Chapter 3
Social Media and Social Networking

Abstract Information can travel at the speed of light, and social media and social networking services make it possible to actually deliver that information at lightning speed to and for billions of people around the planet. This chapter introduces these two concepts, along with various services that facilitate them and a number of issues stemming from their introduction and use. The chapter first describes how social media and social networking services and systems are defined and studied. In doing so, it points out how being social—something that is fundamental to humankind—has taken shape in the online world. The chapter then dives deeper into some of the issues introduced by and studied within the context of social media/networking. These include privacy, identity construction, impression making, communication, social capital, knowledge sharing, access, and digital inequality.

3.1 Introduction

Some time in 2011, there was an earthquake that moderately shook the Northeast United States. Its epicenter was around Washington, DC, and the shockwaves propagated through a large part of the East Coast. While the quake did not produce any substantial damage to people or properties, it was intriguing that, before Bostonians physically felt the tremors, they learned about this event through tweets from the DC area. This is truly an example of information traveling at the speed of light—certainly at a speed faster than an earthquake!

If this was written a decade ago, we would be talking about how amazing this phenomenon is—information dissemination through a microblogging site in a manner not previously conceivable. But we live in an era where such instances are a commonplace. The power of the participatory Web, often called the Web 2.0, is realized and practiced by almost everyone connected to the Internet. While it's not a physically different entity, Web 2.0 reflects a revolutionary mentality in Web users. This new platform, which includes user-driven services and user-generated content, affords us the ability to not only seek and consume information but also to produce and manipulate it. In this chapter, we will see how this new information behavior is manifested through social media and networking services.
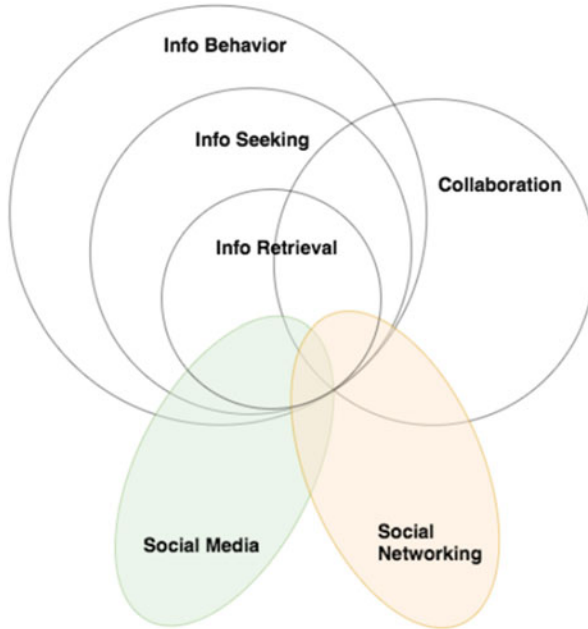
Fig. 3.1 A schematic view of social media and social networking in the context of other related concepts

The chapter will start with a section on social media and a section on social networking, even though at times it's hard to separate them. Then we will dive deeper into some of the core issues relating to social media/networking, including privacy, identity construction, communication and knowledge sharing, and social capital. The big picture of all our related concepts, along with social media and social networking, is shown in Fig. 3.1.

3.2 Social Media

Various sources have tried to concretely define social media. Social media encompasses "forms of electronic communication (as Websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)" (Merriam-Webster). Or, "Social media refers to websites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn,[1]

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[1] https://www.linkedin.com.

Instagram,[2] MySpace,[3] YouTube,[4] and the like, sites where individuals create, share, or exchange information and ideas in a virtual community and network" [16, p. 135]. Still, others point out that social media can be used by businesses to attract more consumers for their specific products or services: "Consumers are utilizing platforms—such as content sharing sites, blogs, social networking, and wikis—to create, modify, share, and discuss Internet content" [26]. One thing we can all agree on: a *lot* of people use social media.

As of September 2016, the online social networking application Facebook registered more than 1.18 billion daily active users on average [12]. 1.09 billion daily active users access the site via mobile devices, while 1.79 billion users access the site monthly and 1.66 billion users access the site monthly via mobile [12]. Facebook reports that approximately 84.9% of daily active users are outside the United States or Canada [12].

