



Social Media & Reputation Management

by Sam Schechter

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Welcome to *Social Media & Reputation Management*!

This book was written for CMNS 3502: Social Media & Reputation Management at Douglas College, but could also be a valuable textbook for many other post-secondary courses.

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Chapter 1: Digital Communication Today and Tomorrow

The global pandemic accelerated the growth of digital communication. With the sudden collapse of face-to-face interactions, everybody quickly shifted their attention and activities online. Organizations made significant investments in social media, mass email deployment, mobile apps, websites, landing pages, blogs, webinars,

and a variety of other digital channels. These tools were responsive to that rapidly changing and unpredictable communications environment.

Perhaps more importantly, though, these tools helped create closer and stronger relationships, and not only with existing audiences, but with new audiences who were less connected to digital communication tools. As a result, the digital world looks quite different post-pandemic, and many digital communication strategies and tactics are here to stay.

Given this acceleration in digital activity, new trends and emerging behaviours signal what lies ahead. Here are five areas that will likely have a significant impact on marketers in the near future:

Automation/Personalization

Due to the computational power that is now available, artificial

intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and deep learning (DL) are playing a pivotal role in how organizations communicate. To clarify the differences, artificial intelligence enables computers to mimic human intelligence. Machine learning uses algorithms to parse data, learn from that data, and make informed decisions based on what it has learned. Deep learning structures algorithms in layers to create an “artificial neural network” that can learn and make intelligent decisions on its own.

Many tools and systems are now using ML to identify meaningful patterns and derive insights based on user data and/or behaviours. As a result, many communications tasks and activities that used to be done manually are being automated. This potentially frees up communicators to spend more time thinking strategically and creatively about ways to engage and convert target audiences.

While some early organizational communications automation is already happening, there is still a great deal of growth that will happen in the coming years. Below are a few examples where machine learning is already helping organizations optimize their marketing activities. That said, many of these technologies are still in their infancy and are only being used by early adopters:

Programmatic Advertising

Programmatic advertising is the use of automated technology to buy advertising space. Instead of manually bidding, placing content/copy, and choosing the timing for a specific ad, programmatic advertising uses data insights and algorithms to serve ads to the right user at the right time, and at the right price. With these systems, organizations simply provide content, campaign goals, budget limits, and other campaign constraints (location, demographic targeting), and the system

will optimize the campaigns to deliver the highest possible returns based on the stated goals/constraints. Since computers can monitor, analyze, and adapt faster than people, programmatic advertising can deliver higher returns, greater efficiency, wider reach, and more ad placements. However, these systems tend to be more expensive, may not always properly match the ad to the audience, and could be vulnerable to fraud. As with any automated system, professionals must review the results and to make sure these systems are best supporting the organization's needs and goals.

Personalization/Recommendation Engines

A **personalization engine** (PE) (also called a recommendation engine) uses insights from a user's behaviour combined with data from other similar users to deliver a personalized experience. The content that is delivered to the user should be contextually relevant and match the user's needs and preferences. Since personalization engines use advanced AI and machine learning-based algorithms to make predictions of what users will need, the more data these engines access and analyze, the more accurate their predictions are. PEs are frequently used for ecommerce to make product recommendations, but they are also widely used by media organizations (e.g., news, music, or streaming companies). These are key benefits of PEs:

- Finer customer segmentation (i.e., the ability to segment your audiences into smaller segments and still support their needs)
- Tailored messages that can be optimized at the individual level

- Shorter conversion times because the customer journey is much more targeted
- Increased revenues due to promoting complementary and/or related products/services that best meet the user's needs.

While there are many advantages, PEs can be quite expensive and require time to setup and collect enough data before benefitting the target audience. Be aware of the significant upfront investment of both time and money before reaping the benefits of these tools.

Conversational Marketing

Conversational Marketing is a way of engaging with a target audience via real-time, dialogue-driven activities such as live chat, messaging apps, or conversational AI (chatbots). The goal of conversational marketing is to create meaningful customer relationships through conversations and to make the customer experience as smooth and easy as possible. To scale conversational marketing, many organizations are turning to chatbots.

Chatbots can help automate some communications and ensure instant and timely responses to customers. By making conversational AI chatbots an integral part of communications initiatives, organizations can guide customers through the customer journey more quickly and potentially drive more conversions. Some of the key benefits of a chatbot are time and cost savings, increased customer engagement, faster response times, and increased customer data because the interactions are captured and can be analyzed and reviewed. On the other hand, chatbots do take time to setup and cannot completely replace humans. They work well for repetitive questions and

basic information sharing. However, they do not work well in dealing with emotions or nuance and people can quickly become frustrated or even alienated by the experience of interacting with them. So, a chatbot may only be a suitable solution for a portion of intended interactions with audiences.

Predictive Analytics

Predictive analytics use historical data to predict future trends, events, and potential scenarios. Many analytics systems are now moving away from simply reporting what happened to offering forecasts that can help users plan and prepare for the future. The most obvious example is Google Analytics 4. This version of Google Analytics launched in October, 2020, and is using machine learning to give users more insights and predictive analytics, often related to improving conversions.

Voice Search & Commerce

Two-thirds of 25-to-49-year-olds speak to their voice-enabled devices at least once per day, according to a [recent study by PwC](#). Whether speaking into their mobile devices or asking a voice-enabled device like Google Nest or Amazon Alexa, more and more people are searching for information using their voice. As a result, voice searches will play a more significant role in the customer discovery process. Communicators need to think beyond traditional keywords and key phrases and consider sentences and questions that might be verbally asked by prospective audiences. Voice searching has become a hot topic in mobile SEO optimization, as users are embracing voice searching when typing is either not safe (e.g., when driving) or simply not convenient.

Social Commerce

Fueled by the global pandemic and the shift to online shopping, more people are also merging their social media activity with their shopping activity. Instagram and TikTok have brought new meaning to social commerce by launching several features that allow users to buy products directly from within the social media platforms. Since many people already follow brands, these networks are creating quick, easy conversions.

Extended Reality (XR) & Immersive Experiences

Even though virtual reality (VR) has been discussed for decades, recent developments with extended reality (XR) and immersive experiences should be noted. **Extended reality** (XR) is an umbrella term referring to all real-and-virtual combined environments and interactions generated by computer technology. It includes augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). **Augmented reality** is an interactive 3D experience that combines a view of the real world with computer-generated elements, usually overlaid on top of the real-world view.

In contrast to virtual reality (VR) experiences, AR experiences can offer an immersive experience with little additional hardware required—often just a mobile device. This makes these experiences much more accessible to a wider audience. However, these immersive experiences all require significant upfront investments in time and money. In the coming years, production costs will likely drop to allow more organizations to develop these compelling and engaging experiences. Here is an example of a [360 VR marketing video](#):



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/socialmedia/?p=77#oembed-1>

Media Attributions

[Experience Amsterdam: A Guided City Tour – 360 VR Video](#) by [VR Gorilla – Virtual Reality & 360 Videos](#) is licensed under a Standard YouTube License.

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Chapter 2: Foundations of Social Media Communication

Why Use Social Media?

Before diving into specific strategies and tactics of social media, let's review why social media is important to digital communication and marketing. There are many advantages to using social media for professional purposes and to promote your organization's brand, products, services, and/or mission. Here are several areas where social media shines:

- Connecting with New Audiences
- Building Relationships
- Increasing Website Traffic
- Distributing Targeted Messages
- Conducting Market Research
- Sharing Expertise
- Managing Reputation
- Evaluating Analytics and Insights

A Six-Step Social Media Framework



This six-step framework supports your social media strategy and activities. As you learn more about digital communication, you will be presented with a variety of frameworks. Understanding the similarities and differences is important, but what you do is ultimately up to you, which may mean your own personalized framework. Used correctly, the framework will align your chosen strategies and tactics.

Step 1: Listen and Learn

Social media allows organizations to listen to their target audiences and see what they are doing. Without any prompting, organizations can listen to what their customers are saying about their needs, wants, and desires. Communicators can cut out most of the guess work.

Listening is the first place for communicators to start when developing a social media strategy. Listening is key to understanding your target audience's perceptions on key topics:

- **Your brand, products, services, and/or mission**

Since social media conversations are happening in real-time and directly from your community, you no longer need to guess about why people are behaving a certain way; they will tell you.

- **Your competitors' brands, products, services, and/or mission**

If you find out what your competitors are good or bad at, you can position your organization to meet some of those customer needs better. Or, perhaps, you can identify new products and services you can offer or change your mission to better fill a specific niche.

- **General topics and trends**

If you can find out what's popular, you may be able to take advantage of emerging opportunities and generate new relationships and revenue streams.

Step 2: Define Goals, Objectives, and Target Audiences

With a well-defined scope, which includes specific goals, objectives, and target audiences, you know what you are aiming for and can put the steps in place to get there. Successful organizations know what they want to achieve and have a clear focus on goals and objectives that ultimately guides their actions.

Identifying goals, objectives, and target audiences is a critical step in getting buy-in from key decision makers, assigning resources (human, financial, and technological), and planning social media campaigns and ongoing activities. Everyone in an organization should work and plan towards achieving these goals and objectives so getting this step right and achieving buy in is important.

Social media managers should plan to complete this step collaboratively because some of the required information might exist in different areas of the organization. There are several points of information that are needed:

- Lessons learned from the listening step of the framework: what the community is saying about your organization, your competitors, and trends
- Audience archetypes (a.k.a. “customer personas”) and customer journey maps developed
- Competitive intelligence learned in the listening step or through other research
- Knowledge about the preferences of the online communities
- Lessons learned from previous social media campaigns/ ongoing activities
- Organizational goals and objectives

If organizations don't properly align their goals, objectives, and strategies, they will waste money, time, resources, and effort.

For a startup, this could be quite costly and, ultimately, result in going out of business. For an established organizations, this may result in losing ground to the competition, missing an important opportunity, losing key people who do not feel supported, falling stock prices, or even going out of business. It can also lead to organizations becoming reactive and developing a culture of crisis management where they are constantly putting out fires instead of planning and being proactive.

Step 3: Choose Channels

While setting goals and objectives is a critical part of planning, how you achieve them has more to do with your implementation plan. Therefore, selecting the appropriate digital channels and platforms is important to achieving those goals and objectives.

Since there are so many social media options, organizations often struggle in selecting the appropriate social media platform to use. Instead of trying to pick specific social media sites, organizations should focus on the type of social media engagement that will work best for their target audiences and build a presence on 2 – 3 platforms that support those activities and cater to those audiences. Organizations with enormous communications budgets may push into a few more, but consider that soft drink mega-giant Coca Cola shows five social media icons on their website; sports mega-giant Nike shows only four.

Step 4: Create Content

After choosing your channels, the next step in our six-step framework is content creation. After selecting the appropriate social media networks, organizations can focus on creating the content that works best for that specific channel and the target audience.

This is not about creating content for the sake of it. Think strategically about what you are trying to achieve, which should be clear after the listening stage, and then deliver content based on that. And, remember to follow a clear content strategy, calendar, and evaluation plan.

Step 5: Engage the Community

Listening is just one side of the equation. Once you have listened to your community, you will need to go out and build positive relationships that last. This is done by engaging your audiences with content they find valuable. However, simply pushing out content and hoping that your community will like, comment, and share the content is somewhat unrealistic and unproductive. To get the best out of content and to develop meaningful relationships and trust, you must meaningfully engage with your community.

Usually, the key to successful engagement is two-way conversation. Engagement can take on other forms such as sharing, liking and posting and, to a certain extent, your community will determine which form is most suitable. However, conversations lie at the heart of social media. It is a central facet: people want to talk to each other. This leads to the following questions about conversations:

- **What is a conversation?**

Simply defined, it is a dialogue between at least two people, possibly more.

- **Why are conversations important?**

Conversations communicate who we are, what our needs are, and what we feel.

- **How do conversations impact organizations?**

Conversations are not new; commerce and governance have revolved around conversations for millennia. The rules that applied to good conversation back then also apply to today's social media business conversations. In 44 BCE, Cicero, a Roman senator, put forward the following rules for good conversation:

1. Speak clearly.
2. Speak easily, but not too much, give others their turn.
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Be courteous.
5. Deal seriously with serious matters, gracefully with lighter ones.
6. Never criticize people behind their backs.
7. Stick to subjects of general interest.
8. Do not talk about yourself.
9. Never lose your temper.

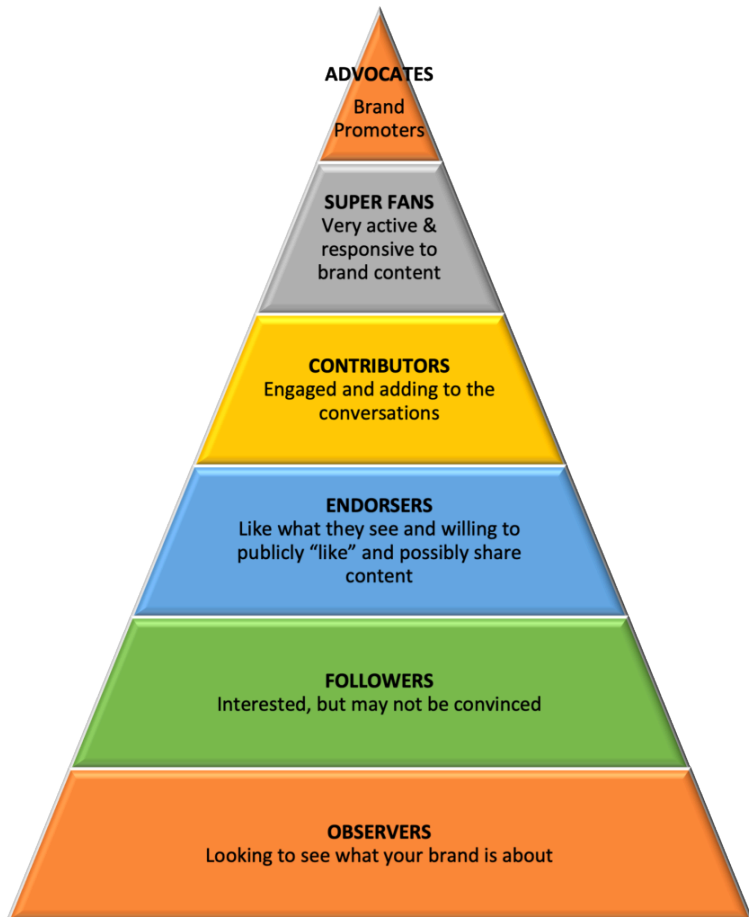
All these rules still apply to maintaining good conversations in social media. For example, although you or your organization may want to talk about your brand, it is best to avoid direct marketing and sales via social media as part of a conversation or dialogue. If it makes sense to bring it up as part of a conversation, feel free. But, remember, no hard selling!

In addition, to Cicero's rules for conversation, there are three more pertinent social media conversation guidelines to consider:

1. Get to know who you are talking to. (In Chapter 8, we'll look at audience archetypes.)
2. Listening is more important than talking.
3. If you're going to be talking, have something important to say.

Again, the secret to successful conversation and engagement will be listening to your community and finding out what they like to talk about and in what manner. Knowing this, you can have more impact when to say something. As part of your content strategy, write down the tone of conversation common to your community. For example, do you want to be light and informal or are you required to be more serious and formal? Develop your conversational style according to your community.

Engagement Pyramid



[\[Image description\]](#)

Organizations should also be aware of the engagement pyramid and the passive majority. Not everyone on social media will engage. Usually, the vast majority of a community will be passive. The individuals doing the most talking

represent a small percentage of your target audience. The digital team needs to be aware of this, as it will affect responses to your content, as well as engagement around your posts.

- Passive behaviours represent the majority of people who see, view, and even read, watch, or listen to content, but choose not to comment or share. In fact, in many of the larger social networks, a good engagement level (Facebook uses the term “people talking about this”) is usually anything above 10%.
- Active behaviours refer to the types of action most digital communicators seek: liking, commenting, and sharing. This primarily refers to the endorsers, contributors, and super fans in the pyramid. Advocates are the ones who take engagement to another level. They are the ones creating their own posts about your brand and promoting your brand to their own social networks.

