



UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON WORKFORCE

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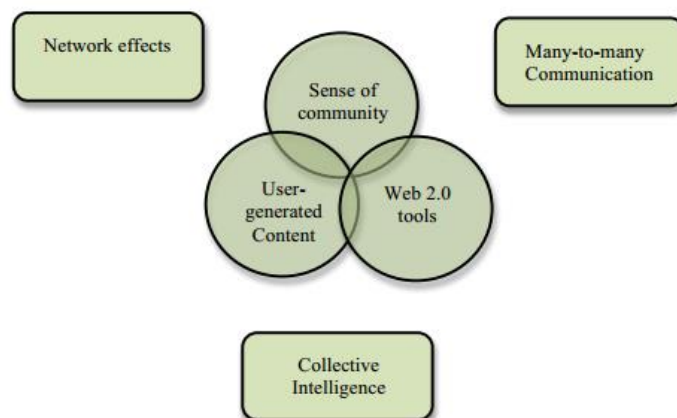
Abstract

Social Media is a broadly used term for all tools and technologies that are currently widely in use for people to connect and share information online. There are various definitions of this term which has been studied in this paper. Also, social media has evolved over a period of time and its history is also studied as part of this research paper. Further, various types and classifications of social media are presented. Most importantly, the impact of social media on the modern day workforce is studied as part of this research paper.

Keywords: *Internet, Social media, Technology, Web 2.0*

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA

‘Social’ means the interaction of humans with other humans and ‘media’ means technology used to store and deliver information or data. Therefore, in short ‘social media’ stands for ‘technologies that facilitate interactions between humans using information or data’ or ‘technologies that facilitate conversation’. In recent technological terms, the phrase social media refers to ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content’ (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).



Source: Lehtimäki et al. (2009)

Figure No. 1: The Formation of Social Media

Lehtimäki et al. (2009) define social media as “the new information channel on the internet. Web 2.0 tools are applications using this channel.” This definition of social media can be illustrated using Figure 1. Here social media consists of a sense of community, user-generated content and web 2.0 tools and together they result in network effects, many-to-many communication and collective intelligence.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.”

Hayes (2010) talks about social media as a collection of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. Such content can then be shared across the connected people through social interaction over the internet. Key aspect of such definition is the strong connect of the tool with the medium that is internet and the ability of being online in this case. He further goes on to suggest that social media has enabled democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers.

In a very interesting comparison between the tradition media and the social media, Scoble (2007) defines certain attributes which differentiate the social media and thereby define it:

- Social Media has the ability of allowing the content to be changed and updated rapidly whereas in case of traditional media, once content is published, it usually cannot be update. Only fresh revisions can be published
- Social media allows interaction
- Social media allows the measurement of popularity of content. In Facebook and YouTube terminology, number of “likes” help instantly gauge the popularity of any content posted
- Social media is enabled by the technology behind it for easy and fast retrieval of archive/history related to any content
- Social media allows usage of text, video, audio and pictures simultaneously thereby making it a more holistic interaction with the freedom of choice for the users
- Social media is not bound by strict publishing guidelines unless the content is being posted on a particular site. The user can chose and publish with minimal interference or obstruction.

The key idea that the author is driving is the flexibility to allow interaction in one form or the other making it a real-time interaction which was a challenge in the traditional media.

Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008) studied several social media sites and have listed their 5 main characteristics (Table 1).

Table No. 1: Main Characteristics of Social Media Sites

1. There is a space to share the content.
2. Participants in this space create, share or evaluate all or most of the content themselves.
3. It is based on social interaction.
4. All content has an URL to link it to the external networks.
5. All actively participating members of the site have their own profile page to link to other people, to the content, to the platform itself and to the possible applications

Other features which often occur in social media sites, but are not obligatory are given in Table 2 (Lietsala and Sirkkunen, 2008).

