SOCIAL MEDIA – A THEORETICAL CORRELATION WITH SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract:
The present paper envisages to understand the concept of social media in sociological context. It introduces the meaning and types of social media as well as brings about some clarity with regard to the grey area of whether some things could be categorized as social media or not. Although social media is a relatively new concept, with its presence being felt in every sphere of our lives, its inter-relation with society can somehow be traced through the theories and writings of social psychologists and modern social thinkers and through some of the classical social thinkers too. Through this paper, some of these theories have been relooked and contemplated upon to draw a correlation between social media and the core sociological concepts of Socialization and Social Change. How socialization and social change are the causes and in turn how they get affected by social media is the subject for analysis here.

1. Introduction:

Today the phrase "social media" is so commonly used that it has become a synonymous term to describe apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and others. In fact, it is used to describe almost every website on the Internet. At the same time some of us are really confused as to what falls under social media and what does not. For example, some people consider Facebook and Twitter to be a part of social media but not a blog.

2. Social Media – Meaning:

The phrase "social media" is made up of two terms: "social" and "media". The "social" here stands for interaction among people by sharing information with them and receiving information from them. "Media" refers to the medium, channel or instrument of communication. It could be TV, radio, newspapers; though they are more traditional forms of media.

The traditional forms of media are like a one-way where it is true that you get the information but there is very little scope for you to share your thoughts on a particular subject or issue. But today when we talk of media we simply mean Internet. The traditional forms of media, at a steady pace, are being overtaken by the new giant called Internet. This is because social media through Internet does not just provide you with information but also interacts with you while giving you any information. Social media is a two-way communication which allows you to share your views and communicate as well. For example, websites asking for your comments or giving you a chance to vote or even recommending products or movies to you based on people's review of the same.

But the question still remains: Is blog social media or not? On a closer look, blogs are basically one of the oldest forms of social media (much before friendship, following and chatting sites dominated) considering its characteristic features of having user accounts, comment sections and blog networks. Some of the big blog platforms have very active community blog networks (e.g., WordPress).

Thus, *social media* could be broadly understood as those web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and receiving information. It could be a PDF document, a status update, an animated GIF or a link to a video or an article.

However, one should not confuse social media with another phrase that is making its large presence in society today, i.e., "social networking". Although there is a very thin line of difference between the two, they are very different. One could say that social media is the umbrella term and social networking is just a mere sub-category under social media like its other counterparts such as social news, social bookmarking, wikis, blogs and private web messaging which are also sub-categories under social media. Simply put, networking refers to who your audience is and your relationship with them (e.g., your friends, colleagues, relatives, mere acquaintances or even strangers, clients etc.).

3. Elements of Social Media:

A general notion is that the basic feature for any website to be categorized as social media is where users network socially. However, in reality it is beyond this single feature.

Web Space: Web space or storage space or disk space refers to the amount of space on a web server that is allocated to website owners by the web hosting companies. It is the total quantity of all text files, images, scripts, databases, emails and other files related to the website. Thus, web space in relation to social media is all about the amount of free web space provided to the users to upload content.

Build Profiles: To start with, the users enter personal details like name, address, date of birth, educational qualifications, professional details etc. It is then that the site excavates personal data to connect individuals.

Connecting: Users on social media are encouraged to post personal and professional updates about themselves. The site then becomes a platform to connect friends, relatives and other acquaintances.

Participation and Conversation: Social media encourages people to share viewpoints, opinions and feedback. Members are also allowed to comment on posts made by friends, relatives and others. Traditional media (TV, radio and newspaper) is about "broadcast" (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) but social media is seen as a two-way conversation. The conversations are a great social connect and it gradually bridges the gap between media and audience.

Uploading Content in Real Time: Social media provides users to post content in real time. The content could be in the forms of text, images, audio, video or even symbols for likes and dislikes. In order to keep the site refreshed it is always the last post that appears as the latest post. And since all posts are time stamped, it makes it easy to follow posts.

Communities and Groups: Social media allows communities and groups to form quickly and communicate effectively by sharing common interests, such as a love of cooking, travelling, an election campaign, social issues etc.

Being Connected: There is a vast ocean of information and resources out there in the web space. Most of the social media thrive on their connectedness - making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

4. Forms of Social Media:

Social media in the recent years has developed tremendously making an array of types of social media available. Depending on the various purposes a user may make use of a particular type of social media. The reasons could be varied: it could be for promoting a business or it could also be for just keeping in touch with friends.