The key takeaway here is that 10% may be a rough guide as to the level of engagement to expect for your content. Clearly, this will differ depending on industry and how inherently social your product is.

Also, make sure that you allow the most engaged members of your target audience to flourish. Offer them rewards and incentives for their hard work. Tell them you appreciate their efforts and give them something back in return. This could even drive user-generated content and/or competitions. Take, for example, a Pinterest competition created by Peugeot cars. In this competition, Peugeot posted pictures of cars to their Pinterest board showing tiny sections of cars. Followers then had to go to Peugeot's Facebook page to find out which car the picture was taken from for a chance to win something.

As well as conversations, another key goal of social media is virality. Most organizations want their content to go viral. Many

marketers have studied why a piece of social media content goes viral and there does not seem to be one definitive answer. However, there are some commonalities. Apparently, most viral content pieces tend to be in one or more of the following four categories:

- Very helpful/practical
- Unique/amazing/spectacular
- Funny
- Controversial

Viral content can be a combination of any of the above categories, but generally at least one is involved. However, from a business perspective, before trying to make engaging content, determine what is appropriate for your target audience. For example, while edgy and causing more buzz and reach, does a controversial video fit with your community's sensibilities/personalities, your content strategy, and your overall brand image and personality?

During the engagement stage, organizations need to be aware of how to build and foster trust in their online relationships. To tap into virality and achieve massive reach, communicators will need to understand which content types are most likely to truly engage their target audiences.

Step 6: Measure, Analyze, and Optimize

Measuring is crucial to social media's impact on an organization. Without measurement, there is no yardstick and no means of understanding whether activities are succeeding or not. Through analytics, surveys, and content analysis, organizations can measure the success of social media activities. Collate and collect all data so that you can analyze whether communications succeeded. In addition to your social

media analytics and insights, you will potentially need other information:

- online web analytics
- a timeline of important events or activities that may have affected the organization in the online, social, and offline worlds
- KPI data regarding sales, donations, or other indicators that are vital to the organization

Once you have all the data, assess the success of your social media campaigns and ongoing activities by examining how it all fits together. Review any lessons learned and optimize your strategy for the next iteration of the cycle.

Once again, start with a listening phase to find out if there is anything new and/or what's changed for your target audiences. For example, if you found out that one product was less popular in terms of engagement and sharing, you may want to focus your attention on monitoring keywords associated with that product in the next listening phase.

Measure, analyze, and optimize your activities so that you can properly evaluate what worked and what didn't. This is crucial for future planning of your social media activities.

Additional Resources

Here are several articles and free industry certifications that provide more social media marketing details:

- [Social Media Marketing Resources for](#)

[Beginners](#) (blogs, podcasts, books, etc.)

- [SEMrush Social Media Marketing Fundamentals Course with Neal Schaffer](#) (4 hrs.)
- [Hubspot Social Media Marketing Certification](#) (5.5 hrs.)
- [Twitter Flight School – Digital & Social](#) (5 hrs.)
- [Hubspot Inbound Marketing Certification](#) (4 hrs.)

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Image Descriptions

Engagement Pyramid

A pyramid-shape diagram demonstrating the engagement level of social media users with the brand. From top to bottom:

- Advocates – brand promoters
- Super fans – very active & responsive to brand content
- Contributors – engaged and adding to the conversations
- Endorsers – like what they see and willing to publicly “like” and possibly share content
- Followers – interested, but may not be convinced

- Observers – looking to see what your brand is about

[\[Return to Engagement Pyramid\]](#)

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Chapter 3: Social Media & Well-being

Is social media good for us? Is it bad for us? Can it be both?

Research findings suggest many complex ways the use of social media platforms can impact our mental and physical health and overall well-being.



The Wall Street Journal 
@WSJ

...

“Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression,” a slide from an internal Facebook presentation said. Among teens who reported suicidal thoughts, 13% of U.K. users and 6% of U.S. users traced those feelings to Instagram. on.wsj.com/3lr3o6D



8:48 AM · Sep 14, 2021

<https://twitter.com/WSJ/status/1437805487618203658>

Dimensions of Wellness and Well-being

According to the [American Psychological Association](https://www.apa.org/) (APA),

wellness is defined as, “a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being.” However, the term “wellness” has become so popular as a marketing buzzword that it has countless meanings to different publics. For clarity, in this chapter we have chosen to use the term **well-being**, defined by the APA as, “a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life.”

Physical Health (and Body Image)

Social media may be associated with physical health improvements due to nutrition advice or “fitspiration” and to problems with physical health caused by learning of unhealthy behaviours. One striking link between social media and mental health lies along the line of body image and satisfaction. For our social media aficionados, think about how many images of people we see each day. What do these folks look like? Do they have “[Instagram Face](#)”? Are they standing with their “good side” towards you, their body flexed to highlight or hide parts of their body or wardrobe? Are you currently looking at them in front of a tourist attraction? Consider critically the seemingly perfect lives and bodies you see, comparing yourself to the images of these people, especially women, that may be artificially enhanced and/or heavily filtered.

Facebook, the parent company of Instagram, has conducted informal investigations of the app (Instagram) to see how it affected the relationship one has with their body. Approximately 32% of young women report feeling worse about their bodies after using Instagram. Moreover, the young women attribute Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression,” tying in the cyclical nature of depression and/or anxiety in relation to social media as shown by Hoge, Bickham and Cantor (2017). Some of the adverse effects are

thought to be Instagram-specific, such as social comparison, which is when people assess their own value in relation to the attractiveness, wealth, and success of others.

The Facebook researchers state that social comparison is worse on Instagram than other platforms, asserting that TikTok is grounded in performance and Snapchat is “sheltered” by jokey filters that “keep the focus on the face.” Meanwhile, Instagram focuses heavily on the body and lifestyle. However, the research team concluded this in 2020. Their findings may not hold up to the current social media landscape, with the prevalence of [Tik-Tok and the affordance of video filters to edit people’s bodies](#). For Instagram specifically, the researchers note that essential aspects of the platform, such as norms around sharing only the best moments and the pressure to look perfect, combined with an “addictive product” can send young folks “spiraling toward eating disorders, an unhealthy sense of their own bodies and depression.” The internal researchers further stated that the “Explore” page, curated by an algorithm can show harmful content.

In “[The Paradox of Tik Tok Anti-Pro-Anorexia Videos](#)” by scholars Logrieco, Marchili, Roversi, and Villani (2021), the shifting stances around anorexia depiction content on TikTok is paradoxically encouraging harmful behaviors. The “What I Eat in a Day” format is a common form of this. Moreover, the numerous “Glo-Up” challenges on the platform reinforce beauty standards (and generally come with weight-loss), while staying away from fostering unconditional self-acceptance. Like Instagram, there are beautification filters that slim and anglify the appearance of the face. What messages could people, especially people who do not fit Hollywood beauty stereotypes internalize?

Meanwhile, many youth consider TikTok a respite from more overtly image-conscious apps, such as Instagram. Although Tik-Tok was released in 2016, the height of its popularity came about in 2020 (and then, you know, the pandemic happened).

Thus, research has yet to catch up to the trends we are seeing on this platform. However, that does not mean that we should not think critically about how this platform is used, what is happening on this app, or the media we consume from it. Of course, this should be true of all platforms we use when considering their impacts on human health.

Mental Health

Mental health includes anxiety and depression, as well as emotional regulation (plus much more). In the digital age, social media can play a powerful role in our stress, happiness, and mental health. Social media has the capability of being a powerful tool in our wellness. For instance, many “mindfulness” podcasts have social media accounts where they share health experts’ tips on mindful living. However, social media also has the potential to damage mental health and wellbeing, as well. As whistleblowers revealed in 2021, social media platforms may be aware of these impacts, yet do little to stop them.

Emotional regulation is a vital part of mental health. Specifically, it is a skill developed in childhood and adolescence by experiencing strong emotions and developing internal regulatory processes. Having this skill is a tool. The lack of and problems with emotional regulation are associated with mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, conditions that individuals who “overuse” the internet report using the internet to avoid. Moreover, research has shown that depression symptoms predict internet usage to regulate mood. Thus our internet and social media use can be seen as a feedback loop, using the internet to avoid emotions, not emotionally regulating, experiencing emotional distress, then back to using the internet to avoid emotions once more.

Social media can be a mixed bag for our mental health and well-being. Hoge, Bickham, and Cantor (2017) state that,

“although there is evidence that greater electronic media use is associated with depressive symptoms, there is also evidence that the social nature of digital communication may be harnessed in some situations to improve mood and to promote health-enhancing strategies.” They further state that much more research is needed to explore these possibilities.

In what ways can social media help us connect with others and positively contribute to our mental well-being?

Social Health

Access to technology was a lifeline for many at the start of the pandemic. We limited our in-person social contact as many businesses, schools, restaurants, and workplaces shut down or reduced capacity for the initial quarantines. According to Pew Research Center (2021), the internet has been personally important to 90% of adults, with 58% saying the internet has been essential. People relied on the internet and digital world to connect with others, whether family, friend, or for school and many of those trends are persisting (or partially persisting) coming out of the pandemic.

Pew Research Center (2021) reports that about 81% of Americans have utilized video calls since the onset of the pandemic and many researchers have found sharp increases in social media use since the pandemic began. Social media have become vital connection points to work, school, and social networks—our connections to nearly all other people when in-person contact was scarce. However, these findings are complicated by the digital divide, as affordability and connection issues are frequent barriers to internet access and, thus, to connection with other people.

We must also consider links between social media and **social anxiety**, or fear of embarrassment or humiliation, leading to the avoidance of social situations. The social media landscape

is a wonderful way for us to connect to other human beings. On the other hand, it can lead to distress, as well. According to Hoge, Bickham, and Cantor (2017), the preference to communicate over text/IM/email over face to face increases the risk of social anxiety in folks who are more prone to develop it. Over time, choosing to substitute digital media for interpersonal communication to avoid feared situations (that can trigger anxiety) may become cyclically reinforced. This is yet another cycle. An individual prefers digital communication and displaces face-to face interactions, which may worsen the symptoms and severity of social anxiety, leading to the individual using the internet and social media again as an emotional outlet.

Social media has the potential to initiate and sustain relationships. Given the potential benefits of social media, perhaps we should consider how to navigate it intentionally to protect ourselves and well being. After all, these technologies will be with us indefinitely. Knowing that, how can we protect ourselves and our mental well-being? Technology and people can mutually shape each other (Ellison, Pyle, & Vitak, 2022), but in order to do so, we have to rethink our relationship to social media and realize how our behaviours can actively and positively contribute to the virtual landscape.

Managing social media's impacts on our wellness

NPR Lifekit episode of rethinking our relationship with social media

<https://www.npr.org/player/embed/1016854764/1018979012>

NPR's Lifekit gives us some considerations to keep in mind when defining or rethinking our relationship to social media. Keep these in mind:

- Social media is designed to encourage repetitive behaviours and compulsions, but social media is not physically “addictive” in the same way as drugs and alcohol.
 - Features like pull to refresh, endless scroll, autoplay and the algorithms are intentional choices made to keep us on the apps by showing us more of what we might like.
 - Push notifications, “made for you” pages, and “Click to See Image” functions are all tactics to capture our attention.
 - Remember: “Technology and people can mutually shape each other” (Ellison, Pyle, & Vitak, 2022). How might the above features

keep us on platforms?

- Think of your relationship with social media as a meaningful one with the capacity to show certain aspects about ourselves. Ask yourself three questions:
 - What does a healthy relationship look like to me?
 - What needs am I trying to meet right now?
 - How do I feel (physically, emotionally) after an hour online?
- Be an active participant in your relationship; declutter and reorganize.
 - Go through your “following” list on social media and clean it out; only keep what is bringing joy and/or value into your life.
 - Block, mute, and other functions let you restrict the kind of content you don’t want to see, which further fine tunes your algorithm to you.

A Secondary Wellness Issue: Time Management

Social media is a great tool for promoting a business without breaking the bank, but it can become a nuisance if not used carefully. Using social media tends to be a time-consuming task and communicators must resist the urge to constantly monitor the technology. Without an effective plan, communicators will end up wasting time

and won't be able to achieve organizational goals.

A major reason why organizations fail to use social media to their advantage is that they try to be on every social network. This is neither possible nor a good idea. Regardless of whether a professional communicator is working independently or as part of a team, they must choose social media that fit the organization's goals. This saves time by focusing on social accounts that can best generate the desired results.

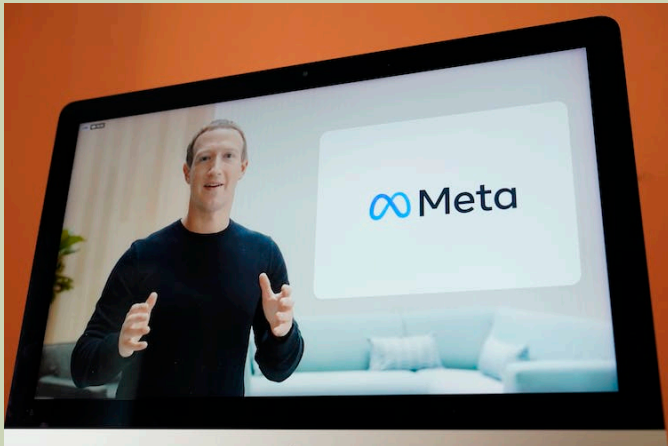
Another challenge for social media communicators is to stay focused on work when logging into social media accounts for job-related tasks. Distractions abound! The best strategy to tackle this issue and manage time is to set time limits for every task. For instance, if tweeting, specify the time needed for the task. With the time limit approaching, priorities become clearer and the impulse to indulge in distractions is minimized.

For personal use, tracking one's screen time and self-imposing daily limits can be extremely healthy, as can limiting the number of social media apps one uses. For the best professional and personal results when using social media, self-discipline is key.

Related Content

The thousands of vulnerable people harmed by Facebook and Instagram are lost in Meta's "average user" data

Adapted from Joseph Bak-Coleman, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for an Informed Public, University of Washington



Mark Zuckerberg's company says the kids are all right, but the data it presents is only about how the average social media user is doing.

[AP Photo/Eric Risberg](#)

Fall 2021 was filled with a steady stream of media

coverage arguing that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram impacts [users' mental health](#) and well-being, [radicalizes](#) and [polarizes](#) users, and [spreads misinformation](#).

Are these technologies—[embraced by billions](#)—killing people and eroding democracy? Or is this just a moral panic?

According to [Meta's PR team](#) and a handful of [contrarian academics](#) and [journalists](#), there is evidence that social media does not cause harm and the overall picture is unclear. They cite apparently conflicting studies, imperfect access to data, and the difficulty of establishing causality to support this position.

Some of these researchers have surveyed social media users and found that social media use appears to have, at most, [minor negative consequences](#) on individuals. These results seem inconsistent with years of [journalistic reporting](#), Meta's [leaked internal data](#), common sense intuition, and [people's lived experiences](#).

Teens struggle with self-esteem and suggesting that browsing Instagram could make that worse doesn't seem far fetched. Similarly, imagining so many people refusing to get vaccinated, becoming hyper-partisan or succumbing to conspiracy theories in the days before social media is more difficult than it is today.

So who is right? As a researcher who [studies collective behavior](#), I see no conflict between the research (methodological quibbles aside), leaks, and people's intuition. Social media can have catastrophic

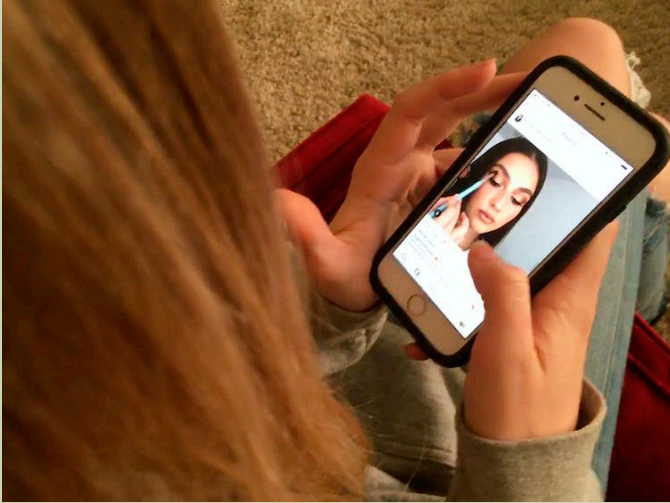
effects, even if the average user only experiences minimal consequences.