Table No. 2: Commonly Occurring Features of Social Media Sites

6. It feels like a community.
7. People contribute free.
8. There is a tagging system that allows folksonomy.
9. Content is distributed with feeds in and out of the site.
10. The platforms and tools are in the development phase and changes on the run.

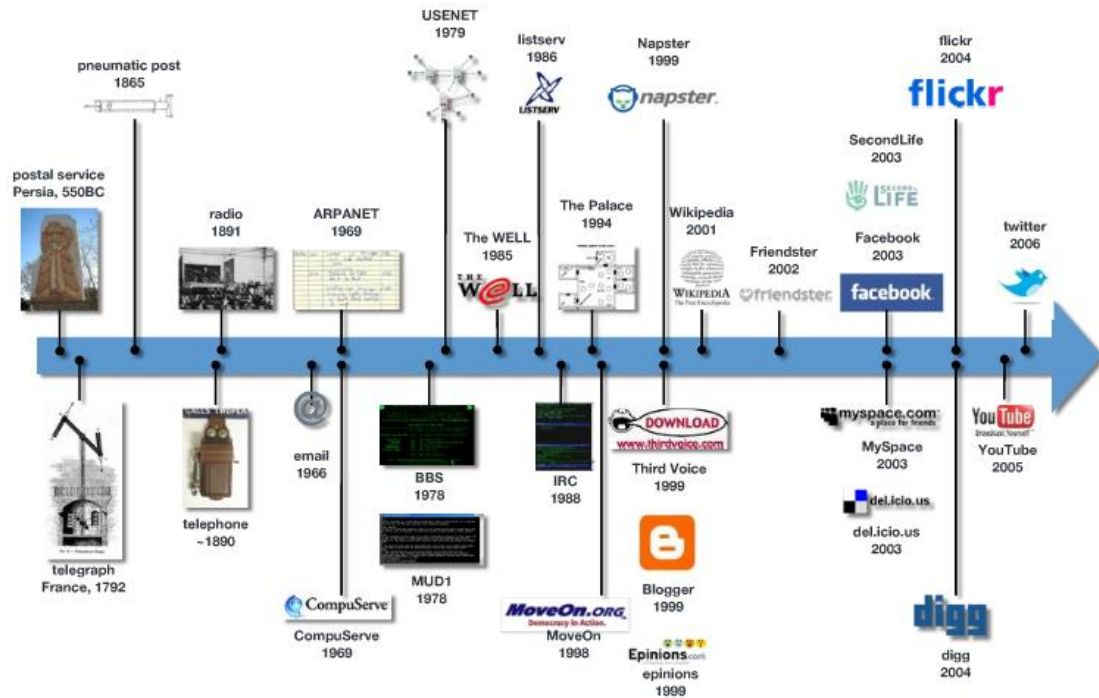
Social networking is one of the most substantial parts of social media. Pettenati and Cigognini (2007) categorise the characteristics of social networking as given in Table 3.

Table No. 3: Social Networking Characteristics

Goal	Relation based on individual interests, debate, confront on specific topics; multiplicity and heterogeneity of joining interests and motivations
Belonging	Spontaneous and autonomous motivation
Duration	Non-defined
Cohesion and enabling factors	High level of trust (relevance of reputation), sense of responsibility, high technological skills, distributed reflexivity and evaluation (non- autonomous, nor heteronymous but socially spread) Type of relation: share/evaluate

HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

It is said, “The Internet has always been social.” Though the earliest form of social media or social communication can be dated centuries back with the advent of postal service, the social media wave as we know today is quite recent and it has swept the world with its popularity. For instance, one of the most popular social networking sites Facebook was launched in February 2004 but as of July 2011, it already has more than 750 million active users. Twitter – the microblogging site was created in March 2006 and has 200 million users as of 2011. Figure 2 depicts the timeline of social media (Carton, 2011).