Facebook currently leads the way as the most popular social networking platform, followed by WhatsApp[5] and Facebook Messenger. In general, social media usage has grown exponentially in the past 10 years. In 2006, 7% of the United States population used one or more social networking sites (SNSs). Now, in 2016, 65% engage via social media, and 76% of American Internet users participate in social networking [7].

Social media users range from teenagers to adults; members of Generation X (35–44 years old) are increasingly joining the number of users, spectators, and critics of social media [25, p. 59]. As of 2014, the over-65 demographic was driving social media growth, while the 50–63 age cohort had stalled. Instagram and Tumblr[6] are most popular with younger age groups, but most forms of social media now reach users of all ages and genders [7].

And we don't only see diversity in demographics when it comes to social media; there are also differences in how social media users engage with their chosen platforms. "Social media is fueled by information, just as the Internet and other digital media before it, but the information on social media is different from other media in that we are not just consumers of the information on it, but are also active producers of information within it" [38, p. 34]. Social media users generally tend to seek information that is in accordance with their interests, needs, or existing attitudes. They tend to avoid information that contradicts their viewpoints and often employ selective exposure, in which they consciously or unconsciously avoid or reject contradictory information. "Hence, people often stay within their own comfort zones in regard to information seeking and information sharing, rather than venture into zones that involve a lot of sense-making" [38, p. 37].

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[2]https://www.instagram.com.

[3]https://myspace.com.

[4]https://www.youtube.com.

[5]https://www.whatsapp.com.

[6]https://www.tumblr.com.

Many researchers have attempted to answer one basic, central question concerning social media: why do people participate? Studies have found numerous reasons behind users' participation in social media, many of which support observations of diverse information seeking behaviors. For instance, in a study conducted by Kim et al. [27], researchers examined a variety of social media platforms used as information sources to support various purposes. Leist [31] found that online communities are used for "providing and receiving social support when confronted with a difficult life situation, regardless of geographical location or time" (pp. 1–2). People also use social media as a form of validation and reassurance. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, everything we do revolves around a need we are seeking to satisfy. Once our basic physiological needs such as food, shelter, and water are satisfied, we then need to satisfy our needs for love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Through social media usage, users can meet new people, establish and build relationships with others, express their creativity, and build self-confidence through their interactions. However, a study done by Derek Ruth and Jürgen Pfeffer found that social media is not the most accurate measure of human behavior, since users can misrepresent who they are online [35]. Through their respective examinations of social media, researchers mine a plethora of information.

3.3   Social Networking

SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Yelp, and hundreds of other platforms that attract millions of users, many of whom have integrated SNS use into their daily practices [5, p. 210]. SNSs support a wide range of interests and activities. Despite commonalities found among key technological features, the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied. boyd[7] and Ellison [5] isolate three key features of SNSs: they allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bound system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they can connect, and (3) "view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). Social networking sites began to appear around 1997 and have since grown in global popularity. Duggin and Smith state that, in 2013, 73% of adults online used some sort of SNS (as cited in [16, p. 135]). As of December 2014, Facebook spanned 80 languages [13].

The countless interactions that occur via SNSs comprise an important component of social media. According to Narayan [38], "social media platforms have become tangible and real places where we gather in intended and unintended ways" (p. 33). Social media has altered the concept of "cyberspace" through its transformation of abstract information spaces into concrete places visited in everyday lives and public spheres. Through social media, users are able to construct their identities, play to real and perceived audiences, engage in knowledge sharing activities, and perform

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[7]No, this is not a typo. This is how dannah boyd spells her name!

other tasks that involve interacting with both technology and fellow SNS users. When defining social networking, Kietzmann et al. [26] identify seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The rich information landscape forged by social networking/media has gained a great deal of scholarly and critical attention. Current trends examine identity construction, communication tactics, social capital, knowledge sharing activities, and issues of access.

