it with millions of people across the country.

Designing Spark the Rise

‘Spark the Rise’ was designed with six tenets in mind, internally known as the “6 Es”: Ease, Excitement, Energizers, Ecosystem, Events, and Engagement.

1. **Ease:** Make participating easy—you have to be where people are. This directive sent ‘Spark the Rise’ to Facebook to attract young urban folks and to our rural dealerships to engage rural innovators. Since the

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launch we have also allowed participation via mobile allowing more than 900 million mobile subscribers¹⁷ to support their favorite entries.

2. **Excitement:** You have to seed excitement so that people want to join you. Mahindra advertised 'Spark the Rise' in print, television ads, online and through roadshows across the country. High-potential Sparks have also featured on a popular TV show called Amazing Indians. The show airs on *Times Now*, one of India's most popular English News channels. In addition, Sparks' success stories were also featured in full-page print ads that ran across national dailies and magazines in multiple languages.
3. **Energizers:** In order to create a movement, you need to engage key members. These "Energizers" are the key to your success. Not only do they amplify your message, but they also act as key influencers in shaping public opinion. Our team reached out to people like Ayaz Memon (recruited as a *Rise* blog writer) and Anand Mahindra, who could act as role models for the movement.
4. **Ecosystem:** The development of an ecosystem of like-minded partners broadens the movement. 'Spark the Rise' reaches out to organizations like Ashoka, Dasra, Innovation Alchemy and the IIT Kharagpur Entrepreneurship Cell to build momentum. We continue to develop our ecosystem partners facilitating collaborative efforts between them and 'Spark the Rise' participants.
5. **Events:** 'Spark the Rise' hosted events that the community could participate in, including campus idea drives at leading institutes of higher learning like XLRI, IITs and NITs. We have also created a series of Twitter chats curated by us and other members of the ecosystem, to deepen understanding of the challenges faced and the solutions needed to address them. The first year of 'Spark the Rise' also culminated in a Grand Finale that was thrown open to all participants and live-streamed on the Internet.
6. **Engagement:** Movements are sustained by the people who run them and 'Spark the Rise' is no exception. Mahindra is constantly striving to create opportunities for people to engage more deeply with the programme, whether it is volunteering time to-

wards a Spark, attending events to learn from practitioners and share opinions, or bringing new perspectives that will help us improve the programme.

In its first year, 'Spark the Rise' was designed to overcome several barriers to action in India: a sense of disillusionment and disempowerment, a lack of information and communication about initiatives around the country, and a lack of resources. By including public voting in the selection of grant winners, 'Spark the Rise' drives innovators to spread the word. The result: collaboration among innovators, an exchange of ideas, mentorship, and even funding. In total, innovators marshaled 740 volunteers and received advice from 473 experts. And they spread awareness to over 2 million people who visited sparkthereise.com and Mahindra's social media.

Lessons from Season 1

The 6 Es gave the 'Spark the Rise' team a strong action framework. But as movement marketing pioneers, Mahindra also had to learn by doing – and sure enough, many lessons were learned along the way.

Be paranoid: When you try to spark a movement and turn over the reins to other people, Murphy's Law rules. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong, and you have to plan for it. In the run-up to the launch, our media agency created a conservative estimate for the number of hits on the site. A day before the launch, our team decided to run the numbers again, only this time we chose to use an optimistic estimate instead. After running the numbers, we realized the scenario indicated that a large number of users could potentially crash the servers. A new server was prepared and the site was migrated to the site a few hours before the launch. By the end of the season, we had significantly beaten all the conservative estimates for site hits; the increased bandwidth and server space meant we were able to run the site smoothly.

When money is involved, there will be mischief: Some pitfalls can certainly be avoided by planning for all scenarios. Others, the team learned to address in real time. Lured by the total US \$500,000 in grants, a slew of attempts to game the web-based voting system sprung up. There were cases of collusion, fake email IDs from spurious domains, and even paying for votes. Our team responded with standard operating procedures for both algorithmic and manual checking of voting patterns and

¹⁷ TRAI - Telecom subscription data for 31st March 2012

results. These resulted in some Sparks' losing votes and for others it meant outright disqualification. It also meant that we had to delay announcements of results for several days to ensure that the winning Sparks were selected on the basis of fair and unbiased voting.

Clear and direct communication: Making tough decisions can lead to a storm of public criticism. After the delays and removal of fraudulent votes, the 'Spark the Rise' discussion forums bloomed with outcries. The experience served as a crash-course on the importance of clear, direct rules and communications, including an exhaustive FAQ.

Be ready to be attacked in public: Setting up social media means creating an outlet where negative as well as positive views will be aired. "Anyone using social media should be prepared to be attacked on it," advises the Rise team. "How you handle those attacks is pivotal for people's perception of your brand." The key, they assert, is not getting defensive or aggressive. Instead, be clear about your stance. Apologize for mistakes—but never apologize for what you believe in.

Be fair to everyone: As sparktherise.com grew from just a few registered users to several hundred thousand, our team had difficulty addressing the needs of every user group. With over 2,000 project submissions demanding greater attention, users with basic problems like browser compatibility and vote submission felt like a second priority. Every user should have a positive experience in order to build a positive perception of the brand. In order to value all users equally, regardless of their level of engagement, it was necessary to allocate greater bandwidth to everyday interaction with the 'Spark the Rise' community.

Sometimes there is no perfect solution: The team also learned that some problems are not solvable. In these cases, the best course is to rely on clear communication to maintain trust and transparency, and plan to do better next time. For example, mobile verification and SMS voting was introduced to prevent fraudulent votes in

the Grand Finale (the bigger jackpots were sure to attract more system-gamers). But one week before the Grand Finale, a user alerted the Rise team that anti-terrorist regulations in the state of Jammu & Kashmir had forbidden the push SMSes used to verify votes. The team made a tough call to go ahead with SMS verification, but it meant that citizens from the state could not be allowed to vote. Our team addressed this by clearly explaining its reasoning to the 'Spark the Rise' community, and as a result there was very little negative feedback. Since then, we have addressed this drawback by allowing participants to vote via missed-call from their mobile phones.

Through social media, 'Spark the Rise' is bridging innovators, and the communities they represent, with a larger ecosystem of organizations. The lessons learned here will inform future programmes and our dealing with stakeholders and communities as we strive to support a movement that sparks real change.

The Vision for this Year

In our first season, we realized that Sparks faced significant challenges when trying to scale up their organizations and impact even after winning a grant. As a result, we have devoted a significant amount of time to understand the needs of our participants and develop specific solutions for them. This year grant winners will have access to training and mentorship to help take their ideas to the next level. Each month, these Sparks will be invited to intensive workshops led by industry experts to help them develop a solid growth model and create deeper social impact. They will also be paired with a mentor from

Dasra, a strategic philanthropy foundation whose mission is to help philanthropists and social entrepreneurs create large-scale social change. The mentors will provide additional support and coaching, and follow up with grant winners to track progress towards stated goals.

'Spark the Rise' is also focusing on increasing rural participation. Reaching deeper corners of the country means overcoming lack of infrastructure, illiteracy and multiple languages. The Rise team plans to use Mahindra's extensive network of dealers—it is India's largest non-banking financial company and a leading provider of tractors and utility vehicles—to meet rural innovators in person.

'Spark the Rise' events have also been scaled up. A series of nationwide roadshows began in September 2012 featuring keynote speakers on specific challenges faced by the 'Spark the Rise' ecosystem. These were followed by a panel discussion that includes a grant winner from Season 1. Afterwards, attendees jump into the conversation through a Q&A. Participants have found the events to be interactive and stimulating.

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