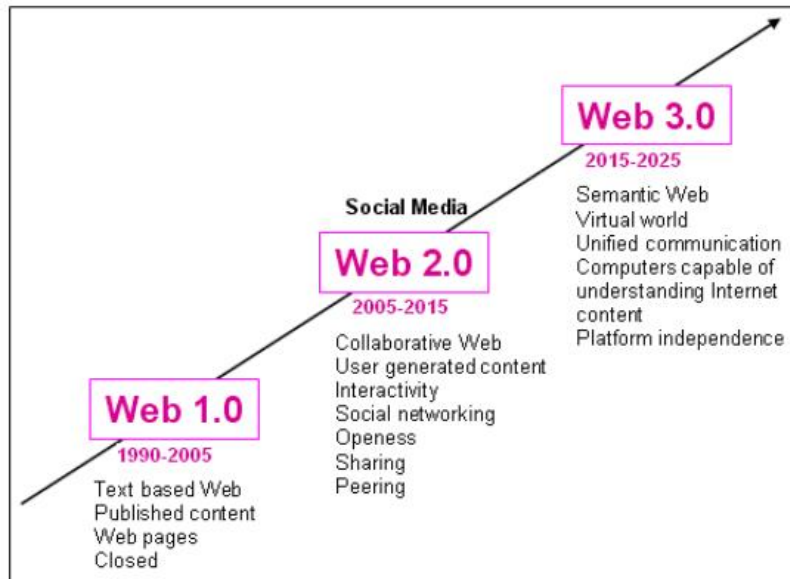
Source: Carton (2011)

Figure No.2: Timeline of Social Media by Carton

Funk (2011) starts the timeline of social media only from 1995 (Table 4). According to Funk him, “when the Web made its commercial emergence in the mid-nineties, social applications like chat rooms were followed by private networking tools such as IM and ICQ, and finally by full-fledged social networks like SixDegrees in 1997 and Friendster in 2002.

Table No. 4: Timeline of Social Media by Funk

1995: Craigslist
1997: SixDegrees
1999: Live Journal, Black Planet, Blogger, Napster
2000: MiGente
2001: Ryze, Wikipedia, StumbleUpon
2002: Friendster, Technorati
2003: LinkedIn, Hi5, Wordpress, Skype, Furl, SecondLife
2004: Facebook, Flickr, Digg, MySpace, Orkut, Yelp
2005: YouTube, Bebo, Ning, MocoSpace
2006: Twitter
2007: iPhone, Friendfeed, Seismic
2008: AppStore, Tweetdeck, Groupon, SCVNGR
2009: Foursquare, Google Wave, ChatRoulette



Source: Säntti (2008)

Figure No. 3: Development from Web 1.0 to Web 3.0

Säntti (2008) illustrates how Web 3.0 will develop further from the current Web 2.0 (Figure 3). According to Driver (2008), workers in the future will “use Web3D to teach and learn, innovate collaboratively, communicate and network, interact with and present information, and manage real-world systems.”

TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Safko (2012) attempts to organise the entire world of social media into fifteen categories:

1. **Social Networking:** “This category includes those platforms which are used today in social media to connect, share, educate, interact, and build trust.”
2. **Publish:** “There have been clay tablets, papyrus, hieroglyphs, handwriting, the printing press, movable type, lithography, computers, desktop publishing, print-on-demand, forums, e-mail, web pages, blogs and comments, text messaging, photo and video sharing, voicemail, and now Twitter”
3. **Photo Sharing:** “Ever since there were photographs, people were sharing them with each other. Sharing photos are a way of capturing moments in time, which captures the emotions that we can share with others.”
4. **Audio:** “Audio allows us to sit back and allow the author or orator to slowly spoon-feed us content with inflection, dramatic pauses, and human nuances of him being right there in the room speaking to us. While we listen to the cadence of the words being formed into sentences and thoughts, we can imagine the associated images and watch them play out in our minds to form the story the author is trying to portray.”
5. **Video:** “Video is the preferred choice of medium for relaying information overall... People love video because it’s the next best thing to being in the same room with someone who is sharing his or her knowledge and experiences.”
6. **Microblogging:** “Microblogging is no more than text messaging on steroids. With the demise of Pownce, for the most part we’re talking about Twitter for open text communication and Yammer for internal or behind-the-firewall communication.”
7. **Livecasting:** “Livecasting is broadcasting video live. It could be 24 hours a day or just for a simple one-hour television show. Livecasting is the ultimate in reality television and it’s available for free to everyone.”