Averaging's blind spot

To see how this works, consider a world in which Instagram has a rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer effect on the well-being of users. A majority, those already doing well to begin with, find Instagram provides social affirmation and helps them stay connected to friends. A minority, those who are struggling with depression and loneliness, see these posts and wind up feeling worse.

If you average them together in a study, you might not see much of a change over time. This could explain why findings from surveys and panels are able to claim minimal impact on average. More generally, small groups in a larger sample have a hard time changing the average.

Yet if we zoom in on the most at-risk people, many of them may have moved from occasionally sad to mildly depressed or from mildly depressed to dangerously so. This is precisely what Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen reported in her congressional testimony: Instagram creates a [downward spiraling feedback loop](#) among the most vulnerable teens.



Large-scale population studies can miss effects experienced by a subset of people, such as vulnerable teen girls on Instagram.

[AP Photo/Haven Daley](#)

The inability of this type of research to capture the smaller, but still significant numbers of people at risk—the [tail of the distribution](#)—is made worse by the need to measure a range of human experiences in discrete increments. When people rate their well-being from a low point of one to a high point of five, “one” can mean anything from breaking up with a partner who they weren’t that into in the first place to urgently needing crisis intervention to stay alive. These nuances are buried in the context of population averages.

A history of averaging out harm

The tendency to ignore harm on the margins isn't unique to mental health or even the consequences of social media. Allowing the bulk of experience to obscure the fate of smaller groups is a common mistake, and I'd argue that these are often the people society should be most concerned about.

It can also be [a pernicious tactic](#). Tobacco companies and scientists alike once argued that premature death among some smokers was not a serious concern because most people who have smoked a cigarette do not die of [lung cancer](#).

Pharmaceutical companies have defended their aggressive marketing tactics by claiming that the vast majority of people treated with opioids [get relief from pain without dying of an overdose](#). In doing so, they've swapped the vulnerable for the average and steered the conversation toward benefits, often measured in a way that obscures the very real damage to a minority—but still substantial—group of people.

The lack of harm to many is not inconsistent with severe harm caused to a few. With most of the world now using some form of social media, I believe listening to the voices of concerned parents and struggling teenagers when they point to Instagram as a source of distress is important. Similarly, acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic was prolonged because [misinformation on social media has](#)

[made some people afraid](#) to take a safe and effective vaccine is important. These lived experiences are important pieces of evidence about the harm caused by social media.

Does Meta have the answer?

Establishing causality from observational data is challenging, so challenging that progress on this front garnered the [2021 Nobel in economics](#). And social scientists are not well positioned to run randomized controlled trials to definitively establish causality, particularly for social media platform design choices, such as altering how content is filtered and displayed.

But Meta is. The company has petabytes of data on human behaviour, many social scientists on its payroll, and the ability to run randomized control trials in parallel with [millions of users](#). They run such experiments all the time to understand how best to [capture users' attention](#), down to every button's colour, shape, and size.

Meta could come forward with irrefutable and transparent evidence that their products are harmless, even to the vulnerable, if it exists. Has the company chosen not to run such experiments or has it run them and decided not to share the results?

Either way, Meta's decision to instead release and emphasize data about average effects is telling.

[Joseph Bak-Coleman](#), Postdoctoral Fellow at the

Center for an Informed Public, [University of Washington](#)

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Chapter 4: Privacy & Content Ownership

Online Privacy

When was the last time you were asked to “Accept Cookies”? Probably today. The tracking of our digital lives through cookies, web analytics, social media platforms and employer apps is constantly expanding. And what are cookies, anyway?

As an issue, privacy spans the realms of both our physical and digital lives; it is incredibly complex and multifaceted. What one person considers private information, another may willingly share with a large circle of friends or even strangers, particularly on social media.



Photo by [Glen Carrie](#) on [Unsplash](#)

While digital information-sharing provides countless opportunities for community-building, collaboration and education, the broad disclosure of personal information can have potentially damaging effects. Aside from making oneself a target for nuisance interactions, such as spam, more significant attacks also become more problematic, such as phishing, hacking, harassment, stalking, doxxing, and fraud. At its most damaging, publication or abuse of personal information on the Internet can, and has, stigmatized vulnerable individuals, tarnished or destroyed reputations, terminated careers, and even caused some people the loss of their jobs, family, identity, or lives.

In British Columbia, there are two primary information privacy laws: the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#) (FIPPA) and the [Personal Information Protection Act](#) (PIPA). These laws set out the minimum standards that

employers, employees, and service providers (including College instructors) must follow to prevent unreasonable, unnecessary, or unsafe sharing of personal information belonging to staff, clients, customers, and the general public. BC has some of the strongest personal privacy laws in Canada and, arguably, one of the best in the world, alongside Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

Organizations with social media accounts need to take notice! These laws are in force if they are operating in the province of British Columbia, even if the internet is a global digital space. What happens in Vegas most certainly does not stay in Vegas, as it were.

In the context of maintaining an online presence, there are two main privacy concerns for organizations: “transactional” privacy and content ownership.

Transactional Privacy

“Transactional” privacy is the privacy of meta data that identifies individuals or their computers (e.g. IP addresses) and what they access online, when, for how long, and with whom. Meta data refers to data that is captured through information exchanges when a user is browsing the internet, including any tab or window that is open, logged into an online application, submitting a form, purchasing a product, or clicking a link. This type of information is typically kept in cookies that are requested and downloaded from websites onto your computer then shared with websites or web apps that you visit. (For personal privacy, manage cookie options every opportunity you get!)

Here
are few



examples of what cookies do:

1. Netflix remembers where you last stopped watching a particular show/movie.
2. Amazon remembers what you had in your cart last time you logged in, even if you didn't buy anything.
3. Facebook remembers your login information so that you don't need to login in every time you visit the website.

When a particular site has Google Analytics installed, a lot of information is shared with a website host:

- an individual's [MAC \(media access control\) address](#),
- IP (internet protocol) address, and
- any information Google can ascertain from your Google profile (when you are logged in or have saved login information on a particular site).

Particular attention needs to be paid if you are using a software application that is hosted and managed in the US. Firms in the US buy digital information for sale at auctions. Large multi-national organizations, such as Google, Meta (which owns Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp), SnapChat, FourSquare, and Twitter are all based in the US. These

companies broker and auction transactional information to advertisers to help strategically control their respective markets.

As we move through the course, you will learn more about how much businesses know about customers to target advertisements. When you use social media or many other website services (e.g., WordPress.com), you consent to the terms and conditions of a privacy policy for that given company. In some cases, you will be asked to click a checkbox agreeing that you have read the conditions outlining how that specific company will (or won't) protect your privacy. This "privacy through policy" system leaves users vulnerable, as many people do not take the time to read through the conditions and simply click "agree." This can lead to the sale of personal information by companies, often without a user's awareness.

Content Ownership

Content ownership is concerned with the privacy of an individual's words, views, opinions, images, relationships, exchanges or reviews online.

Types of online privacy

Source	Transactional	Content
Static Website (no database capabilities)		Content is copyrighted by author/business, unless otherwise stated. (i.e., wikicommons)
Dynamic Website	Cookies, Web Analytics	Content is copyrighted by author/business, unless otherwise stated. (i.e., ToS;DR)
Facebook & Instagram (Meta Inc.)	Cookies, usage data tracked, data shared with third-parties under “terms of service”	Content is copyrighted by creator, however, owned by Meta Inc.
GMail, Google Drive, Docs (Alphabet Inc.)	Usage data tracked	Content is copyrighted and owned by creator
Employer tracking apps	GPS (location), screen captures, check-in/out, attendance, etc.	How content is copyrighted depends on an employee's contract.

By default, copyright is provided to the author(s) or organization of the documents' creator, according to the laws of the country from which they operate. Some companies, such as Meta, apply their own licensing onto the content published on their site. This is agreed to in the Terms of Service when users create their accounts.

In the case of Facebook and many other similar platforms, they do not grant themselves full property rights over your content, but they do claim royalty-free redistribution rights and they are absolved of any copyright infringement claims that might occur from others copying your content from them.

Copyright

Copyright provides security and protection for an original literary, musical, dramatical or artistic work. The author has the right to prevent others from reproducing or copying the work. A work is by default copyrighted once it has been created and fixed in material form (Canadian Intellectual Property Office, n.d.).

Licensing

Many types of licensing exist for all digital media that allow the copying and reproduction of an original work of writing or art. For example, in BC, educators can use the [Fair Dealings Policy](#) to upload and create copies of up to 10% of a copyright-protected work for their courses.

Read [The Educator's Guide to Copyright, Fair Use, and Creative Commons](#). This article outlines important distinctions regarding copyright use and provides a number of important rules you must follow to avoid copyright infringement.

Creative Commons

In a way, Creative Commons (CC) licenses are what the internet was originally intended to be: an open sharing of knowledge, ideas, and other content to enrich and advance humanity.

Creative Commons licenses offer a variety of attributes that can be applied (or not) by the original content creators, at their own discretion. For example, most content creators create a “BY” requirement; anybody who wants to use that content in the future must state who originally created the content (that is, who it was “by”). All CC licenses allow content to be accessed

for free; that's at the heart of the license policy. Many Creative Commons licenses include a "Share Alike" license ("SA"), which means that future users of the content must agree to share the content, just as they are using it. Many specify that the content cannot be used for commercial purposes at all ("NC").

Content creators can consider their options and apply the Creative Commons license simply by adding it to the content. However, once that has been done, the content is forever in the Creative Commons and can be reproduced by others, as per the specific terms of the license.

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Consumer Privacy & Data Ethics

As more and more data is collected and tracked, there will continue to be a tension between organizations wanting to know more about their target audiences and consumers wanting to protect their privacy and personal data. Data protection is being monitored by governments across the globe. As a result, organizations will need to rely on building truly meaningful relationships with their target audiences that are based on trust, value, and consent, which brings us to data ethics.

Data ethics is about responsible and sustainable use of data. Organizations will need to have policies in place that serve their audiences well. This will likely involve giving consumers more control over their data, providing a level of transparency, holding organizations accountable, and keeping customer

data secure. Data is a powerful asset for any organization. Yet, with this power comes increased organizational responsibility to use it wisely, appropriately, and ethically.

The Value of Human Data

We are learning the hard way that we must fight for our privacy online. As an early leader in the social media platform market, Facebook set very poor standards for the protection of user privacy because access to personally identifiable user data was immensely profitable for the company. Before Facebook, users of online sites frequently used avatars and crafted usernames that didn't connect to details of their offline lives.

Still, countless online sites permit or encourage users to create online identities apart from their face-to-face identities. Many of today's younger internet users choose platforms with higher standards for privacy, limiting the audiences that their posts reach and the periods of time those posts last. Youth frequently have “finsta” accounts—“fake” Instagrams that they share with nosy family and acquaintances, while only good friends and in-the-know audiences have access to their “real” Instagrams. Practices like these force developers to offer users more control over user privacy and the reach of their posts, at the risk of losing users to competitors.

Users shape platforms and platforms shape user behaviour.

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Chapter 5: Free Expression, Anonymity, and Content Moderation

In this week's readings and media, you will see a study about the **Online Disinhibition Effect**, which explains how a person's social behavior can be different when posting online anonymously.

When you consider the negative impact of trolling, you may be wondering why there isn't a global initiative to eliminate anonymous communication all together? Should the social media companies be held accountable?

On the other side of the issue, you will examine the *social and political benefits* to being anonymous. There is a strong case to suggest that, without anonymity, there would be a chilling effect on free expression, which, as we have become accustomed to, is believed to be a cornerstone of democracy.

Also, what content needs to be moderated and when is the time for an organization to limit, block, or deplatform a user?

Key points in this chapter

In the following readings and media, the authors will present the following themes:

1. People behave differently when they know they are anonymous – mostly negatively or in anti-social ways.
2. The power of SM to inflict suffering and to cast hate upon individuals and groups causes tension against the principles of free speech.
3. Anonymity provides protection for political dissenters and oppressed groups to organize and communicate safely.

4. Content moderation and deplatforming are pressing, but extremely complex needs for social media companies, with political controversy swirling all around the decisions made.

Article: Council on Foreign Relations –
“Hate Speech on Social Media: Global
Comparisons” by Zachary Laub, June 7, 2019
(8 pages)

This article provides an analysis of the relationship between hate speech on social media and hate crimes on a global scale. Worth noting are the following statements:

- “The same technology that allows social media to galvanize democracy activists can be used by hate groups seeking to organize and recruit.”
- “Users’ experiences online are mediated by algorithms designed to maximize their engagement, which often inadvertently promote extreme content.... ‘YouTube may be one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century,’ writes sociologist Zeynep Tufekci.”
- “The 1996 law exempts tech platforms from liability for actionable speech by their users. Magazines and television networks, for example, can be sued for publishing defamatory information they know to be false; social media platforms cannot be found similarly liable for content they host.”

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Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons



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Laub, Z. (2019). Hate speech on social media:
Global comparisons. *Council on Foreign Relations*, 7.

Article: The Online Disinhibition Effect

John Suler's research article "The Online Disinhibition Effect" describes the six psychological factors that contribute to trolling behavior: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic in-trojection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority. **Download PDF:** ["The Online Disinhibition Effect."](#) (6 pages)

Key quotes:

"When people have the opportunity to separate their actions on-line from their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting out. Whatever they say or do can't be directly linked to the rest of their lives. In a process of dissociation, they don't have to own their behavior

by acknowledging it within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity.”

“Consciously or unconsciously, people may feel that the imaginary characters they ‘created’ exist in a different space, that one’s online persona along with the online others live in an make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world. They split or dissociate online fiction from offline fact.”

“Consciously or unconsciously, people may feel that the imaginary characters they ‘created’ exist in a different space, that one’s online persona along with the online others live in an make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world. They split or dissociate online fiction from offline fact.”

Suler, John (2004). “The Online Disinhibition Effect.” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 7 (3): 321–326. doi:10.1089/1094931041291295. Retrieved 10 March 2013.

Business policy: The value of anonymity

Whisper app: [Whisper](#) allows users to post their intimate feelings with total anonymity. Here are their [community guidelines](#) with references to their philosophy of anonymity. In this Huffington Post article, we see how the anonymity factor has served as a channel for expression: “[LGBT Youths With Unsupportive Parents Sound Off Anonymously On Whisper App](#)” by Curtis M. Wong Senior Editor, HuffPost Queer Voices. Retrieved December 18, 2016.

Poll: “[When it comes to people’s identity on social media, ... what you think should happen?](#)” YouGov informal poll of 3,400+ adults, July, 2021

What do you suppose are the results for the poll question above? After you read the results, [go to the Twitter post from YouGov and read the comments](#). Take into consideration that Twitter users do not represent anything or anyone else other than Twitter users, so consider this to be a trend and not necessarily scientific.

Content Moderation and Deplatforming

“The wave of violence has shown technology companies that communication and coordination flow in tandem. Now that technology corporations are implicated in acts of massive violence by providing and protecting forums for hate speech, CEOs are called to stand on their ethical principles, not just their terms of service.” – Joan Donovan, author of “[Navigating the Tech Stack: When, Where and How Should We Moderate Content?](#)”

At first glance, the issue of whether a private company has the right to moderate content for the purpose of removing (perceived) offensive or misleading content is simply a matter of conducting business. The most common meme used to describe this policy is the “No shirt. No Shoes. No Service” policy used by restaurants to refuse service to those who do not comply with the rules.

However, the issue becomes more complicated when you consider that a small handful of tech companies now control the vast majority of content that people engage with; there is no equivalent “public sphere.”

Content moderation is typically used to remove violent, pornographic, threatening, and other objectionable content from social media and the Internet. However, it can also be used to limit political expression or oppress ethnic, cultural, religious, and sexual minorities.