3.4   Privacy

Social media's growing popularity has given new urgency to individuals' right to privacy. Though users may dole out personal information that ranges from movie preferences to social security numbers, Purdy [41] points out that all data is stored or disseminated without the knowledge of individuals involved. While an estimated 99% of that data may never be analyzed, it remains available.

Two major areas of concern exist between social media and privacy: government behavior and children's safety. The law dealing most specifically with online privacy in the United States is the Electronic Communications and Privacy Act of 1986, which was passed long before social media became pervasive [41]. Although many social media users are aware of privacy concerns, they continue to post personal and/or sensitive information to friends and followers, all of which can easily become available to the public depending on privacy settings. Additionally, law enforcement agencies commonly request information from major social media outlets. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Dropbox have all developed their own regulations for responding to such requests [41]. After data released by whistle-blower Edward Snowden concerning the Verizon metadata program combined with panic over the NSA's violation of online privacy rights via the PRISM surveillance program, a number of laws were introduced to protect digital privacy at the state level. According to Richards [42], a survey of current privacy laws finds them insufficient given the current cyber-landscape.

Children's online privacy is of particular concern. Purdy [41] contends that children and teenagers—who make up a significant portion of social media users—are less likely to be concerned about privacy than older users. The plethora of information that can be gathered from their posts, including addresses and other location indicators, can easily put children in harm's way. Many parents may not be tech-savvy enough to guide their children through an online privacy lesson. A clinical report compiled by the American Academy of Pediatrics [40] discusses youths' exposure to social media and concludes that cyberbullying, "Facebook depression" (in which young people exhibit signs of depression after spending an extended period interacting online rather than face-to-face), sexting, and exposure to inappropriate content are all potential ramifications of online social networking. Internet safety education is a must for young social media users.

Acquisti et al. [1] summarized and connected various streams of empirical research on privacy behavior. They identified three themes that influence how humans behave in the face of privacy concerns:

1. Uncertainty about the consequences of privacy-related behavior and their own preferences over those consequences
2. The context dependency of people's concern (or lack thereof) about privacy, which can vary and change over time and/or based on cultural norms and an illusion of anonymity
3. The degree to which privacy concerns are manipulable by commercial and governmental bodies

In her analysis of these concerns, Johnstone [24] contends that the processes result in "privacy tradeoffs" in which people uncharacteristically disclose personal information that may ultimately be contrary to their and others' best interests.

Beyond everyday social media users and at-risk children, many studies on privacy and social media focus on specific professional groups and how they can navigate various privacy-related challenges. Health-care professionals, for example, publish a great deal of information concerning social media usage. The Alaska Nurses Association [39] permits its members to participate in online social networking, but cautions against including any patient details in their posts and interactions. This protects patients' right to privacy and prevents nurses from breaking their professional, legal, and ethical obligations. Library scholars also focus on social media and its potential effects. Their works generally promote the notion that librarians must continue to champion privacy rights in the face of social media's many controversies and loopholes. For example, Lamdan [30] argues that because social media has become a major source of information and a hub for information seeking, librarians must shape and spread social media policies that protect users' privacy and allow them to seek and share information without limits.

3.5 Identity Construction and Making Impressions

Many studies of social media and SNSs focus on users' ability to both establish their identities and make impressions via their respective profiles and activities. Donath [8] states, "in the world of the virtual community, identity is [. . .] ambiguous. Many of the basic cues about personality and social role we are accustomed to in the physical world are absent" (n.p.). Studying UseNet, Donath [8] asserts that virtual identities can be deceptive and are often based upon an account name, the content and connotation of posts, and social cues such as signatures. Deception can apply to social categories, impersonations, concealed attributes, and "trolls," or those who attempt to pass as legitimate participants in a group [8]. Hancock [23] also tackles digital deception by examining identity-based forms of online deception and the lies that are often present in everyday digital communications.

Gonzales and Hancock [20] examine how computer-mediated self-presentations can alter identities. Using a linguistic analysis, they found that presenting oneself in a mediated context "engenders a sense of public being" that could manipulate an audience [20, p. 179]. They also believe that the Internet serves as an outlet for self-construction, which can inform user behavior.