8. **Virtual Worlds:** “Platforms like Second Life which allow its users to interact with each other through ‘avatars’ are included in this category. Here people from all over the world can meet, talk, exchange ideas, and watch presentations without leaving their homes or workstations.”
 9. **Gaming:** “Many Fortune 1000 companies have participated in gaming as a way to build brand recognition.”
 10. **Productivity Applications:** “These tools include event management, VoIP telecommunications, peer to peer downloads, alerts, word processing and spread sheets in the cloud, and even online surveys.”
 11. **Aggregators:** “Aggregators are web sites that allow you to choose what type of content you want to see, where you want it to come from, present it to you all in an organised page, and do it automatically all of the time. Aggregators allow you to see all of the new blogs, web pages, news, audio, photo, and video updates all in one convenient web page location.”
 12. **RSS:** “RSS, or Really Simple Syndication, is the name of the technology and also the name of just one of the technology providers. An RSS feature on a blog or web site allows you to sign up and automatically get notified whenever there is an update to the site including a new blog or news.”
 13. **Search:** “Internet search is one of the most important functions of the Internet... as the number of web and blog pages grows, search will become even more integral to your Internet experience and to your customers and prospects.”
 14. **Mobile:** “ It’s through this technology that people from around the world are staying in touch with one another, accessing their e-mail, sending photos, audio, video, blogging, and surfing the Web.”
 15. **Interpersonal:** “This is another category of seemingly unrelated technology. The common thread, however, is that they are all tools that allow you to connect and communicate with your customers and prospects.”
- Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008) make a division of social media tools into six subgroups by genre:
1. Content creation and publishing tools
 2. Content sharing
 3. Social networks
 4. Collaborative productions
 5. Virtual words
 6. Add-ons

Table 5 examines the main practices of each of the six genres.

Table No. 5: Genres of Social Media and their Activity Types

Genre	Main Practices
Content creation and publishing tools	Production, publishing, dissemination
Content sharing	Sharing all kinds of content with peers
Social networks	Keeping up the old and building new social networks, self-promotion etc.
Collaborative productions	Participation in collective build productions
Virtual worlds	Play, experience and live in virtual environments
Add-ons	Adoption of practices from one site to another. Transforms a service into a feature of another site or adds new use-value to the existing communities and social media sites through 3 rd party applications.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media can be classified into six categories:

- Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Blogs and micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter)
- Content communities (e.g. YouTube)
- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
- Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)
- Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)