Companies that facilitate online communication are making discretionary decisions to remove users or entities from their systems that they deem to impose a risk to their customers or the public—or their profitability. There are several ways that companies can deplatform a person or entity.

Deplatforming removes or constrains a person's communication on a platform's private system, usually due to a violation of its terms of use, but there is controversy on this point.

For companies using social media accounts to engage with their target audiences, they will need to make careful decisions about when to delete posts from their accounts, why, and what to communicate about such decisions. Equally, organizations need to carefully decide how, when, and why to block individuals from contributing to their online spaces.

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Chapter 6: The Social Media Ecosystem

Every Network is an Island

When you decided to study social media, you must have defined a few objectives. You may be exploring the social marketing world to work as a social media marketer for a business or get familiar with the concepts so you can implement the learning on growing your own startup. Maybe you want to use social media for non-profit engagement or political activism. At this stage, many people may think “Which social media website is the best option for my organization?”

It's a never-ending debate and you can waste your time in the argument. But the simplest answer to this debate is that every network is important (or it dies). As for the decision of choosing which platform will work best for you; it entirely depends on your goals, your target audience, and the nature of the content you need to produce.

Social websites were developed to serve different purposes. For instance, Facebook brought together people from different parts of the world, while LinkedIn facilitated online business networking, and Instagram enabled people of different age groups to capture important moments and share them with each other. So, before you reach the conclusion, it's crucial to understand the benefits of each platform and then decide which website has the highest capability of meeting your business goals.

Who Lives There?

Social media attracts marketers due to its plethora of targeting options. Traditional marketing and communications mainly

focuses on mass audiences, but with social media, you can efficiently decide the audience you intend to target with your campaigns. Let's learn more about the audience on popular social media websites.

Facebook

Facebook is populated mostly by adults of 25-34 years age group. The second largest group is 18-24 years, who make up 23.8% of Facebook's population and only 4.8% of users fall into the senior age group. The biggest country present on the platform is India, while users from the US and Canada are only 10% of the total Facebook population. As for gender, males dominate the platform, with 56% of the total population. Also, 51% active users visit the website several times a day and 75% of Facebook users are at least college graduates.

X/Twitter

With 500 million tweets sent every day (or do we now call them "exes"?), X/Twitter is one of the busiest social platforms. Talking about age groups, 25-34 year-olds make up 28.9% of total users, while 35-49 year-olds are 28.2% of total users. Lastly, the smallest age group on Twitter is 13-17 years with only 9.1% of share.

Eighty percent of users are affluent millennials from all around the world who use the website to get information. Most users come from the US, Japan, India, and Brazil respectively. As for businesses, \$913.8 million was spent on ads in 2019, though this number has plummeted since Elon Musk bought the platform. Furthermore, 93% of Twitter users engage with

brands by retweeting their posts or sharing their thoughts and experiences about brands of their choice.

Instagram

On Instagram, the highest population is of 25-34 year-olds, who make up 33.1% of all users and the age group of 18-24 years is second with 29.6% share. Most of them come from the US, with India and Brazil holding second and third positions, respectively. Almost half of these users are college graduates and 42% earn over \$75,000 per annum.

A slim majority of the billion or so users are females. These users spend around 28 minutes per day on Instagram. Most users follow at least a single brand on the app and 73% of teens in the US find Instagram the easiest way to reach and interact with a brand.

TikTok

TikTok is a customer favorite app and stands second among the most popular free apps. Its users are present in 141 countries, with China, India, the United States, and Turkey being the countries where it is more frequently downloaded and used.

A majority of TikTok users are male (56%) and 41% users are aged 16-24 years; they typically spend at least 52 minutes every day on the app, watching videos related to entertainment, dance, pranks, fitness and other categories.

Ninety percent of TikTok or Douyin users access the app via smartphones and maintain a healthy engagement rate of 52%. In 2019, people spent \$115.3 million on the app for in-app purchases, influencer marketing, and so on.

What Language Do They Speak?

Creating a profile on social websites is easy. What's difficult is to spread your message and get people talking about the brand in a positive manner. However, this objective can be achieved by determining what type of content the audience prefers and creating posts accordingly.

Hashtags (#)

Hashtags were introduced by Chris Messina in an attempt to organize content on social media. Twitter platform first introduced this unique feature in 2007, but it was later adopted by Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and LinkedIn due to its usability.

Long Form vs. Short Form Content

Internet users tend to have short attention spans. They easily get distracted and can ignore posts if they don't find them interesting. This is why content communications and marketing in digital media focuses on captivating and concise content that can keep readers hooked till the last line.

If we need to keep the content short, how can we share important information or news with the target audience?

It's common for social media communicators and marketers to get confused about the length of content. But you should remember that the content length depends on the interest of your audience as well as the platform where you intend to post it.

If you are planning to set up a company blog, it's best to opt for long-form content. The purpose of blogging is to engage

people about a relevant topic and offer more meaningful commentary. Blog posts can be 500-1,000 words, with 700-800 words being a bit of a sweet spot. Longer blog posts (2,000-2,500 words) can help boost SEO scores, though.

LinkedIn is also suitable for posting long-form content. You can write about your area of expertise and experiences to share knowledge with other professionals.

Other social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are suitable for short-term, short-form content.

Also, don't forget that long form videos aren't compatible with most social websites. Instagram supports videos of up to 15 seconds. So, if you are creating long form informative videos, it may be a good option to post it on YouTube and share a brief snippet on Twitter and other social websites. Your followers who find the topic interesting will visit your YouTube channel to watch the entire video.

Each platform specializes its content provisions slightly differently (or very differently). These are the most popular types of digital content:

- Blogs or articles
- eBooks
- Images (still images, GIFs, 360° images)
- Videos (recorded videos and live streaming)
- Infographics
- Testimonials
- Contests
- Polls
- Podcasts
- Webinars
- How-to guides

While myriad social

media websites are available these days, you can't promote your brand on each and every website. By focusing your efforts on websites that are popular among your audience, you can drive results.

Why Do You Want One to Win Or Lose?

Myspace got the first-mover advantage and remained the leading social website for quite some time. However, when Facebook was introduced, it captured a huge market share in no time and left other social media websites struggling with their loss.

When an innovative company is launched with the right strategy, it has a good chance of eliminating the predecessor and becoming the market leader. In the past, we have seen

many such examples. Netflix beat Blockbuster; digital camera companies killed Polaroid; Circuit City lost to Best Buy.

This is a common trend that old and established businesses lose to new market entrants. It is because many traditional stores prefer to stick with the strategies and actions they have been using for years and fear change or innovation.

This practice isn't good for anyone; neither marketers nor consumers. If there is no market competition, consumers would suffer the most.

Higher competition eliminates the monopoly. The more firms in the market, the more efforts would be needed for a business to make its place in the crowded market. They are motivated to innovate and offer value to consumers to stand out. It keeps them on their toes and they constantly put in their best efforts to stay ahead and stay relevant. Similarly, they are also inclined to offer better quality goods and services at reasonable prices.

How Do We Benefit From Each Network?

Investing time and money in social media is no longer optional for professional communicators and business marketers. With your competition gaining customers and building a good reputation via social websites, you can't afford to miss out on this invaluable opportunity.

For marketers, the first step should be to get a website where you can display products, testimonials, and other relevant information. After that, you can gain several benefits from social accounts. The same is pretty much true for non-marketing communications professionals, except that there's no "product" to display (though one could have a lengthy conversation about the "products" offered by non-profit organizations, political parties, and governments, as examples).

Regardless of which platform you choose, you can raise

awareness via social posts, as well as paid social media advertising. Your social posts should include a call to action that guides users about the next action. For instance, if you post a special discount for your social media followers, you ought to add the link to the online store where they can redeem it.

Customers tend to trust businesses that have a transparent system. Not only should you share detailed information about your business, but also share accurate pricing and terms and conditions. With this approach, you can earn their trust.

Many customers post reviews about their experiences with a brand. When a satisfied customer posts a positive comment, you should respond to them. However, it's equally important to respond to negative comments. When you take action quickly to solve their problems, your popularity and sales are likely to elevate.

Also, be mindful of changing trends. Where you gave your attention last year will not be the same as where you give your attention next year. Social media professionals need to be trend spotters and experimenters; explore new social media apps as they are released and check statistics about which platforms are thriving and which are in decline.

Explore and Experiment

In social marketing and communications, there are no rules and standards. You can't follow specific rules that guarantee specific outcomes. The best way to succeed in the social media world is to adopt the trial and error technique. You should come up with a plan to promote the brand and execute it on social channels of your choice. If it brings you the desired results, then it's great, but there is a good chance that social media efforts won't always prove effective.

Despite your efforts to boost awareness, gain customers, or

generate leads, your social strategy won't always work. This is why you need a contingency plan. If the first plan doesn't get results, you should adjust it based on the performance metrics.

The good news is that there are several options available for communicators and marketers. If Facebook doesn't work, turn to LinkedIn or Youtube for the next campaign. You should set clear objectives, choose the right platform that meets your criteria, and measure performance after the execution of the plan for making your social media campaigns fruitful.

Competition Check

Competitors offer similar products or services to your client. In many cases, the first point of competition is for the audience's attention; there's a strong push to win that competition in the world of social media, as the first to grab their attention gets the first chance to gain their interest and secure their favourable action (which could range from buying a product to donating to a charity to voting for a political party or any other activity your client needs performed).

The competition for the hearts, minds, and wallets of audiences is now global, but it also has a way of being regionalized. Social media disproportionately engage with people who live in their geographic area and they are more likely to shop from a business that has a local presence (even global companies, such as Amazon, have a stronger local presence in some places than others).

Competing can be a major challenge. However, a proactive approach improves success.

Keeping an eye on competitors is critical to success. If you are unaware what others are doing, they may capture your audience's attention and lure them away.

Competition isn't always bad. When you aren't alone, you feel the motivation to keep improving the quality of products

and customer service. You also get to learn from experienced competitors who have been in the market for a long time.

Why Perform Competitor Analysis

Performing competitive analysis assists in identifying your competitors and learning about their business. It's a time consuming process and many entrepreneurs don't find it too important. However, a comprehensive analysis can help you in many ways.

Understand Audience Needs

Businesses often fall victim to market myopia. They focus on the internal expertise or strengths and only consider the firm's perspective. As a result, they ignore changing market trends and fail to understand customer needs.

Competitive analysis is a great way to broaden horizons and explore customer's perspectives. By analyzing the activities and strategies of competitors, you can obtain a fresh perspective and evolve processes with time to stay ahead of the competition.

Identify Potential Threats

A business should always be aware of potential threats and risks. You can perform SWOT analysis to determine threats facing the industry. But competitive analysis is also a must.

With this approach, you can stay updated with what your customers are doing. Furthermore, you can also monitor new

market entrants and take the right measures to deal with challenges they create for your business.

Set Suitable Benchmarks

Every business sets certain standards or KPIs to evaluate the performance of different departments as well as the entire organization. Through competitor analysis, you can ensure that your benchmarks suit the current industry trends and make necessary improvements.

Further Reading

<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-marketing-strategy/>

<https://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-trends-2021-predictions-from-pros/>

Attributions

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Chapter 7: Audience Analysis

According to this author, rule number one of communication is “know your audience and put them first.” Communication begins and ends with the audience; if the audience did not receive or understand the message, then the communication failed. The best way to ensure that a message has been received and understood is through audience analysis.

A fundamental technique used in public relations is to identify the target audience and to tailor every message to appeal to that audience. The audience can be local, nationwide, or worldwide, but it is more often a segment of a population. Marketers often refer to economy-driven “demographics,” such as “white males, 18-49,” but in public relations, an audience is more fluid, being whomever someone wants to reach. For example, political audiences may include “soccer moms” and “NASCAR dads,” which are admittedly stereotypes, but they’re also very visual and accessible simplifications of a large amount of complex audience analysis summarized in two words. Sometimes, that’s what PR practitioners need in conversation with their clients, rather than a complicated spreadsheet or chart.

In addition to audiences, there are usually stakeholders, literally people who have a “stake” in a given issue. All audiences are stakeholders (or presumptive stakeholders), but not all stakeholders are audiences. For example, a charitable organization may commission a public relations agency to create an advertising campaign to raise money to find a cure for a disease. The charity and the people with the disease are stakeholders, but the audience is anyone who is likely to donate money.

Sometimes the interests of differing audiences and stakeholders common to a public relations effort necessitate the creation of several distinct—but still complementary—messages. This is not always easy to do, and sometimes—especially in politics—a spokesperson or client says something to one audience that angers another audience or group of stakeholders.

Demographic Characteristics

Public relations practitioners first analyze an audience by its demographic characteristics and then by their internal psychological traits. In beginning this discussion, however, be careful about stereotyping, which is generalizing about a group of people and assuming that, because a few people in that group have a characteristic, all of them do.

At the same time, one should not totalize about a person or group of persons. Totalizing is taking one characteristic of a group or person and making that the “totality” or sum total of what that person or group is. Totalizing often happens to persons with disabilities, for example; the disability is seen as the totality of that person or all that person is about. This can be both harmful to the relationship and ineffective as a means of communicating.

Avoiding stereotyping and totalizing is important because PR practitioners cannot assume everything about an audience based on just one demographic characteristic. Only two or three might be important, but in other cases, several demographic characteristics matter.

What follows is a listing of the more common demographic characteristics that a communicator might use in understanding their audience and shaping their message and the delivery of that message to adapt to the target audience. Understand, however, that there are others, as well.

Age

In North American culture, certain roles, behaviours, motivations, interests, and concerns have traditionally been assigned to people of certain ages. Young people are concerned about career choices; people over 60 are concerned about retirement. Most people go to college from the age of 18 to about 25. People 50 years old have raised their children and are “empty nesters.” These neat categories still exist for many, but are largely outdated. Most post-secondary classrooms have a student who is in their 40s or older; many people aged 50+ still have children living at home or never had children at all. These stereotypes are problematic, even if they more often true than not.

Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity

The second demographic characteristic commonly listed is gender. This area is open to misunderstanding as much as any other. In most cases, PR practitioners will be communicating with a mixed audience, which may include people of more than one or two genders, so one needs to keep all groups in mind. Yes, there are more than two genders; this topic is complex and, while not the focus of a public relations course, demands attention and sensitivity.

While a broader consensus is emerging in North America about the politics of sexual orientation—which isn’t to say there is unanimity and acknowledges extreme regional and/or religion-based variances in attitudes—the politics of sexual identity are at the forefront of political attention. Divisive debates and policies about gender identity need to be clearly understood and navigated with the greatest care.

Age and gender are the two main ways PR practitioners categorize people: “teenaged boys,” “elderly women,” or “middle-aged men” would be examples of potential starting points for how PR practitioners would begin defining their target audience.

Race, Ethnicity, Nationality and Culture

Race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture are often lumped together; at the same time, these categorizations can be controversial. Race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture are discussed here in one section because of their interrelationship, though they are distinct categories. Most social scientists today reject the idea of race as a biological reality altogether and see it as a social construct. This means it is a view of humanity that has arisen over time and affects our thinking about others.

Unfortunately, dividing these categories and groups is not that easy and these categories are almost always clouded by complicated political and personal concerns, which this author does not have time or space to address here. However, as an example, far too many people confuse language categories with cultures and are oblivious to differences, ranging from subtle to what should be painfully obvious.

Having said this, PR practitioners must be able to consider issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture without being racist. PR practitioners need to be able to consider how these factors may affect tactical communications choices not as inspired by stereotypes, but to meet the needs and sensitivities of the target audiences.

Be mindful of the sensitivities associated with these topics and take time to meaningfully understand and appreciate the differences involved, being especially sensitive to those

populations that have been colonized, marginalized, oppressed, or otherwise discriminated against.

Religion

Religion, casually defined as beliefs and practices about the transcendent, deities, and the meaning of life, can be thought of as an *affiliation* and as a *life commitment*. On the other hand, a person may have an affiliation with a religious group, but have no real commitment to it. The teachings and practices of the group may not affect the personal daily life of the member, but they nonetheless identify as a member.