In terms of the impression a user can make through social media, Utz [43] conducted an experiment to determine how self-generated information combines with friend-generated information and the sheer number of friends a user possesses to influence perceived popularity, communal orientation, and social attractiveness. Her hypothesis operated based on the "warranting principle," or the idea that "perceivers' judgments about a target rely more heavily on information which the targets themselves cannot manipulate than on self-deceptions" [45, p. 229]. Walther et al. [45] used the warranting principle to discuss the effects of social comments on impression formation. They found that there may be domains of impressions for which warranting is heuristically useful—such as physical attractiveness—and others where it is not, such as attributions of introversion and extroversion [45, p. 247]. It would seem, however, that interactions via social media have an important effect on one's social media identity and presence. These interactions revolve around various methods of communication.

3.6   Communication via Social Media Platforms

Many scholars focus on the ways in which communication and expression occur on social media platforms. One area of interest concerns how social media interactions align with face-to-face interactions via communication styles and tactics. In a study conducted among Facebook users, Kramer et al. [28] found that emotional states could be transferred to others via emotional contagion. Previously, emotional contagion—which leads people to experience the same emotions as those they are interacting with without their knowledge—was thought to only apply to in-person situations, but Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock's study suggests that social media interactions can contain many nuances previously assumed to apply only to nonverbal cues. These findings also suggest that massive-scale contagion via social networks is possible.

In their study of Twitter users, Marwick and boyd [36] identify an important difference between social networking and face-to-face communication. They focus on a Twitter user's "imagined audience" and posit that, because social media users do not have a concrete understanding of their reach, they "take cues from the social media environment to imagine the community" (p. 115). In doing so, social media users often frame their posts around imagined audiences that are entirely different from those who actually read and interact with their posted content. These users engage in strategic self-commodification to appeal to their target and/or perceived followings. Bernstein et al. [4] found that social media users consistently underestimate their audience size for their postings, guessing that their audience is

only 27% of its actual size. In a related study, Yee and Bailenson [47] examined self-representation in virtual environments, such as SNSs. They discovered the "Proteus Effect," in which those who represented themselves as confident and/or conventionally attractive engaged in a higher rate of self-disclosure and self-assuredness throughout their interpersonal interactions. While Yee and Bailenson [47] focused mainly on cordial interactions, they admit that their findings also have implications for hostile online communication (p. 274).

In a cornerstone study of computer-mediated communication, Walther [44] contended that "media"—which can be applied to today's conception of social media—could facilitate communication that surpasses typical face-to-face interpersonal information sharing. Walther [44] coined the term "hyperpersonal" to describe this phenomenon and stated that receivers, senders, channels, and feedback elements all contribute to enhanced computer-mediated interpersonal communications. "Hyperpersonal" interactions may be related to current social media phenomena, including offensive postings, "Twitter wars," and other abrasive and/or revealing social networking activities.

In the realm of communication via social media platforms, some scholars focus on specific types of exchanges. Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela [18], for example, studied engaged citizenship and found that citizen communication that took place within large online networks fostered weak interpersonal ties, which led to invigorated civic participation (p. 415).

3.7 Social Capital

Closely related to communication tactics is the idea of "social capital," which a user can accrue through effective social networking. Appel et al. [3] define individual social capital as "the sum of the resources embedded in social structure, or the potential to access resources in social networks for some purposeful action" (p. 399). Social capital contains two distinct measures: bonding and bridging. Bonding refers to resources accessible through one's homogeneous and trusted social network, whereas bridging refers to resources accessible through heterogeneous networks that involve weaker social ties [3]. Various methods have been employed to measure social capital, including analyses of trust levels, participation in voluntary associations, and other levels of engagement. Williams's [46] Internet Social Capital Scale (ISCS) is one way in which these constructs are combined into a metric tool. Appel et al. [3] argue that the ISCS is ineffective due to its conflation of social capital with related concepts, such as social support and attachment. They advocate for alternative measures that rely strictly on the discrete concept of social capital.