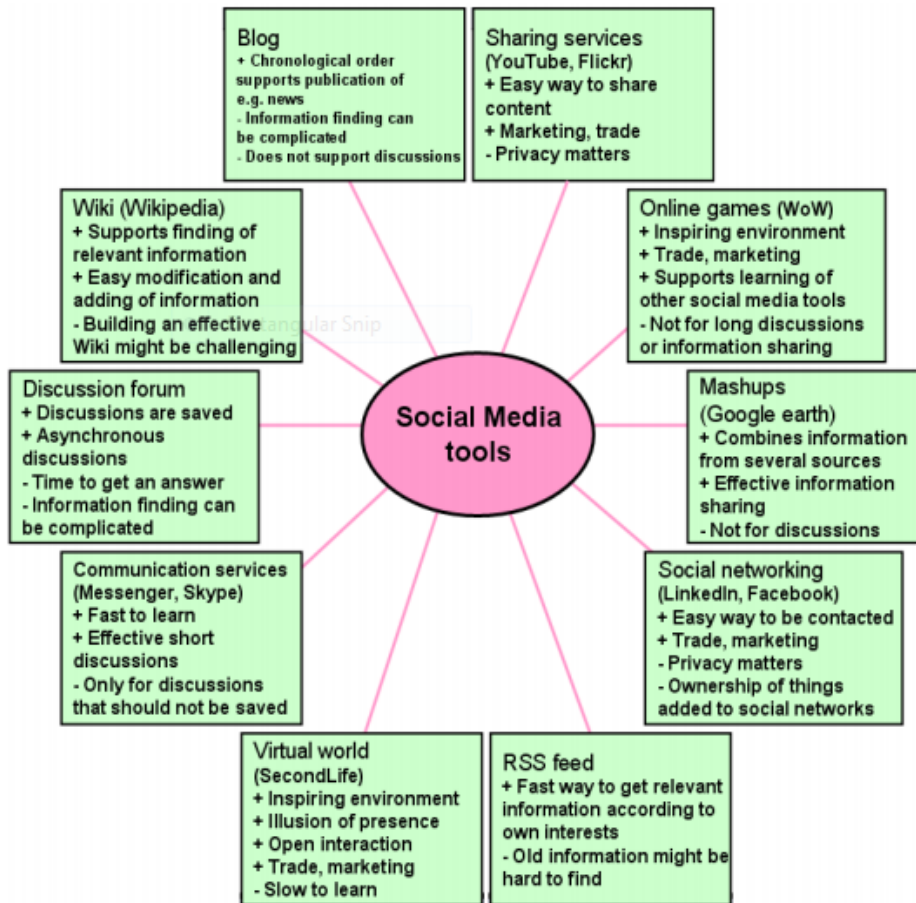
Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) further classify the social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure (Table 6).

Table No. 6: Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

“With respect to social presence and media richness, applications such as collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) and blogs score lowest, as they are often text-based and hence only allow for a relatively simple exchange. On the next level are content communities (e.g., YouTube) and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) which, in addition to text-based communication, enable the sharing of pictures, videos, and other forms of media. On the highest level are virtual game and social worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft, Second Life), which try to replicate all dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment. Regarding self-presentation and self-disclosure, blogs usually score higher than collaborative projects, as the latter tend to be focused on specific content domains. In a similar spirit, social networking sites allow for more self-disclosure than content communities. Finally, virtual social worlds require a higher level of self-disclosure than virtual game worlds, as the latter are ruled by strict guidelines that force users to behave in a certain way (e.g., as warriors in an imaginary fantasy land).”

Säntti (2008) illustrates various social media tools and also adapted the strengths and weaknesses of social media tools from the work of Melakoski et al. (2007) (Figure 4).



Source: Säntti (2008), Melakoski et al. (2007)

Figure No. 4: Strengths and weaknesses of Social Media Tools

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WORKFORCE

The research from the perspective of social media and its effect on / use by employees is quite limited. NOVA Workforce Board (2011) in its report tries to understand the trends in how social media are being used in the recruiting and hiring process in Silicon Valley and which skills and fluency these companies expect prospective employees to possess in order to be hired. Social Media Governance has compiled social media policies of 177 companies used for their employees as well as businesses. Manpower survey (2010) intended to gauge employer attitudes toward the use of external social media in the workplace.

Among the few research which determine the impact of social media on employee productivity or/ and satisfaction, Nucleus research (2009) points that companies effectively lose an average of 1.5 percent of total office productivity when employees can access Facebook during the work day.

