The Influence of Social Media on Today's Culture
In this Whitepaper

Today, social media has a significant impact on the way we see the world. It is estimated that by 2017, the global social network audience will exceed 2.5 billion. Networking, entertainment, and hard-hitting journalism within the digital sphere have become a part of everyday life.

Thought Leaders now turn to the web to create a splash, influence others, and have their voices heard.

Through the power of social media, organizations and individuals can reach audiences in staggering numbers not previously accessible through traditional media channels. In this whitepaper, we will review examples of social media and its global impact in negative and positive ways.

In addition, we will consider the implications of not leveraging social media – answering the difficult question – is it right for my personal and professional brand?

In this Whitepaper, you will learn:

- Why Social Media is effective as a tool to influence the masses
- Examples of social media influence in today’s culture (pop culture, religion, politics, philanthropy)
- What is a Digital Footprint and why a professional online presence is crucial
- What is Brand Awareness and how does it relate to building an international influence through social media
- Potential pitfalls with social media cultural influence and what behaviors to avoid
Social Media is Changing our World

Social media has many purposes. It allows its user to find their voice, keep in touch, measure the impact of services, build an audience, monitor trends, and stay informed. It has impacted the way we view news, interaction, politics, learning, and business – nearly every aspect of the way we live today.

One in every seven people on Earth is on Facebook. (MediaBistro)

The effect of social media usage spans a number of avenues:

**Journalism**
Today, more than 50% of people learn about breaking news via social media instead of reading a traditional newspaper.

- 65% of traditional media reporters use sites like LinkedIn and Facebook for story research, 52% use Twitter
- 55% of regular news readers say they read the paper mostly on a computer or mobile device (ProCon.org)

**Law Enforcement**
Four out of 5 police officers say they use social media for investigative purposes, community outreach, soliciting crime tips, and notifying the public.

- Bragging about offenses, tagging criminals on social media is helping law enforcement catch criminals faster.

**Education**
Four out of five professors in U.S. colleges and universities use social platforms to teach their students. (ProCon.org)

Definitions

According to the Oxford English Dictionary

**Social Media**
is defined as:

“ Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.”

**Social Networking**
is defined as:

“A platform to build social relations among people who share interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections.”
In some cases, social media has allowed students to increase grades by 50% and has dropped the overall number of absent students.

- 59% of students report that they use social networking sites to discuss educational topics and 50% use the sites to talk about school assignments (ProCon.org)

**Political Awareness**
Statistically, social media inspires people to vote and increases political awareness.

According to the Pew Research Center, young adults are most likely to be politically active on social networking sites. The average Facebook user is six times more likely to attend a political meeting or rally, and *the social media supporter is four times more likely to contact political representatives.*

**Relationships**
According to a Common Sense Media Research Study, 88% of social media users report that social media helps them stay in touch with friends and family they cannot see regularly. Sixty nine percent of social media users report getting to know students at their school better.

**Employment**
One in six job seekers credit social media with helping them find a job, according to a survey by Job Seeker. In addition:

- Nearly 90% of companies use social media for recruitment
- 45% of Fortune 500 firms include links to social media on their career page
- Three out of four hiring managers and recruiters check candidates’ social profiles even if they are not provided
- One out of three employers reject candidates based on something they found on social profiles
Business

Social media produces nearly double the marketing business leads of trade shows, telemarketing, and direct mail, according to Social Media Examiner. Seventy four percent of marketers saw an increase in website traffic after investing time on social media, and social media conversion rates are 13% higher than average conversion rates.

The Social Media Revolution

Social media has inarguably enabled greater political awareness and organization, rewriting political landscapes and causing significant change in the way we live today.

From hashtags (#) used by protestors, to live streaming of uprising and live comments and responses, social change has a new avenue for voices to be heard.

During the Ukraine Uprising, CNBC called social network activity “enormous,” citing copycat protestors outside of the original protest as a result. There have been a number of additional global waves caused by political discourse on social media:

Occupy Wall Street

A tweet with the hashtag #occupywallstreet started the American Occupy movement in 2010-11. These protests were created to raise awareness of the inequality of the upper class and the average American, emphasizing financial greed and corruption.
• Social media traction led to nationwide demonstrations that opposed social inequality
• Led to thousands of arrests for unauthorized protests nationally

Arab Spring
Social media played a central role in shaping political debates, demonstrations and protests in the Arab world.