Researchers have employed various methods to quantify SNS users' social capital. Ellison et al. [10] studied social capital in the context of Facebook users' "connection strategies," or relational communication activities (p. 873). They found that users derived social capital benefits, such as emotional support and exposure to diverse ideas, through information seeking behaviors rather than connection

strategies that focused on close friends or strangers. In a later study, Ellison et al. [11] examined the relationship between bridging social capital and Facebook Relationship Maintenance Behaviors (FRMB), or behaviors that "assess the extent to which subjects report they engage in activities that signal attention to and purposefully cultivate relationships on the site" (p. 864). Ellison et al. [11] found significant positive relationships between measures of bridging social capital and users' total number of friends and their engagement in FRMB. Kwon and Adler [29] provide a comprehensive overview of social capitals' evolution and cross-disciplinary acceptance as a valid field of study.

3.8   Knowledge Sharing

Social media and social networking can facilitate a variety of knowledge sharing practices. These interactions can be both formal and informal and may or may not be in relation to organized business and managerial practices. Gibbs et al. [17] assert, "Social media tools such as blogs, social network sites (SNSs), wikis and microblogging are proliferating in organizations and providing new sites of collaboration, coordination, and community" (p. 102). Social media enables organizations to participate in knowledge sharing by helping people locate expertise and relevant content, engage in sense-making about other employees, access new people and perspectives, and increase contact among virtual employees [17, p. 102]. Gibbs et al. [17] specifically focus on the ways in which social media platforms can strategically limit information sharing in order to maximize individual and organization-wide productivity and positive attitudes. In their review of enterprise social media practices within organizations, Leonardi et al. [32] provide a comprehensive understanding of communicative activities and work accomplishments through social media platforms.

Faraj et al. [14] report their investigation about knowledge collaboration in online communities (OCs), which include social media platforms and SNSs. They posit that OCs facilitate an unparalleled scale and scope of communication. Specifically, they examine the fluidity inherent in OCs, which engenders a dynamic flow of resources that results in positive and negative consequences. They identify five tensions (passion, time, socially ambiguous identities, social disembodiment of ideas, and temporary convergence) that, when met with certain generative responses, sustain knowledge collaboration through OCs [14]. In a later study, Faraj et al. [15] expand upon this research and create a framework that explores the antecedents of leadership in online communities focused on knowledge work. Fleck and Johnson-Migalski [16] specifically analyze information and knowledge sharing that occur between Adlerian mental health providers and their patient community, and conclude that social media use can educate and reduce clients' isolation if companies are willing to embrace its impact.

Knowledge sharing and classification via Web-based collaborative tagging systems comprise another area of study. Golder and Huberman [19] define collaborative

tagging as "the process by which many users add metadata in the form of keywords to shared content" (p. 198). They assert that tagging can be traced through stable patterns that expedite knowledge sharing through imitation. In a more recent study, Mican and Tomai [37] reiterated these findings, and added that social tagging systems contain various semantic structures that can be integrated with recommendation systems, and thus used to identify experts and trustworthy content.

In a linguistic study of group information seeking, Gonzales et al. [21] found that linguistic style matching (LSM)—an algorithm for calculating verbal mimicry based on an automated textual analysis of function of words—could predict the cohesiveness of groups in both face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions. Thus, verbal mimicry can predict underlying social dynamics that may affect information seeking and sharing on SNSs. In another study that compares face-to-face information seeking and sharing with computer-mediated learning, Lester and King [33] found that students in virtual classroom settings were able to learn just as much as their traditional counterparts.

Zimmer [48] raises a different, but important, issue in his research on social media usage and knowledge gathering. His approach states that researchers who mine SNSs for data are subject to ethical concerns, including consent, properly identifying and respecting privacy, data anonymization prior to release, and the relative expertise of institutional review boards. Lewis et al. [34] also discuss social network analysis, though they use Facebook data to demonstrate the potential to improve network research through social media platforms, particularly because SNSs demonstrate users' cultural preferences.