Religion, like ethnicity and culture, is an area where PR practitioners should be conscious of the diversity of their audience. Not everyone worships in a “church” and not everyone attends a house of worship on Sunday. Not everyone celebrates Christmas the same and some do not celebrate it at all. PR practitioners need to carefully choose their words, aiming for inclusive language.

Group Affiliation

Without getting into a sociological discussion, one can note that one demographic characteristics and sources of identity for some is a group affiliation. To what groups do the audience members predominantly belong? Sometimes, a PR practitioner will want to know if the group is mostly members in a particular political party, union, recreational club, professional organization, and so on. In many cases, the reason they are the target audience is connected to a group identity. Again, be mindful of what the group values and what binds the audience together.

Region

Region, another demographic characteristic, relates to where the audience members live. PR practitioners can think of this in two ways. Large countries have regions: Atlantic Canada, the Pacific Northwest, the Prairies, and so on. These regions can be broken down even more, such as the Gulf Islands or the Niagara Peninsula. Many are very conscious of their province or community and identify with it a great deal.

The second way to think about region is as “residence” or whether the audience lives in an urban area, the suburbs, or a rural area. If a person lives in a city, they probably do not think about being without cell phone or internet service, but many people in rural areas do not take those for granted. The clubs that students in rural schools belong to might be very different from the clubs a student in a large city would join.

Occupation

Occupation may be a demographic characteristic that is central to a PR task. For the most part, people choose their occupations based on their values, interests, and abilities. As people associate with colleagues in their occupation, those values, interests, and abilities are strengthened. Readers of this OER textbook are probably in college to enter a specific career that they believe will be economically beneficial and personally fulfilling. Many people spend more time at work than any other activity, except sleeping (or even more than sleeping in extremely demanding jobs). Messages that acknowledge the importance, diversity, and reasons for occupations may be more effective in some situations, such as if the target audience is police officers, teachers, or farmers; such occupations are often central to the audience’s identity.

Education

Education is closely tied to occupation and is often, though not always, a matter of choice. Education usually reflects what kind of information and training a person has been *exposed to*, but it does not reflect intelligence. Nonetheless, people of varying education levels often react quite differently to messages and PR practitioners will often target people based on education level.

Socio-Economic Level

Socio-economic level (sometimes socio-economic status) is also tied to occupation and education in many cases. Generally, people of certain levels of education or certain occupations to make more money. These norms can be significantly thrown off, however, by inheritance (or lack thereof) or marital status.

Marital and Family Status

Family status, such as whether the audience members are married, single, divorced, or have children or grandchildren may be very important to the concerns and values of the audience and even the reason the audience is targeted. For example, young parents could be gathered to town hall meeting because they are concerned about health and safety of children in the community. Getting married and/or having a child often creates a major shift in how people view the world and manage their priorities.

All that Diversity!

This section on demographics could leave one wondering, “With all this diversity, how can we even think about an audience?” That’s a reasonable reaction. As diversity increases, audience understanding and adaptation becomes more difficult. To address this concern, PR practitioners should keep in mind the primary reason the audience is being targeted and the demographic characteristics they have in common—*their common bonds*. For example, a group of classmates may be diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, or religion, but they have a common occupation (all students) and region (living near or on the campus), group identity (sharing a class together) as well as, possibly, other characteristics.

Psychographic Characteristics

Whereas demographic characteristics describe the “facts” about the people in a target audience and are focused on the external, psychographic characteristics explain the inner qualities. Although there are many ways to think about this topic, beliefs, attitudes, needs, and values are the best starting point.

Beliefs

Daryl Bem (1970) defined beliefs as “statements we hold to be true.” Notice this definition does not say the beliefs *are* true, only that people hold them to be true and, as such, they determine how people respond to the world as they encounter it. Stereotypes are a believe that all the people in a certain group are “like that” or share a trait. Beliefs are not confined to

the religious or political realms, but touch all aspects of human experience.

Beliefs are hard to change, but perhaps more so based on each level of these characteristics:

- Stability—the longer a belief is held, the more stable or entrenched they are
- Centrality—they are in the middle of a person's identity, self-concept, or "who we are"
- Saliency—the audience thinks about them a great deal
- Strength—the audience has a great deal of intellectual or experiential support for the belief or engage in activities that strengthen the beliefs

Beliefs can have varying levels of stability, centrality, salience, and strength. An educator's beliefs about the educational process and importance of education would be strong (support from everyday experience and reading sources of information), central (how they make their living and define their work), salient (they spend every day thinking about it), and stable (especially if they have been an educator for a long time). Beliefs can be changed, but it is not a quick or easy process.

Attitudes

The next psychographic characteristic, attitude, is closely related to beliefs. Attitude is defined as a stable positive or negative response to a person, idea, object, or policy (Bem, 1970) and comes from experiences, peer groups, beliefs, rewards, and punishments.

Do not confuse attitude with "mood." Attitudes are stable; that does not mean they are unchangeable, only that they change slowly and in response to certain experiences.

Changing attitudes is a primary task of public relations professionals because attitudes are the most determining factor in what people actually do. In other words, attitudes lead to actions and, interestingly, actions lead to and strengthen attitudes.

Values

Values are goals people strive for and what they consider important and desirable. However, values are not just basic wants. A person may want a vintage sports car from the 1960s and may value it because of the amount of money it costs, but the vintage sports car is not a value; it represents another type of value:

- Nostalgia (positive memories)
- Display (vanity, showing off)
- Materialism (greed, desire to own more or what others do not)
- Aesthetics (beauty, appearance, style, design)
- Prestige (status symbol)
- Pleasure (physical enjoyment)

Therefore, people can engage in the same behaviour, but for different values. One person may participate in a river cleanup because she values the future of the planet; another may value the appearance of the community in which she lives; another may help because friends are involved and she values those relationships.

Needs

The fourth psychographic characteristic is needs, which are important deficiencies that people are motivated to fulfill. Students may already be familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). It is commonly discussed in the fields of management, psychology, and health professions. The hierarchy is one way to think about needs. In trying to understand human motivation, Maslow theorized that, as people's needs represented at the base of the pyramid are fulfilled, they move up the hierarchy to fulfill other types of need (McLeod, 2014).

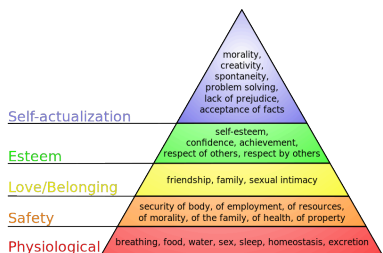


Image created by J. Finkelstein, 2006. Published in Wikimedia Commons.

According to Maslow's theory, the most basic physiological or survival needs must be met before people move to the second level, which is safety and security. When needs for safety and security are met, people move up to relationships or connection

needs, often called "love and belongingness." The fourth level up is esteem needs, which could be thought of as achievement, accomplishment, or self-confidence. The highest level, self-actualization, is achieved by those who are satisfied and secure enough in the lower four levels that they can make sacrifices for others. (As an aside, this model is sometimes shown with different levels or labels, such as "social" instead of "love/belonging." Many scholars reject this model as inaccurate. However problematic it may be, it is still a useful tool for contemplating audience motivations. Other useful models also exist.)

So, how do these psychographic characteristics affect the work of PR practitioners? They are most applicable to

understanding how audiences are likely to be persuaded to take action. This is a crucial part of a PR practitioner's job: motivating a target audience to act (or stop acting) in a particular way or at a particular time.

Contextual Factors of Audience Analysis

The “facts about” and “inner qualities” (demographic and psychographic characteristics) of the audience influence how a PR practitioner approaches communication. The context (place and time) does also. What follows are some questions to consider when planning to communicate with a target audience.

1. How much time does the audience have to receive and process a message. The less time available, the fewer details and the more simplified the message needs to be. With more time, messages can become more detailed and complex.
2. What has recently happened to this audience? If a PR message is being sent to residents of a small town about water quality safety, that message is received differently if a train with hazardous materials has recently derailed nearby or if there was a fire at a chemical plant.
3. Why is the target audience being targeted? If an organization needs to change a group's behaviour, that means there's some reason that audience isn't already doing what the organization wants. In many PR messages, the target audience is, in some way, vulnerable, so understanding the motivations of both parties is key.
4. How many people are being targeted? If a million people are being engaged, this changes the tactics considerably from engaging 400 people. If a neighbourhood is being targeted, a PR practitioner may choose to knock on

everybody's front door and talk to them. If every wheat farmer in the country is being targeted, other methods will be needed.

5. What does the audience expect? This depends a lot on the communicator and/or their client. For example, audiences are usually skeptical of governments and large businesses; this influences how they view the messages delivered. On the other hand, members of a religious organization will usually accept messages from the leadership of that group—pardon the pun—on good faith.

Knowing these details about the audience can greatly impact how successful a PR message will be; not knowing them can potentially have adverse effects.

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Chapter 8: Audience Archetypes

What is an Audience Archetype?

Most communications strategies and activities begin by defining the target audience. Examples of target audiences could look like any of these:

- First-time buyers of an organization's product or service,
- Donors to a non-profit organization,
- Students at an educational institution, or
- Constituents of a municipal government.

As you communicate on behalf of a client or employer, you'll want to have a lot of clarity about the target audience groups you're engaging with, and there may be multiple such audiences.

Assuming you have defined your target audiences, the next important step is creating data-driven audience archetypes (also known as "customer personas"). Simply defined, data-driven audience archetypes are semi-fictional representations that showcase the key traits of a segment of your target audience, based on data you have collected from research, analytics, and any other reliable information.

Here is a 9-minute video, [How To Create A User Persona](#), that provides a nice summary of what customer personas are, as well as walks you through the process of building your own.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/socialmedia/?p=61#oembed-1>

Now that you understand what audience archetypes are, let's explore a few different types.

Types of Audience Archetype

There are a few different approaches to developing your customer personas:

- Data-driven and Proto/Ad hoc/Lean Archetypes
- Initiatives-based vs. Close-up Archetypes

Data-Driven vs. Proto/Ad hoc/Lean Archetypes

The main difference between “data-driven” audience archetypes and “proto, adhoc, or lean” archetypes has to do with how the personas are created. In an ideal world, you start with a blank sheet of paper, make no assumptions, and conduct extensive audience research. You talk to lots of real-world people and use the data collected to construct archetypes. This is the data-driven approach, and it is how archetypes should *ideally* be created.

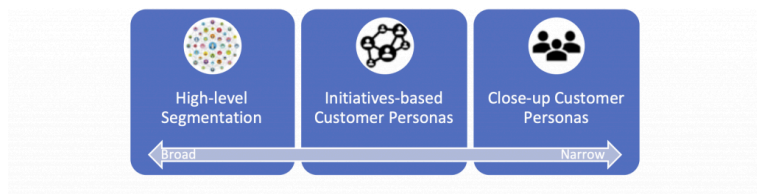
That said, many organizations do not have the time, budget, nor desire to do this level of research. So, rather than stall the audience archetype process or have no archetypes at all, you can use a different approach: proto or ad hoc audience archetypes.

Proto, ad hoc, or lean personas normally are not created by doing extensive external audience research, but rather by collecting information primarily from within an organization. For example, you might hold a workshop or meeting with various stakeholders and ask them to **describe** your target

audience. Based on everyone's input and/or experience, you can start building some “rough” personas.

The critical point to note is that these rough personas are not research-led and, therefore, contain assumptions or biases that may or may not be true. While such lean archetypes can be useful tools, treat them with caution and verify them with research, even if that research happens well after you have created your rough personas. A good approach is to start with a few ad hoc personas to get the process rolling and to get stakeholder buy-in. Then, over time, conduct research to verify and validate their accuracy and refine them as you gain more audience insights and gather more audience data.

High-level Segmentation vs. Initiatives-based vs. Close-up Customer Personas



Another way to approach your audience archetypes is by exploring how broad or narrow you want your personas to be. Below we present three common options along this spectrum.

- **High-level segmentation** provides marketers and communicators with a bird's eye view of their target audience. Since there is limited segmentation, the data driving this type of persona is quite broad and this persona will represent the largest/broadest segment you may want to target. For organizations that have not

created personas, this is a suggested first step. However, to ensure better targeting and maximize your effectiveness, you should further segment your target audience and create more defined and narrower personas as time and other resources permit.

- **Initiatives-based archetypes** identify audience groups who have a moderate to high interest in a specific initiative. These are often seen with cause-based non-profits, where the target audiences are particularly interested in a specific, cause-based initiative. These personas often represent a subset of the high-level segmentation target audience, but do not represent those audience segments at the lowest possible level(s).
- **Close-up personas** highlight audiences who are generally interested in a *specific* product, service, program, or action/activity. For example, close-up customer personas might represent “customers most likely to leave.” These personas tend to be narrower and, as a result, represent a smaller audience segment. However, because of the narrow focus, these personas are easier to target and have more in common with other members of that audience segment.

Now, let’s explore how to develop data-driven customer personas.

How to Build a Data-driven Audience Archetype

Below is a framework that will cover all the foundational aspects of an audience archetype. However, please keep in mind that all personas should incorporate multiple viewpoints,

i.e., if a customer persona is being developed by a single person, with only one viewpoint in mind, for only one purpose, and/or for only one stage of your customer journey, your persona may not support your organization as a whole. So, try to include a variety of audience viewpoints in the following process because it will make your customer personas much stronger and applicable to the entire organization.

1. **Conduct Audience Research**

To get a deeper understanding of your target audience, start by seeking out the answers to the following questions:

- Who are your customers/donors/voters/stakeholders?
- How do they behave?
- What are they interested in?
- What kind of challenges do they face?

More specifically, here are several research data points that you may want to collect and document:

Audience Research Data Points		
Category	Examples	Sources
Demographics/ Backstory	Name, birthplace, family history, childhood memories, first job, location	CRM, Public records, social media analytics
Personal life	Marital status, family size, pets, diet and fitness habits	Public records, social media
Career	Industry, job title, experience level, retirement plans	CRM, LinkedIn, online forums, Google
Personality traits	Introvert/extrovert, right brain/left brain, optimistic/pessimistic	Social media, customer surveys, interviews, List of 14 free personality tests, online comments ¹
Online behaviour	Favorite social media platforms, search engines, mobile devices	Social media activities, online groups, forums, comments
Purchasing behaviour	Favorite online retailers, payment methods, spending habits	Google Analytics, Tag Manager, remarketing / retargeting tools, previous campaign analytics
Goals and challenges	Dream job, customer service experiences, regrettable purchases	CRM, customer service database, customer surveys, feedback, focus groups, online comments
Objections	Communication issues, product features, purchasing methods	CRM, customer support database, customer surveys, interviews, focus groups

¹ [List of 14 free personality tests](#)

For some more ideas, you may also want to consider [Hubspot's list of what you should consider when defining buyer personas](#).

2. Identify Audience Pain Points

Either through surveys, interviews, or social listening, you will want to identify the key pain points your audiences have, e.g.:

- What problems or hassles are they trying to solve?
- What's holding them back from success?
- What barriers do they face in reaching their goals?

3. Identify Audience Goals

This is the flip side of pain points. Pain points are problems your potential audience members are trying to solve.

Goals or aspirations are positive outcomes they want to achieve. Depending on the kinds of products and services you offer, these goals might be personal or professional. Similar to above, this information can be acquired through customer surveys, interviews, or social listening.

4. Understand How You Can Help

Now that you understand your audiences' pain points and goals, it's time to create a really clear picture of how your client or employer can help. Stop thinking about their brand in terms of features and dig deep to analyze the benefits you offer audiences. Consider your products and services from the audience's point of view. And, keep in mind the following three questions:

- How can we help?