Social Networking: This is one of the most casual forms of social media, the purpose being to socialize with friends, classmates, or other people (e.g., facebook). At the same time there are other networking sites like Linkedin which connects you with people in the professional world.

Bookmarking Sites: There is a humongous amount of information out there on the web. Name it and it is there. However, putting them all together (could be news, data, or other resources) in one place for one to reference it would be a killing task. It is here that the bookmarking sites come to our rescue. These sites allow to save and organize links to any number of online resources and websites. Most of them let you to "tag" your links to make them easy to search and share. This could be anything from a news story to a funny video you saw. Sites like Digg and StumbleUpon provide you links based on your likes and what you have read. This form and type of social media is often used to promote a business.

Social News: This allows people to post various news items or links to outside articles and then users could vote on the said items. Voting is the most important aspect of this service the items that get the maximum number of votes get displayed most prominently. Thus the community or the group decides which news items get seen by more people. Popular social news sites are Digg and Reddit.

Microblogging: Microblogging is a recent phenomenon and is an advanced form of texting. One can send posts or could upload thoughts, feelings, and events for others to see through a mobile phone (usually the characters limitation being 160). All news, protests, election campaigns, surgical strikes, terror attacks are today microblogged through Twitter. Instant information and eye-witness accounts make the event and situation real and provides thoughts that cannot not be ascertained from a news report.

Blog Comments and Forums: Forums are a great way to find people who have similar interests. Online forums let users hold conversations by posting and responding to messages. Blog comments are similar except they are attached to blogs and usually the discussion centers around the topic of the blog post. That is the reason why there are hundreds of blogging sites (many of them are genre specific).

Media Sharing: Media sharing websites allow you to upload and share different types of media such as pictures and video. The most popular being YouTube and Flickr. Some of these services also have additional social features such as creating profiles, commenting, etc.

Search Engines: This seems to be a lesser known form of social media. Some years ago, you typed in what you were looking for and the matching results appeared. Today the search engine takes you one step ahead. You can customize your searches with local results, rate the results, and even save your searched results.

5. Social Media and Society:

Everything comes with its good and bad. It is for us to know where to draw the line. How to make use of every new gadget in the most positive way after all lies in our hands. And the same blanket rule applies to social media too. To understand this co-relation between social media and society one first needs to understand society in the very modern day context.

Do we all not at times experience the feeling of discomfort and tension simply in the presence of some people? It also happens that not knowing exactly what other people think of you may lead to self-doubt and

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feelings of insecurity. This is exactly the reason why so many people out there are hovering around social media and making it the trendiest trend today.

6. Social Media and Socialization:

To get a wider view, let us look at what the sociologists and social psychologists have to say. According to the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), the degree of personal insecurity you display in social situations is determined by what you believe other people think of you. Cooley´s concept of the "Looking Glass Self", states that a person's self grows out of a person´s social interactions with others. The view of ourselves comes from the contemplation of personal qualities and impressions of how others perceive us. Actually, how we see ourselves does not come from who we really are, but rather from how we *believe* others see us. Using the social mirror as a measurement of ourselves, a positive reaction from others creates a positive self and a negative reaction creates a negative self (Cooley, 1902).

"I am not who you think I am;
I am not who I think I am;
I am who I think you think I am"… Charles Horton Cooley

Cooley's theory clearly indicates the reason why so many people connect on to social networking sites and are so affected by what others think of them on these platforms. For example, the number of likes on your photograph on Facebook determines what you think others think of you. Or, how many followers you have on Twitter determines how popular you are. Cooley's belief that societies shape the lives of people who live within them stands true even in the social media context.

Contemplating on a similar line was George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), a sociologist and a social psychologist, who conceived society as an exchange of gestures which involves the use of symbols (think of the thumbs up sign on many social media sites and all kinds of emoticons floating out there). In his *Mind, Self and Society* (1934; published posthumously), Mead maintains that the conception a person holds of himself/herself in the mind emerges from social interaction with others. He went on to argue that there can be no "self" without society, no consciousness of self and no communication without society. In turn, society must be understood as a structure that emerges through an ongoing process of communicative social acts, and through transactions between persons who are mutually oriented toward each other (Coser, 1977). The self, according to Mead, is made up of two components: the "I" and the "me." "Me" represents the expectations and attitudes of others (the "generalized other") organized into a social self. The "I" is the response to the "me," or the person's individuality. It is the essence of agency in human action. So, in effect, the "me" is the self as object, while the "I" is the self as subject. Thus, it again comes down to the same conclusion that an individual develops his self only in interaction with others and social media gives an individual that platform to interact with a large number of people at the same time.