3.9 Access and Digital Inequality

Of course, social media's ability to facilitate knowledge sharing is contingent upon potential users' ability to access and utilize its features. And at this point, it's important to consider how the world is divided up when it comes to access to digital information (see Fig. 3.2).

Hampton [22] argues against those that believe that users with more privilege and resources reap the most benefits from Internet services. Examining community-level interactions, Hampton [22] states, "The literature on digital inequality [...] has overlooked change within the context where social and civic inequalities are reproduced. The Internet reduces the transaction costs of communication, and this, in turn, undermines contextual constraints on social and civic involvement" (p. 2). Communication and knowledge sharing via social media may actually reduce knowledge gaps. Related to social media's potentially inclusive effects, Allan [2], when studying women in the Sahara, points out that social media "can preserve diverse women's voices, whose perspectives are too often invisible in mainstream news media" (p. 704). Current trends seem to focus on how social media can provide access to marginalized groups, rather than how it could further inhibit disadvantaged populations.
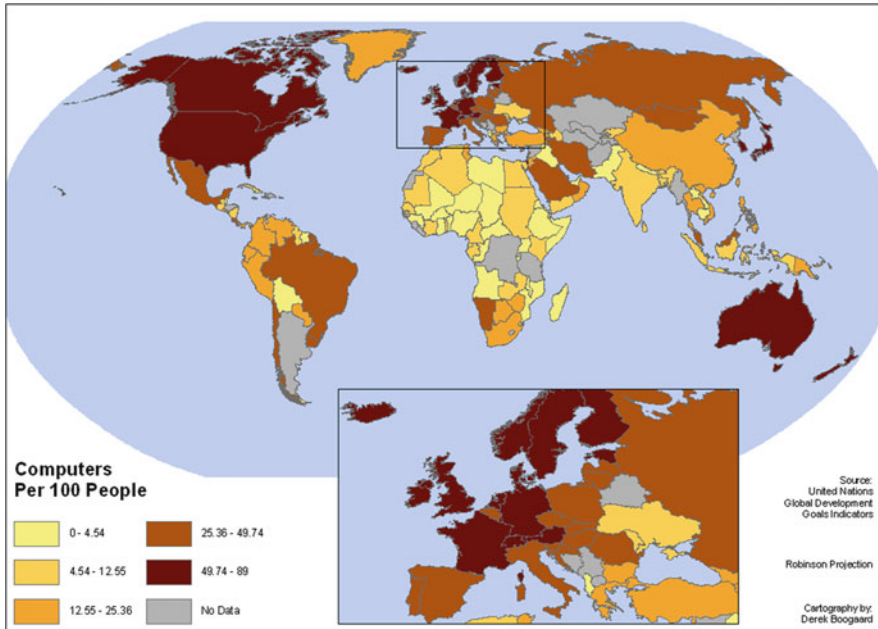
Fig. 3.2 The global digital divide. Source: WikiMedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Global_Digital_Divide1.png

Another major area of access-related study concerns social media users' ages. Buckingham's [6] *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* contains essays that tackle the generational divide in social networking, as well as the advantages and disadvantages granted to young people through their social media literacy. Dutot [9] used the digital gap that exists between generations to study individuals' willingness to adopt social media. Findings suggested that age influences optimism, innovativeness, and perceived usefulness toward the adoption of social media [9].

3.10 Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to social media and social networking concepts, services, and issues. Those born in this century may not even know of the time when these services did not exist, and millennials may not be able to imagine their lives without being connected to and through social media/networking. But relatively speaking, social media and social networking sites (SNSs) are new areas of study that have deep implications for how individuals, interest groups, and corporations communicate with both known contacts and perceived audiences. Thus far, scholars have focused on identity formation, communication, social capital,

knowledge sharing, and access when examining the expanding digital landscape created by various SNSs, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and more. Emerging scholarly trends may take shape around marketing initiatives, educational potential, and social media's role in relaying emergency notifications and information.

In some respect, the social media/networking field has matured a lot, and in some other respect, maybe we are just getting started! Let's revisit that thought in the next section of this book as we look at how the social aspect of our online lives is integrated with information seeking.

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