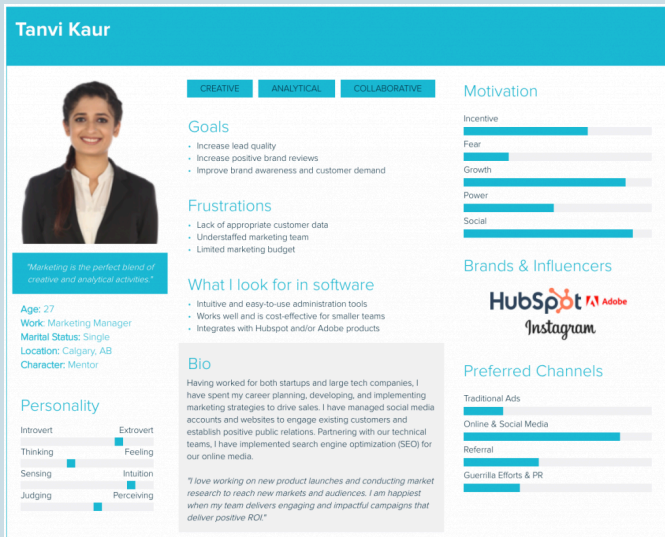
- What are your audience's main action barriers?
- How can you help audiences overcome any barriers/pain points and achieve their goals?

5. **Define and Name Your Audience Archetypes**

Define and name these audience segments. Start looking for common characteristics and patterns. As you group those characteristics together, you'll have the basis for your unique personas. Take your collection of characteristics and turn them into a persona that you can identify with and speak to. Give your persona a name, a job title, a home, and other defining characteristics. You want your persona to seem like a real person.

Customer Persona Analysis Exercises

Let's look at a sample customer persona:



Here we have Marketing Manager, Tanvi Kaur, a business-to-business (B2B) persona. We can see her goals and aspirations, and even the experience she's seeking when looking for products and services. It's interesting that we also have a mix of bulleted statements, as well as quotes from Tanvi herself. It's beneficial to let your personas speak for themselves. This little touch goes a long way towards showing the individual's personality and can also provide cues to the type of language the persona uses and what messaging might resonate with them.

Looking at Tanvi's customer persona above, how would you answer the following questions:

1. **What additional details might be useful for**

this customer persona?

2. If you were a software company, how might you target Tanvi?

Pros and Cons of Audience Archetypes

Audience archetypes can be an important strategic and tactical tool. However, it is helpful to review some of the common “pros and cons.”

Cons

- **Significant Time and Effort**

To be done well, audience archetypes take time and effort. Organizations may not be willing or able to commit to create truly **data-driven** personas. As a result, personas may be based on stereotypes instead of *observed* behaviours or researched audience data. This can defeat the purpose of audience archetypes, as they will not be valid representations of an audience group.

- **Poor Research Practices**

Those conducting the audience research may not have advanced research skills. Given that data-driven personas are based on data and the research collected, the personas may be built on faulty, inadequate, or biased data.

- **Just Fictional Stories**

Some argue that personas are all made up of stories and our perceptions. However, with the amount of data available to organizations today, audience archetypes can be based on observed data and reflect the reality of what is happening. That said, be careful in how *interpretations* of the data can enter into personas. Make sure personas are based on real data. Even then, consider personas as supportive data and not the only source of customer insights. This is why customer personas require testing, validation, and updating because, with an iterative approach, you can identify and counter false assumptions or interpretations.

- **Outdated**

Because changes are happening quickly, some audience archetypes become outdated (such as the stereotypical senior citizen who can't use a computer—that person almost stopped existing during the pandemic). Measure real-time data as much as possible to see if your personas match the audiences you are attracting and engaging with. If not, there is a mismatch, and your personas need to be updated. Remember the audience archetype process is ongoing and each archetype needs occasional refreshing (or discarding).

Pros

There are quite a few ways that audience archetypes can help an organization communicate more effectively.

Audience archetypes assist marketers in knowing what to promote, to whom, when, and through which channels. With digital marketing on the rise and more and more channels available to marketers and communicators, making sure you

spend your time and money on the appropriate channels and activities can define your organization's success or failure.

A relatable persona can help sales staff and customer service representatives better visualize customers during the training process and can help them anticipate needs and support customers during interactions. Indeed, the sales staff and CSRs can better relate and connect with their audience, improving the organization's relationship to this audience.

These audience archetypes are also used heavily in product development and technical design. Engineers and programmers can't design products and social media apps and websites for engineers and technical designers; they need to design the products and software for end users. Archetypes help them visualize those people and keep their needs first.

Please note that any tool and any type of audience research can result in faulty insights. The key is to choose the proper tool and use it correctly. Bottom line: the identified issues are not inherent flaws in audience archetypes, but rather flaws in **implementing** personas. These flaws can be fixed by proper management, real customer data, and regular updating of personas.

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Chapter 9: Branding & Social Media

A brand is much more than a logo, tagline, and product line.

It's more than a catchy jingle, the celebrities who endorse the brand, or the storefront where the brand has a physical presence.

An organization's brand is the visual identity, emotional connection, imagined personification, status, and cultural legacy of that organization, all wrapped up into something an audience can process and understand in less than a second.

A strong brand can be worth billions upon billions of dollars. As of this writing, the total market valuation of the Coca Cola Company is [approximately US \\$260 billion](#). Now, imagine what the value of the company would be if it sold all of its bottling plants, all of its trucks, its trade secret formula, and transferred all of its customer contracts, personnel, and operations to another company called "Sugar Water Soft Drinks." In this scenario, the only part of the company that isn't sold is the name of the company and everything associated with the brand. After this hypothetical sale, what would "Sugar Water Soft Drinks" be worth as a company? What would Coca Cola be worth without anything but its brand? Marketing experts estimate the Coca Cola brand to be worth [approximately US \\$100 billion](#) on its own, separate from all the physical aspects of the company, its contracts, operations, and everything else.

That's an extremely valuable brand and it needs to be protected from harm. We'll discuss reputation management in the next chapter.

Brand Elements

As noted earlier, a brand is more than just a logo. However, a logo is definitely part of it. What else is? These are the elements

of a brand that need to be defined and redefined as an organization evolves:

- Brand name
- Brand identity
- Brand image
- Brand personality
- Brand positioning

Brand Name

A good brand name is unique, unmistakable, short and easy to say. Think of some powerful and popular brands: Pepsi, Samsung, Donald Trump, the Red Cross, NASA, Harvard University.

If you ever watch the film [*The Founder*](#) about Ray Croc's takeover and expansion of McDonald's, Croc specifically mentions that he preferred to buy out the original owners of McDonald's, rather than to simply compete with them, because he valued the brand name.

You know all of those brand names. You have an idea of what each one means to you, how you feel about it, what the brand represents, and how prestigious that brand is in terms of connecting with it, working for it, or owning it.

Brand Identity

For each of the brands noted, you can conjure images in your mind: what the product looks like, the face of the former American president, the logo of the Red Cross, the old buildings of Harvard University.

Brand identity is the logo and set of visual symbols associated with the brand.

There are parts of those organizations you probably don't know about and don't connect with the brand. For example, when you think of Samsung, do you think of a military weapons manufacturer? Equally, when you think of Harvard University, you probably don't think of one of the most powerful investment groups on Wall Street, but with [over US \\$50 billion](#) in their endowment fund, that's exactly what Harvard University is. These parts of Samsung and Harvard are not part of how you think about the brand and are separate from their brand identity, even though they are important parts of how those organizations generate revenue.

Brand Image

This is the impressions a brand makes on an audience and how that audiences perceive the brand, which means organizations do not have total control over their own brand image. However, much effort is put into managing those perceptions. The brand image is also closely tied to an organization's reputation.

Brand Personality

Brand personality is the personification of the brand, especially with human traits and emotional associations.

Sometimes these questions are easier to think of on a spectrum or in contrast. Think about tech giants Apple and Microsoft. What are those brands like as people? One is fun and one serious. One is young and one is mature. One is cleaner than the other. One is smarter than the other.

If you said that Apple is a fun, youthful brand with a clean

image, I agree with you. In truth Apple and Microsoft are about the same age and their products are equally clean. This isn't about facts, though; this is about audience perception of the brand. Yes, Microsoft is the more mature, more serious, and smarter brand. The people who work at Apple are plenty smart, too, of course. This isn't about the people who run the companies, their products, or their operations; it's about how people perceive the brand on an emotional, relational level.

Brand Positioning

One good way to study brand positioning is to look at where companies advertise: look who advertises in which publications.

Luxury brands advertise in magazines about business, the economy, and luxury products (including golf). Value brands advertise in popular magazines and newspapers. Where in the market does the brand attempt to position itself?

If you think about luxury car brands, you should quickly be able to understand the brand positioning. Consider Mercedes-Benz, Rolls Royce, Cadillac, and Audi. You probably have a clear sense of what type of social status comes with each of these vehicles. One you would associate with the ridiculously rich; one you may not even think of as a luxury brand. However, most people will rank the status associated with these vehicles as follows: Rolls Royce, Mercedes-Benz, Cadillac, Audi. This is true, despite that Cadillac is the least expensive of the four brands, so this isn't only about price.

Another aspect of positioning is about filling certain audience niches. What car brand is the “environmentally friendly” brand? Which car brand is best at safety? If your answers were “Tesla” and “Volvo,” respectively, you’re tuned into their brand positioning, despite that a Toyota Prius is more environmentally friendly and a variety of car manufacturers

compete favourably on safety ratings with Volvo. Again, this isn't about facts; it's about where organizations are trying to position their brands in the market.

Building a Brand

Building a strong brand is a long-term action that requires consistency in visual identity, but also tone of voice in messaging, brand associations (such as celebrity endorsers), price point, product quality, and customer service.

Organization's put painstaking effort into building their brand, but as audiences' wants and needs shift, brands must adapt and change to stay relevant and engaging. Changes to a brand need to be managed carefully, as the high-stakes decisions can have both positive and negative consequences.

Successful brands create long-term emotional connections with audiences and generate a certain amount of loyalty—sometimes even an intense amount of loyalty, as with sports fans, who will spend a fortune on tickets and merchandise for their preferred team, but not a nickel for another team, despite that the product is extremely similar.

Organizations also put a lot of effort into differentiating themselves from competitors—again, even when the products offered are extremely similar, as with sports teams or car manufacturers. Brand managers want their brand to stand out as being unique, trustworthy, and preferable to their target audience.

Brands in Social Media

How a brand presents itself in social media must be consistent

with how it presents itself globally, but it also needs to work within the specific social media ecosystem in which it operates.

In social media—as in real life—audiences value authentic communication and connection. Organizations need a social media voice that matches that audience expectation and respects their overall brand.

In some cases, organizations take a social-first approach where their brand is first designed digitally and then projects as such into the global environment based on that. One good example of that is [Wendy's](#), which has become famous for its glib, edgy humour on social media, which is pushing into its branding elsewhere.

Social media can bring brands into closer conceptual proximity and even amounts to a certain amount of jibing and jockeying between them (again, as can be seen on the Wendy's Twitter account). How organizations want their brand to interact with other brands is something that requires consideration, as well.

Chapter 10: Reputation Management

Put simply, reputation is the balance between positive and negative feelings that an audience has about an organization (or an individual).

Branding, identity, and reputation combine to represent the intellectual conception of an organization. They define what an audience understands about an organization beyond its products.

A strong reputation evokes positive feelings; a weak reputation does the opposite. Because people make decisions emotionally, reputation has a huge impact on decision making, whether that's a desire to buy a product because you have positive associations with the brand, or not wanting to go to see a movie because the lead star has a personal history of criminal violence.

Reputations can be built, protected, defended, damaged, rebuilt, and destroyed. Building a strong reputation takes years; damaging it takes minutes.

Reputation management is now mostly done online and an important portion of that work is now done through social media. Reputations are most often damaged through negative news stories—whether originating in social media, a magazine, a newspaper, on television, or otherwise—that are circulated online. Those stories circulate and whirlwind out of control, becoming a topic of attention for more and more news stories, and rising up the list of trending topics for the day, week, or even month.

Skilled professionals work to enhance an organization's online presence by building a strong brand, attaching positive associations, such as through corporate social responsibility,

excellent customer service, celebrity endorsements, or other intentional actions.

Reputation Management in Social Media

Audiences expect quick responses from organizations, especially when critical events are unfolding. However, news can break any time and social media users will engage with an organization at any time in the day, meaning that a dedicated team of social media communicators would be needed for round-the-clock reputation management. This is feasible (though expensive) for large international corporations; it's impossible for small, local non-profits.

Information spreads quickly and can have a lasting impact, so even small organizations need to have contingency plans for how they'll engage off hours. This is one of the curses of social media for smaller organizations.

Good social media reputation management demands certain strategies and tactics. Let's look at them here.

Social Media Monitoring

So much is happening on social media all the time. Keeping up is very difficult, but organizations need to follow relevant hashtags, daily trending hashtags, relevant accounts, and other media that would be relevant, such as mainstream news sites. Constant monitoring keeps you informed and both limits the impact and number of unwanted surprises.

Create High-Quality Content

Your audience wants to connect with you, so you need to provide them with content they are going to upvote, share, and comment on. Pushing high-quality content also can help position your organization as a leader in its industry, which provides some protection when negative publicity arises.

Social Media Engagement

Meaningfully engage with your audiences. Promptly respond to questions and comments on your social media accounts and anything that might come in through email or other channels. Every positive interaction builds your reputation. Even if an interaction isn't entirely positive, as with a complaint, being authentic and responsive can still help.

Respond to Reviews

Keep your eyes open for online reviews of your organization or its products or services. If somebody trashes you, invite them to get in touch and provide some positive language to help give your side of the story. Don't be defensive, but don't leave a trash comment unaddressed. If somebody praises your company or product, express appreciation.

Transparency

If your organization made a mistake, be forthright about it. Work out the language so that it's not going to get you in

trouble (especially legal trouble), but denying what people know to be true is usually a losing strategy. Also, if you are asked a question and don't know the answer, tell the person that you'll get them an answer as soon as you can, providing a time estimate if possible, letting them know why you don't have an answer now. Make sure you follow up by the time you stated.

SEO Optimization

When people search the name of your organization or product, good SEO will help push positive information, even information your own organization created, up to the top, which means problematic content may even find itself off the first page of search results.

Advertise Online

With a caveat: if disaster strikes, you need to be ready to pull your advertising. Depending on the nature of the crisis, the advertising could seem insensitive or worse. Positive message advertising can help build a brand, its reputation, and even control a narrative if unfavourable news is circulating online.

Train Your People

Some folks just don't realize the harm they can do to an organization's reputation with an online comment. If somebody lists themselves as an employee of a company and posts something awful, that can reflect on the organization. Employees need to understand the sensitivity of the organization's brand and they need to make sure their own

behaviour, even private behaviour, doesn't reflect on the organization.

In one example, a public figure started receiving toxic backlash, much of it racist and sexist, over a statement she had made. As this horrible emails came in, she did something brilliant: she shared them publicly. Some of the people emailing used their work email addresses to send these hateful messages and employers had to deal with the fallout of being associated with such employees.

Secure Your Brand

This might seem obvious, but make sure your organization, especially if it is larger and can afford to do so, is buying up domain names that are linked to its brands. Create social media accounts to hold the names, even if you don't plan to use them. This prevents others from maliciously using them to attack your organization.

Stay Current

Update your website from time to time, as well as your social media profiles. Make sure information is accurate. Keep an eye on small details, such as whether search engines are displaying correct business hours and addresses.

Make Friends

Finding celebrities and influencers who can help boost your brand is part of the game. This has an inherent risk, though. If they have a fall from grace, this tarnishes your brand, as well.

Take Action

In extreme cases, such as with defamation or massive abuse of your product, consult legal experts to decide if you need to take legal action or in some way respond to the problem.

Plan for a Crisis

Hopefully, you never need to deal with a full-blown crisis. However, every organization should have a crisis communications plan in place. Entire books have been written on this subject, so no attempt to do justice to a topic of this magnitude will be made in this lone paragraph, but for more information on crisis communications, you can see this chapter in [*Public Relations: From Strategy to Action*](#).

Remember that you'll never be done managing your organization's reputation; it's an ongoing process. Consistency, authenticity, and proactive approaches are key to building and maintaining a strong reputation.

Chapter 11: Content and Voice

Content Speaks

Social media and content go hand-in-hand. Social media websites provide users a platform where they can interact with each other; those interactions are defined by their content. Organizations engaging target audiences through social media must take a pro-active and constant role in sharing content.