As per a research commissioned by Gaudin (2009) cites research by IT recruitment firm Robert Half Technology (Techjournal, 2011) more than half (54 percent) of chief information officers interviewed said visiting social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace while at work is "completely prohibited" by company policy. Of the remaining respondents,

- 19 percent allow social networking activities for business purposes only;
- percent said employees are allowed limited personal use of such sites;
- 10 percent said employees can access social networks for any type of personal use;
- 1 percent either didn't know or provided no answer

Whereas, according to a report released by AT&T (Dynamic Markets, 2008), social networking tools as part of everyday working life has led to an increase in efficiency.

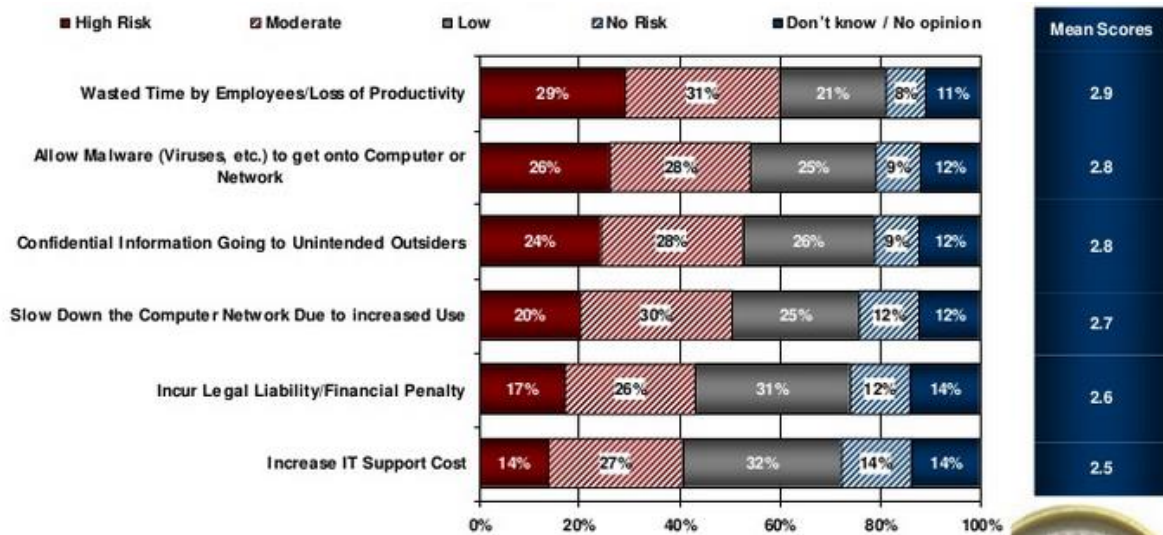
Otala (2008) argues that if an organisation wants to live in an Internet culture - which is collaborative and open - it must adapt also new operational models that support openness. As an example, Otala (2008) describes IBM's new way of action from closeness to openness. IBM has just recently opened some of its programming patents to be utilized by others. It hopes to benefit from the product development made by all users. According to Otala (2008) employees cannot be forced to be innovative and a company should create circumstances that motivate people to share knowledge, collect new knowledge and question the existing information. A company should find a way to encourage people to share their ideas. This can be supported through incentive systems providing rewards or awards. Interaction with others is one of the possible ways to encourage innovation.

Crockett and Gerhart (2011) suggest that by using social media for employee communication companies can "promote community, show off their company's culture, attract new talent, and build transparency around their company's culture and personality".

Ferreira & du Plessis (2009) in their research conclude that online social networking (OSN) (a part of social media) can be used to increase collaboration between individuals who share a common interest or goal. Increased collaboration will stimulate knowledge sharing between individuals, with the possible effect of increased productivity. However, they also warn of the risks associated with OSN which include loss of privacy, bandwidth and storage consumption, exposure to malware and lower employee productivity.

Aguenza and Som (2012) investigated the relevance of collaborative technology such as social networking to employee productivity in the workplace. They discovered that "use of social networks at work helped employees improve their productivity, but numerous studies also found the opposite. Thus, the authors suggest that organisations should comprehend about social networking before educating their employees and setting appropriate policies at workplace.