Society is a web of social relationship and social media helps in creating a stronger web. Thus social media has a very crucial role to play in an individual's socialization today.

7. Social Media and Social Change:

Moving on from **Socialization**, the other prominent effect that social media has had on society is through **Social Change**. Social change indicates the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Society is a web of social relationships and hence social change means change in the system of social relationships. These are understood in terms of social processes and social interactions and social organization. The father of Sociology, Auguste Comte, spoke of both social statics and social dynamics as part of society. He went on to say that social change is a result of social dynamics and social change is a part of intellectual dimension. Comte went on to argue that social change is an outcome of intellectual development. And what we see today is the change brought about in the society through a development in technology, i.e., social media.

This paper shall concentrate on the technological theory of social change and its interrelation with social media.

Technological theorists have always argued that any technological change which is great enough will produce some other social change as a consequence. They go on to explain that among many other things, social change evolves primarily through contact with other societies, through changes in the ecosystem, population, demographic variables and most importantly here through technological change. Continuous small-scale and short-term changes are inevitable features of human societies, because customs and norms change and invention of new technologies take place. Technological change, synonymous with Industrial Revolution, gave birth to a new social group called the urban proletariat. Ogbum and Nimkoff (1958) have rightly argued that "An important invention need not be limited to only a single social effect. Sometimes it exerts many influences which spread out in different directions like the spokes of a wheel." Technological advancements bring with them a lot of changes in attitudes, beliefs and even in traditions. These influence almost all aspects of our life and culture.

Social thinkers such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and marquis de Condorcet in France and Adam Smith and John Miller in Scotland advanced theories on the progress of human knowledge and technology.

They identified technological evolution as the most important determinant of social change. It has been time and again proved that smelting of iron or the introduction of plough in agriculture or the invention of steam engine or the development of computers and Internet have had lasting social impacts.

Social Media has taken over our lives completely. It has profoundly altered our modes of life. The social institutions of family, religion, morality, marriage, state, property, business, politics too have not been spared of its effects. And this is all happening at breakneck speed universally.

It is a well-known fact that technological information grows at an exponential rate. And one could clearly notice that the social media explosion has happened due to advances in storage, retrieval and communication of data. Thus it is a cyclical process where improvement in technology leads to increase inn information and knowledge. And it is this that is a matter of concern to sociologists. How technological societies (with social media governing every aspect of our lives) will be forced adapt to social changes that improvements in computers and technology will continue to bring.

At this juncture, the "cultural lag" theory by William F. Ogburn in his book *Social Change* (1922) helps us in understanding the distance between human culture and social media (technological culture) and how the adaptation to each other takes place. According to Ogburn non-material aspects of culture persist longer than material aspects of culture because of the strength and intensity of resistance of the former to changes. When changes occur in 'material' culture, i.e., in our technology and invention (e.g., social media), these in turn stimulate changes in the 'non-material' culture, i.e., in our ideas, values, norms, customs, beliefs, laws and social arrangements. This could also lead to some kind of moral and ethical dilemmas as the new social norms are developed. Hence, the time interval between the appearance of a new trait (material culture) and the complete adaptation of the new non-material culture is known as 'cultural lag'. And what we see or call the generation gap in terms of social media is nothing but an apt example of cultural lag.

8. Conclusion:

The lag between *socialization*, *social change* and *social media* is clearly noticed. People are quite excited about the infinite opportunities at their doorstep through social media (be it in their personal or professional lives), but have at the same time not quite been able to adjust to the generation X norms of social media. Truly enough some of the aspects of social media will have to wait for complete adjustment. After all we are talking of human relations, human values, human attitudes and human society and not just a world of mechanical devices, gadgets and gizmos.

However, at the same time, it is because of social media that the world has become a single social system and the growing ties of interdependence affect everyone virtually. The idea of 'global village' developed by Marshall McLuhan (1960) reflects that the world is becoming more integrated in economic, political and cultural terms…All thanks to social media for making it come true!

> **Trivia…**
> + The number of people owning a mobile phone is more than those owning a toothbrush!
> + By 2018, 2.44 billion people will be using social networks (in 2010 it was only 970,000)!
> + Facebook happens to have become the largest country on earth!
> + More than 30 million messages are sent on Facebook and there are almost 350,000 tweets every minute!
> + By 2018 You Tube videos will take over mobile usage!
> + Grandparents have become the fastest growing Twitter users!

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