Many organizations post content on social websites without a meaningful strategy to back their actions. Good strategy and planning streamlines actions and guides communicators in the right direction. It helps organizations stay on track towards long-term and short-term goals and helps them meaningfully connect with their audiences.

To create an effective content strategy, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my goals?
- Who should I post content for?
- Which platforms would work best?
- What type of content is preferred by my audience?
- How often should I post content?
- Which KPIs should I use for measuring performance?

Creating Your “Voice”

Brand voice is the distinct personality of your business that sets you apart from the competition. It creates an image or perception in customers' minds. If you promote a positive message through a captivating brand voice, you'll be better able to achieve social media goals through your unique brand voice.

On social media, you can attract the audience through storytelling. Your stories should portray a consistent image to build credibility. For instance, if you are an optimistic person in real life, you notice the positive aspect of every event and don't linger in the negativity. Similarly, if you intend to portray your brand as adventurous, energetic, inspiring, or trustworthy, you should choose a tone that portrays this image and be consistent.

Audiences consider the brand image of a business before they interact with them or make buying decisions. If your brand voice is intimidating or you often post controversial content, then you may end up losing them to more stable and friendly competitors.

Tone and Brand Voice

What tone and voice resonates best with your target audience? Are you using the language and words that they use? While many marketers focus on the message and **what** they want to communicate, it is equally important to spend time thinking about the tone, language, dialogue, and voice being used to communicate.

Consider these questions related to tone and voice:

- Who am I trying to persuade to do what?
- What tone and voice is most appropriate for the target audience?
- Are the tone and voice consistent with my organization's brand identity?
- How can the content be presented so it is engaging and

persuasive, but not condescending?

- What words demonstrate authentic connection to the audience's views and feelings?
- Have any insensitive words or examples been presented that are likely to cause offence to the readers or viewers?

Where to Find the Right Content?

Creating fresh content takes time and effort. If you engage with your audience on multiple social websites, it won't be easy to generate unique content for every platform, especially when you need to post content on a regular basis.

Look at content generated by other social media users. You can get to know about the latest trends and get ideas for your organization.

You may have created some [evergreen content](#) in the past. Go check your social profiles and locate posts that can be reused. For example, you may find images posted on Pinterest or Instagram from previous achievements. You can create blog posts about those experiences, drawing on existing images and post them on your blog. However, when repurposing the content, make sure it goes well with your brand voice and the general language of the specific social platform. You should also consider creating content around the products or services your organization offers.

Content repurposing works great when you understand your organization's weaknesses and strengthens. Choose platforms that go well with your organization's brand and strengths and can help you promote your products, services, or mission. As an example, content on TikTok is very abbreviated; this won't work well if your organization is a law firm, which requires more thorough discussions of complex topics. For them, a blog would be a better choice. However, if your client is a fashion

accessory company, TikTok is perfect and a blog would probably be too long and boring.

How to Create the Right Content?

As a communicator and/or marketer, you can learn from social media trends.

Networking and other public events provide opportunities to create engaging content for your social media audience.

Consider recording these events and posting them on social media for followers. You can record videos via any device, but you may wonder whether it's better to share live and unprocessed videos or process them first before posting on social media. I would say both tactics can work in your favour, depending on the circumstances.

In the case of live events, social media users expect to enjoy live coverage of the event. If you don't want them to miss those golden moments, you should live broadcast the event on your social media pages. Facebook Live feature comes in handy for this purpose.

Some believe that brands may suffer if they share unprocessed video content with the audience, as the content is less attractive to viewers. But this isn't the case anymore. People don't mind this approach because they are aware you may not always have professional equipment at hand for live events. Moreover, people today are more interested in authentic brands. Overly processed content leads to question marks on authenticity, which is why live videos are a valuable social media content option.

Also, posting live videos doesn't mean processed and professional quality videos aren't important. You can share the event live and process captured images and videos for later use. With this professional content, you can promote the brand, product, or event on an on-going basis.

What Tools Do You Need?

You don't need to invest a huge sum in buying equipment and tools to create the right content.

Many social media communicators avoid generating video content because they don't own professional equipment. However, you don't need highly professional cameras to record videos. It's perfectly fine to use a smartphone camera, digital cam, or GoPro for capturing events. But it's recommended to get a portable tripod to ensure captured videos are stable and clear. As an organization grows, investing in equipment may be advisable, but using a DSLR camera and a tripod might be as much as you need for online content.

In the indoor environment, you may need to arrange lighting equipment. However, outdoor events can save you from this trouble, too. Also, don't forget to get a microphone to record audio along with the video content. Most built-in microphones are inadequate to the task.

If you intend to share it live, you need not process it to enhance quality, but it's important to edit and process them for professionally posting them on LinkedIn and other platforms.

There are many video editing software available that you can learn to use. However, it is a complex process that is best left to professionals. To find qualified professionals, you should visit [Freelancer.com](https://www.freelancer.com) and [Upwork](https://www.upwork.com) websites. These are popular freelancing platforms where you can hire professionals on a project basis or an on-going as per your needs. Self-training with lots of practice is also an option, but it takes time and early results may be second-best in appearance.

The Caption Game?

Posting images and videos on Instagram and other websites

isn't enough; you should complement it with captivating captions to increase engagement. Its length can vary, but the shorter the text, the more effective it will be.

Writing long-form captions can work for brands as long as they aren't boring. If you want to adopt this method, always remember to mention important phrases or words at the beginning. This way, when the post is truncated, users will still be able to get the information at a glance.

Aside from the descriptive text, you should also add the most appropriate hashtags to increase visibility.

What's the Hashtag?

Hashtags help users organize content and view posts based on their interests or the latest trends. Organizations should habitually follow hashtags that best connect with their target audiences, as well as other stakeholders (competitors, regulators).

As a social media communicator, you should master the art of creating and using the right hashtags to better promote your organization and its brand, products, services, and/or mission. Some organizations include guidelines in their social media style guides about how many hashtags to include, with some opting for a large number and some opting for one or even none. These are strategic decisions that need to be made by each organization as it approaches its social media engagement strategy.

You can brainstorm innovative hashtags for your needs, but hashtag tools can simplify this task for you. Explore Hashtagify, RiteTag, Trendsmap, and AutoHash to master this skill.

Am I Famous Yet?

Social media communication seems like a cost-efficient and effective way to connect with an audience. However, doing this well requires skill and that means paying for skilled communicators, which is not so cheap as simply hitting “post” to launch content. Part of a social media communications plan may also include paying for ads and boosting content. The mantra that “social media is free” applies to users—who pay with their attention time—and not to organizations who pay for professional skill and advertising benefits.

A common mistake made by some marketers is that they post content and ads on social media for a few days and opt out of social marketing if the posts go unnoticed.

There is no doubt that social media websites have become a leading platforms for marketing purposes. However, it doesn't mean that your brand will suddenly become popular in a few days.

A majority of businesses rely on social media marketing. Non-profit organizations, governments, political parties, trade unions, and even unincorporated groups (some of them fairly dodgy) use social media to engage with key audiences. Given this, you can't expect to become a sector leader on social media within a week.

An organization needs to be consistent with their effort. During the initial few weeks, your social media campaigns may not do that well. However, follow your strategy without losing hope. Monitor the performance of the campaign and adapt where advisable.

With this approach, your social media efforts will eventually and increasingly bring results.

We're Engaged! Aren't

We?

When you create profiles on social media, you may aim to increase the number of followers, but you should also focus on increasing the amount of engagement for long-term benefits.

Social media engagement refers to likes, comments, and shares on posts by other social media users. Not all of your followers are active and many of them may forget about you after liking your page on Facebook or following you on Instagram. In this sense, engagement is far more impactful, as it indicates that your followers not only see your posts, but also meaningfully interact with you.

The phrase “out of sight, out of mind” is certainly true and is applicable in social media communications. With increased competition in the online world, your content needs to both reach your target audience and also capture their attention. If not, a previously engaged audience member will ghost your brand and you may never rebuild that relationship.

If audiences are engaging with your brand, the social media algorithm would show them your content on priority, which helps ensure they remember you. Therefore, not only should you create engaging content, but also monitor the engagement rate.

There are many different tools available that can help you keep track of audience engagement on social media including Twitter Counter, Buzzlogix, Zoho Social, and Agorapulse, which can help you monitor engagement and brand reputation across social platforms.

What If They Don't Talk Back?

Even though business marketers try their best to attract the

target audience and encourage them to like or comment on their posts, they are not always able to achieve this goal. This situation is troublesome and can make you wonder why your entire efforts are going in vain.

To get the answer, you should first analyze your current social media strategy. Perhaps your content is of low-quality or doesn't interest your audience. Perhaps your choice of social media isn't right. With this analysis, you may find out potential issues with your strategy and revise it to address those issues.

However, a defective strategy isn't always the cause of low engagement. You may need to develop more interesting content to capture the attention. Hold live Q&A sessions may be helpful.

Audiences are no longer interested in listening to faceless brands. They rather find the human side of brands more attractive and engage with them on social media. By introducing them to your team and interacting with them via live sessions, you can win their trust and increase engagement.

Customer-generated content can also help you in this regard. You shouldn't only create and share your own content, but also retweet, or like, or share relevant posts by followers. For instance, if you find an interesting post of your followers discussing the niche or topic related to your organization, you should consider sharing it with your follower base.

Influencer marketing can also be a good option. You can get in touch with social media influencers who have built a community of followers and ask them to promote your brand. When they endorse your business, their followers will visit your social profile and may engage with the content if they find it interesting.

Should I Still Use Email?

Most people check their email on a daily basis, which is why

there is no better way for communicators to share information. Yes, even as social media climbs in popularity, email is a superior communications channel. (If you're wondering what the very best communication channel is, it's face-to-face conversation, but this is a book about social media.)

Email can increase website traffic and generate or capture qualified leads. You can also curate content and send customized information to audience groups, as per their interests. This targeted information can help in building strong relationships and entice audiences to interact with you.

Once they are directed to your website to get more information, there is a good chance they will go through and take action in a way you've intended, such as donating money or buying a product.

What If They're Upset

Businesses that value their customers work extra hard to provide them an unprecedented and memorable experience. However, they may not be able to achieve this goal every time. Despite your best efforts, some customers may still be unhappy and dissatisfied.

Unhappy customers often post negative reviews about brands on social media pages or Facebook groups. If you notice such a review about your client or employer (or self), you should get ready to resolve the situation instead of losing your cool.

You should calmly listen to customers and apologize for mistakes. If it was a genuine problem, then you should empathize and assure them that the management would look into the matter and resolve the problem at the earliest. You can also send them a gift or discount voucher to make up for their bad experience.

Some customers may accept your apology and let it go, but some customers get too angry and they don't listen to social

media managers. They may continue posting negative reviews about your business and hurt your brand reputation.

In this scenario, the best strategy is to use tracking tools like Mention that keep you updated about discussions and reviews about your business. With this real-time information, you can tackle the situation and spread positive messages about your brand to prevent them from further hurting your business.

Don't Feed the Trolls

Some angry customers post negative reviews because they genuinely faced a bad experience with your client or employer. But remember that some social media users deliberately post provocative content against other users and businesses out of habit.

They poke fun at others and humiliate them with derogatory content. Interacting with such trolls and responding to their comments can further ignite the situation. So, you need to tactfully handle the situation.

First of all, write terms and policies for your community where followers are expected to be respectful of others and refrain from using offensive language. You can politely ask trolls to be mindful in the light of community policies. You can respond to fake posts regarding your business with facts or ignore them. You can also come up with witty responses to diffuse the situation.

However, social media trolls don't go away easily and they may keep trying to instigate you. Don't get into the trap and stay calm and respectful to protect your brand image.

Do the Hokey Pokey: Turn Complaints into Gold

Brands that often receive negative comments and reviews tend to lose customers and damage the reputation. But customer complaints and negative comments aren't as bad as they are perceived.

These posts give you a chance to identify and recognize your mistakes. Your business processes or products may be harmful in some manner or fail to meet the needs of customers. Instead of treating these comments as trash and ignoring them, you should treat them as feedback and make the most of this constructive feedback to enhance service quality.

If a customer points out that the behaviour of a staff member wasn't good, you should pay attention to them. Offering excuses won't help, as that gives the impression you don't consider customers to be important. You can arrange training sessions for team members to help them boost their skillset and improve service quality—and you can publicly state that's what you're doing to address a concern.

You should encourage customers and social media followers to offer suggestions for further improving your business processes. Also, once you implement a customer suggestion, you should post it on social media and appreciate customer feedback.

Do You Even Care?

Customer service is a challenging job. You need to listen to customer complaints and suggestions, and bear their anger, while taking the blame for intentional or unintentional mistakes.

No matter what type of organization you work for, effective

audience engagement is the key to success. You should always prioritize your target audiences and work hard to add value to them. Similarly, listening to and addressing their issues is equally important for any organization.

Customers, in particular, are aware of their rights and don't want to do business with people who ignore them. To become an effective social media communicator, you need to care about your audiences. You don't want to receive negative reviews due to the negligence of your team. You should develop a culture within the organization where staff members consider customer care their first and foremost responsibility and leave no stone unturned in achieving customer satisfaction.

This approach strengthens relationships with audiences and creates a lasting bond.

Time Management

Social media is a great tool for promoting your business without breaking the bank, but it can become a nuisance if you aren't careful. Working as a social media communicator can be a tough job if you constantly feel the urge to scroll the timeline every now and then.

Furthermore, social media tends to be a time-consuming function. Without an effective plan, you will end up wasting time and won't be able to achieve your goals.

A major reason why organizations fail to use social media to their advantage is that they try to be on every social network. This is neither possible nor a good idea. Regardless of whether you work on your own or have a social media team, you need to choose social media that fit your goals. This way, you can save valuable time by putting your entire focus on social media that can increase website traffic and generate results.

Another challenge for organizations is to stay focused on

work when logging into social media accounts for job-related tasks. You may soon find yourself checking posts and messages from other users. The best strategy to tackle this issue and manage time is to set time limits for every task. For instance, if you need to post a tweet, you should specify the time needed for the task. With the deadline approaching, you will be motivated to prioritize real work.

Practice Safe Scheduling

To succeed as a social media communicator, you need a plan.

Your priority should be to get a content planning calendar for your organization. You can easily find a template online or design a calendar that best fits your requirements. With the help of this tool, you can specify the content that needs to be posted across platforms.

Organizations usually plan content at least a month in advance. You can make changes to this calendar based on current events, but you want a schedule for the mid-term future. You can decide the theme of the day or week and plan which type of content should be posted on different platforms throughout the month. This practice makes sure you can regularly post well thought-out content. If you work with a social media team, keeping them in the loop will be much easier.

When you track the performance of social media campaigns, you will get to know when the majority of your audience is online and can post content accordingly. But what if that time slot isn't during standard business hours and you can't log in at that particular time? This is when scheduling tools will save you from trouble.

SocialPilot, HootSuite, Post Planner, Feedly, and other similar tools can be used to schedule social media posts for a later

date or time. You won't have to worry about forgetting to post content and the software will take care of this task.

That's Embarrassing: Don't Let Your Scheduled Post Land at the Wrong Party

Scheduling social media posts via software can make work easier and boost productivity. However, this method isn't fool-proof and can lead to embarrassing mistakes if you aren't cautious.

Some brands become the talk of the town in a negative way when they accidentally post content with unintentional profanities. This mistake can happen when you schedule a post for later without proofreading it. Updating settings for filtering out unethical phrases and words is ideal. Be expansive in thinking about ways that your brand, taglines, or other content could be abused or accidentally misrepresented.

US Airways and a few other businesses caused controversy in the past when they accidentally attached highly explicit images or links to pornographic websites. These mistakes can happen due to minor carelessness, but can attract significant negative publicity which isn't good.

You don't want to fall victim to such controversy, so carefully check and recheck posts before you schedule them.

When you manage content for multiple social platforms or working as a social media manager for multiple organization, there is a higher risk of making mistakes. For instance, you may want to schedule a post via software for Instagram, but accidentally do so for another website. While this mistake may not appear significant, it can promote a negative image of your business.