• During the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak’s resignation in 2011, tweets about political change in Egypt rose from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day
• Videos featuring protest and political commentary received 5.5 million views

Philanthropy
In 2012, a video went viral of a bullied bus driver in the U.S. Catching wind of the bullying, global fundraising site Indiegogo set up a campaign to raise money for the bus driver, Karen, to go on the “vacation of a lifetime.”

• Goal was to raise $5,000
• Once the news spread of the campaign on social media, $703,168 was raised for Karen’s trip

Social Media Pitfalls
The need for social acceptance online has become dangerous. Researchers at Harvard University recently determined that the act of disclosing information about oneself through social media activates the same part of the brain that is associated with the sensation of pleasure, the same feeling that we get from eating food, getting money, etc.

In other words, Social Media is causing Addiction.
The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is evaluating the inclusion of "Internet Addiction Disorder."

- 62% of Adults worldwide report better self-esteem after positive social media feedback (NYMag)
- 25% of adults 18-44 say they can’t remember the last time their smartphone wasn’t next to them (Facebook)
- Some areas of China even have Internet Addiction Camp

**Universal Privacy Concerns**
As many as 13 million users are unaware of or do not understand Facebook privacy settings (Consumer Report).

- Disclosing one’s private life online means teens are getting bullied on social media, sometimes leading to suicide

**Decreased Productivity**
Social Media distractions cost the U.S. economy more than $650 billion each year.

- 42% of American users play social media games like Farmville or Mafia Wars
- Students who spend excessive time online have lower GPAs
- 1 out of 10 workers spend more time on the Internet than they do actually working, with Facebook being the biggest time waster
- People spend 2x more time on Facebook than they do exercising (Mashable)
- 6 out of 10 workers visit social media sites at work

**Loneliness & Disconnect**
The intimacy of friendship has been lessened in exchange for online interaction.

- Version of ‘Self’ presented to impress world instead of building true friendships – experiences faked to seem extraordinary online
- False sense of not being alone: “I share, therefore I am”
Best Practices

Social media can be a great avenue for your personal and professional brand if utilized properly. To start using this valuable resource, put a plan into place to leverage these tools and create a value proposition that helps decide what you hope to gain on this medium. Gain insight into your audience and make your content worth their time. Consider ways to provide moments of positivity, productivity, or value.

Work to make your social media content:

- Authentic
- Transparent
- Educational
- Informative

Targeting
Make sure the social sites you are utilizing are populated by the audience you want to reach.

- Target the right area of the world – which network is your audience using most? Who do you want to listen, and why?
- Share thought provoking, educational content, don’t just “promote”
- Set up an editorial calendar and stick to it: blogging, sharing, commenting, following, joining in on conversation

Engagement
The world’s top brands, like Starbucks, Dell, and Coca Cola, use social media to connect with and market to their customers like never before. Utilize the power of these distribution channels.

- 27% of consumers admit they check social networks as soon as they wake up, and 51% continue to log in periodically throughout the day
- Exercise Thought Leadership by creating a robust, trusted online presence that makes audience want to come back
“At a cocktail party, you wouldn’t walk up to someone and say, ‘Hey, I’m Dave. My stuff is 20% off.’ What you do is ask questions, tell stories, listen, and relate to people.”

- Dave Kerpen, CEO of Likeable Media

**Trust**
Practice the 3 C’s of online sharing, suggested by Fast Company.

- **Culture**: What do you stand for?
- **Community**: Listen to your audience’s needs
- **Conversation**: What does your voice add?

**Combating the Negative**
A social media presence is becoming truly inevitable – work to keep it a positive experience.

- Be aware of the dangers of social media
- Be quick to acknowledge complaints about your online presence
- Try and see it from your audience’s point of view
- Don’t feed the social media “trolls” – those who are there only to cause trouble