Zeiger (2009) in her article lists that allowing access to social networking websites in the workplace negatively impacts employee productivity as the "distractions available on the websites often outweigh any benefits." Also, "social networking has the ability to hurt employee relations within a company", and "Allowing access to social networking in the workplace opens a company up to potential breaches in confidentiality and a tarnished image."



Source: SHRM (2011)

Figure No. 5: Perceived Risks of Social Networking Sites for Organisations

SHRM (2011) in its survey on ‘Social Media in the Workplace’ asked the respondents if their organisations track employee use of social media services and whether they block access to these services. Overall, 31% of companies were found to track employee use of social media services, and 43% block access to social media platforms on organisation-owned computers or handheld devices. The most frequently blocked social media and multimedia platforms were found to be 1) Facebook (39%), 2) Myspace (38%), 3) Twitter (33%), 4) YouTube (32%) and 5) iTunes (26%). Larger-staff-sized organisations, publicly owned for-profit organisations and firms with multinational operations locations were more likely to track employee use of and block access to social media (Figure 5).

Mayer Brown (2011), a global legal services organisation put together a publication covering legal issues related to using social media in the workplace. The publication covered 44 jurisdictions, India being one of them. Among the questions they asked two of them were, “What problems could an employer face as a result of employees using social media sites? and, What steps can be taken by an employer to minimise the risks associated with employees using social media sites?” The answers for the Indian context were:

“What problems could an employer face as a result of employees using social media sites? An employee could post information on a social media site that breaches their obligations of confidentiality to their employer. An employee could also post information that damages their employer’s reputation. Social media sites could be used by a former employee as a medium to solicit employees of the employer. A state-owned employer could also be held liable for any postings by employees that constitute unlawful discrimination or harassment against other employees. The use of social media sites could also result in a loss of productivity within the workforce.”

“What steps can be taken by an employer to minimise the risks associated with employees using social media sites?”

- Block access to social media sites.
- Put in place a social networking policy.
- Provide training to employees on the pitfalls of using social media.
- Incorporate within employment contracts confidentiality clauses and non-solicitation covenants.”

SilkRoad (2012), a leading provider of cloud-based social talent management solutions conducted a survey of over 1000 employees around why and how employees are using social

media in the workplace: the tools they use to communicate and collaborate, how often they access personal social media during the workday, and whether their companies had provided policies to guide their online experience.” The report throws up some central issues for organisations.

- *“Employees access personal social media daily from mobile devices in surprising numbers.* Findings show that 75% of workers access social media on the job from their personal mobile devices at least once a day, and 60% access it multiple times. With the proliferation of smart phone use, this practice is expected to grow. Rather than viewing the activity as a threat, corporations might view it as an opportunity, harness the potential of social media, and take steps to educate and guide employees.
- *Blocking, restricting, or monitoring social media sites at work does not curtail employees’ use of personal social media during the workday.* If executives in the C-suite think that limiting employees’ access will reduce social media use, they might be mistaken.
- *Developing social media policy is a thorny and confusing issue for companies.* Findings show that a substantial number of companies have no policy regarding social media, and few companies offer social media training. Clearly, businesses must address this gap to stay ahead of the social transformation that’s occurring. “Best practices” in social media use, aligned with company goals and culture, must be developed. An informed workforce well-trained in social media can better engage customers and become online champions of the organisation.
- *Organisations, particularly HR professionals, must be aware of the legal implications regarding asking employees or candidates for social media passwords—particularly during the recruiting and hiring process.* This is a rapidly evolving area of law.

CONCLUSION

It is clearly evident that Social Media does have an important impact on the modern day workforce especially in work environments where Information Technology plays a significant role. Accordingly, it becomes important for organisation to consider this important dimension both in workforce productivity enablement as well as policy formation around the usage for such platforms in the organisation.

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