Lastly, create social media posts for prominent occasions, events, and festivals, but make sure you schedule it for the

right time and date. What if you create an Instagram post for Halloween, but due to the scheduling mistake, it gets posted a day or two after the holiday? You may become the laughing stock for the audience.

“If This, Then That” Social Media Automation

The “if-then” concept is a basic principle of computer programming where you specify the system to check for the defined condition and execute the specific block of code if it meets the condition. The “IFTTT” platform was developed with the intention to provide similar functionality to social media managers.

This platform allows organizations to create applets for automated content. You can create posts for suitable social media and specify the trigger point. When the specified action is triggered, the post applet will be published.

However, using the IFTTT model may not be your best bet when it comes to comments. Some businesses use bots to post automated comments. These comments don’t only seem fake, but they also create a negative image of the company.

Alternatively, it can be used to improve customer service. For instance, you can use this model with a messaging app to facilitate customers. You can specify answers to most common queries that are frequently asked.

For example, when a customer enquires you about your working hours or the prices of your products, they can receive an automated answer to their query. This practice saves time and provides answers to customers without unnecessary delays.

Although automation can make your job easier to some extent, it never works for communicators to create a post and

then forget about it. As a result, it may get published at an inappropriate time and seem irrelevant. You should go through the scheduled content from time to time and tweak posts if needed.

If this then that automates social media posts for promotion purposes, but you can also use it for personal reasons. For instance, you can use this tool to wish colleagues on their birthdays or work anniversaries.

However, this functionality should be used carefully. This tool posts the same content every time an event takes place. In certain cases, this may get out of hand or get noticed for being too impersonal.

When an existing or potential customer messages a brand, they often receive an automated message where they are addressed with their first name. This may cause an embarrassing situation for businesses. A few years ago, a brand used this function on Twitter where they were addressed with their user name. But the user had previously changed their profile name to be a profanity and the tweet made the brand look bad to other users.

In an unforgiveable and horrible example, KFC automated posts encouraging customers to celebrate events on a holiday calendar with a bucket of fried chicken and other food-like products. Unfortunately, not all holidays are happy events. In Germany, the holiday calendar includes Kristallnacht: the anniversary of a specific date in 1938 when Nazis physically attacked Jews, murdered over 90 people, smashed Jewish-owned businesses, and burned hundreds of synagogues to the ground all across Germany. Needless to say, when KFC suggested celebrating Kristallnacht by buying fried chicken, it was an international outrage.

Such events aren't common and don't happen too often. But they can lead to an embarrassing situation for your business and may deter the customer base. So, before you opt for the

IFTTT model, you should evaluate your decision and come up with suitable content that is less likely to lead to controversy.

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Chapter 12: Digital Storytelling

A core skill for any digital communicator is the ability to tell compelling stories, which is a critical element of any digital strategy. Talented storytelling has many common traits:¹

- Expert use of the voice
- Vocal and body expression
- Intonation
- The use of verbal imagery
- Facial animation
- Context
- Plot and character development
- Natural pacing of the telling, and
- Careful authentic recall of the story

So, how can we apply these storytelling techniques to our own organizational stories?

Imagery

Imagery is not just visual. Building on the previous point, there is **visual** imagery and **verbal** imagery. **Visual imagery** describes what we see and is what we traditionally think about when we think of imagery, e.g., photographs, charts, icons, etc. **Verbal imagery** represents the **words and sounds** one uses to paint a clear picture in your audience's minds. In many ways, verbal imagery can trigger stronger memories or emotions by connecting key words and sounds to important concepts, ideas, feelings, and, yes, even brands. This is why jingles can be so effective in branding activities.

1. ²

2. [1]

Facial Animation

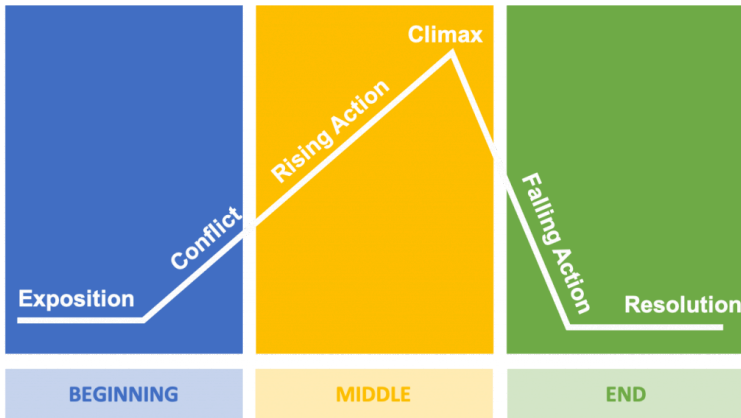
Sharing facial expressions can have a significant impact on your viewers. Are the people in your video smiling or frowning? Are they excited or indifferent? Are they puzzled or enlightened? And remember that even when writing a story, think about the words you are using (verbal imagery) to describe that facial expression and/or animation in your story. This is a good time to point out how emojis have been used to achieve in short-form what authentic facial animation historically achieved for real.

Context (or Setting)

Context orients us in place and time. Context tells the audience what the presented information means to them and why they should care. But be careful about just providing facts. Great communicators provide rich context. Rich context goes beyond merely sharing **what** is the context and explores **why** this context is important or **how** this context might be applicable to even further-reaching circumstances. Rich context has multiple layers, allowing it to resonate with a wider range of audiences.

Plot and Character Development

Every story must have a beginning, middle, and end. The following image, also known as Freytag's Pyramid, is a commonly used framework when developing stories. Please note that this approach can be used for any length of story.



Freytag's Pyramid

Freytag' Pyramid

- **Exposition**
Exposition is the beginning of your story that introduces the three Cs: conflict (key issue/problem), characters (often customers in marketing settings), and the context.
- **Rising Actions**
Rising actions present the events before the climax, where your characters attempt to solve the problem (conflict), but fail.
- **Climax**
The climax represents the turning point or point of greatest suspense/action in your story.
- **Falling Actions**
Falling Actions are the actions and events that happen after the climax.
- **Resolution**
End of the story where the conflicts or problems are solved.

When you are telling your organizational stories, are you clearly including all of these elements? And are you walking your audiences through this entire storytelling journey?

Natural Pacing of the Telling

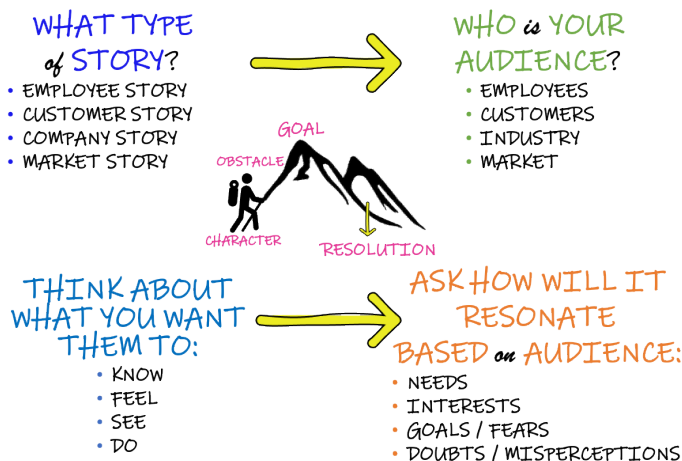
You need to spend time building your story by setting the foundational pieces in the beginning and middle of your story. Getting to your resolution too quickly can undermine the journey and steps required to get to that point. Take the appropriate time to build your story so that your climax truly presents a turning point in the audiences' journey.

Careful Authentic Recall of the Story

The best stories are those that are authentic, truthful, and clearly present the issues (conflict) and resolution. While many communicators may try to embellish their stories, stick to the facts and let the story tell the compelling narrative. If you feel the story needs to be embellished to make it more captivating, you may not have a story worth sharing.

As you begin to create your own organizational stories, think about the following questions:

CREATING YOUR STORY



- **What kind of story are you creating?**
 - employee story
 - customer story
 - organizational story
 - sector or industry story
- **Who is your audience?**
(This should align with the kind of story you are creating.)
 - employees
 - customers (potential and/or existing)
 - industry
 - market
- **What do you want your audience to:**
 - know
 - feel

- see
- do
- **How will it resonate with your audience's mindset:**
(This should align with what you want your target audience's responses to be.)
 - needs
 - interests
 - goals/fears
 - doubts/misconceptions

Visual Storytelling



The Importance of Visuals and Why

Now that we've discussed how to tell compelling stories, let's look at **visual** storytelling and how it has become a critical way stories are told and shared today.

According to [Wikipedia](#),

“Visual storytelling (also visual narrative) is a story told primarily through the use of visual media. The story may be told using still photography, illustration, or video, and can be enhanced with graphics, music, voice and other audio.”

One of the reasons visual storytelling is so powerful is because our brains are wired “visually.” Here are several mind-boggling statistics that explain why visual storytelling is so critical to the digital world we now live in:

- 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual¹
- 50% of your brain is active in visual processing³
- 70% of your sensory receptors are in your eyes⁵
- It takes only 13 milliseconds for the human brain to process an image.⁷
- Our brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster than text.⁹

1. ²

2. [1]

3. ⁴

4. [2]

5. ⁶

6. [3]

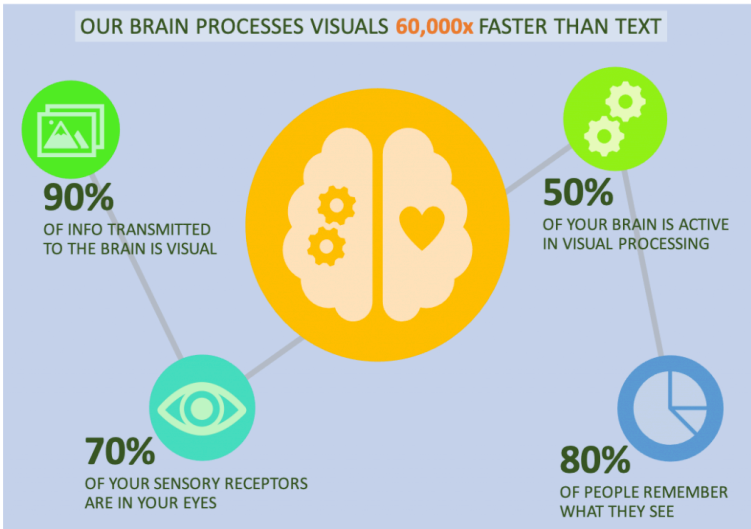
7. ⁸

8. [4]

9. ¹⁰

- 80% of people remember what they see,¹¹ compared to 10% what they hear and 20% of what they read.

But, what if some of the above information were presented as follows?



Do you prefer the bullets or the infographic?

In responses to a 2014 survey, 95% of B2B buyers said that they wanted shorter and highly visual content.¹³ And, organizations that feature visual content grow traffic 12 times faster than those that don't.¹⁵

10. [5]

11.¹²

12. [6]

13.¹⁴

14. [7]

15.¹⁶

Also, in comparison, we don't have much patience for text.

- Most people only read 20-28% of the words on the page.¹⁷
- 80% of people will watch a video¹⁹ but only 20% of people will read text on a page.
- 55% of website visitors spend less than 15 seconds actively reading.²¹

Unfortunately, we are not great listeners, either. When people hear information, they're likely to remember only 10% of that information three days later. However, if a relevant image is paired with that same information, people retained 65% of the information²³ three days later.

We also love to consume and share pictures, infographics, and videos:

16. [8]

17.¹⁸

18. [9]

19.²⁰

20. [10]

21.²²

22. [11]

23.²⁴

24. [12]

2021 *This Is What Happens In An Internet Minute*



2021: This is what happens in an Internet minute.

- More than 100 million photos and videos are posted daily on Instagram.²⁵
- Tweets with images receive 150% more retweets²⁷ than

²⁶
25. _____

^[13]
26. _____

²⁸
27. _____

^[14]
28. _____

tweets without them.

- On Facebook, photos have an interaction rate of 87%,²⁹ compared to 4% or less for other types of posts, such as links or text.
- 100 million hours of video are watched every day on Facebook,³¹ 85% of them with the sound off.
- 6 billion video ads³³ are watched online each year.
- Posts that include images produce 650% higher engagement³⁵ than text-only posts.
- People share infographics three times more³⁷ than any other type of content.
- Using the word “video” in an email subject line³⁹ boosts open rates by 19% and clickthrough rates by 65%.

And, finally, from an organizational perspective, video drives our purchasing and/or conversion decisions:

³⁰
29.

30. [15]

³²
31.

32. [16]

³⁴
33.

34. [17]

³⁶
35.

36. [18]

³⁸
37.

38. [19]

⁴⁰
39.

40. [20]

Videos Drive Purchases

Videos play a crucial role in purchasing decisions

85%

more likely to buy after
viewing a product video

4x

more people prefer a
product video over text

70%

of B2B buyers watch a
video before buying

86%

increase in landing page
conversions with video

- 70% of B2B buyers and researchers watch a video during their purchase process.⁴¹
- Four times as many consumers would rather watch a video about a product than read about it.⁴³
- People are 85 percent more likely to buy a product after viewing a product video.⁴⁵

41. ⁴²

42. [21]

43. ⁴⁴

44. [22]

- Videos on landing pages increase conversions by up to 86%.⁴⁷

Visuals are an important and inherent part of how we process information. And, as communicators with global audiences, relying on universal imagery, instead of specific written languages or words, allows your messages and stories to be much more accessible to a wider audience. So, if you are looking to have the greatest impact, internally or externally, you will need to understand how to present your story and information in a visual way that grabs your audience's attention and tells a compelling story.

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⁴⁶
45. _____

46. [23]

⁴⁸
47. _____

48. [24]

1. [First Nations Pedagogy Online ↵](#)
2. [Humans Process Visual Data Better ↵](#)
3. [How do we transform an ever-changing jumble of visual stimuli into the rich and coherent three-dimensional perception we know as sight? Rochester vision scientists are helping reshape our understanding of how the brain 'sees.' ↵](#)
4. [The Eye and Vision ↵](#)
5. [What is the Impact of Visual Content Marketing? ↵](#)
6. [Humans Process Visual Data Better ↵](#)
7. [12 Hard Stats That Proof The Power Of Images ↵](#)
8. [B2B Content Preferences Survey: Buyers Want Short, Visual, Mobile-Optimized Content ↵](#)
9. [The Rising Power of Visual Content \[Infographic\] ↵](#)
10. [The Power of Visual Communication ↵](#)
11. [Digital Marketing by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts ↵](#)
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13. [Brain rule rundown ↵](#)
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16. [Six Reasons to Embrace Visual Commerce in 2018 ↵](#)
17. [52 Video Marketing Statistics 2022 \[Infographic\] ↵](#)
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19. [16 Visual Content Marketing Statistics That Will Wake You Up ↵](#)
20. [15 Visual Content Marketing Statistics That'll Blow Your Mind ↵](#)
21. [How to Increase Your Email Open and Click-through Rates ↵](#)
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Chapter 13: Writing with Artificial Intelligence

ChatGPT, while advanced and capable of generating coherent and contextually relevant text, still has several limitations that make it inferior to authentic human writing. Here are some key ways in which ChatGPT falls short:

1. **Lack of True Understanding:** ChatGPT doesn't truly understand the text it generates. It lacks genuine comprehension and is simply predicting what words and phrases are likely to come next based on patterns in the data it was trained on. Humans possess deep understanding, emotions, and the ability to connect ideas in a nuanced and meaningful way.
2. **No Personal Experience or Creativity:** ChatGPT lacks personal experiences, emotions, and creativity that humans bring to their writing. It doesn't have genuine thoughts, feelings, or unique perspectives to draw from.
3. **Limited Contextual Awareness:** While ChatGPT can maintain a short-term context in a conversation, it can struggle with maintaining a deep, nuanced understanding of long conversations or intricate topics. It may sometimes provide responses that sound relevant, but are contextually incorrect or inappropriate.
4. **Inaccurate Information and Biases:** ChatGPT can generate inaccurate or outdated information since its responses are based on the data it was trained on. Additionally, if the training data contains biases, the model might inadvertently generate biased or prejudiced

content.

5. **Unsatisfactory Flow and Coherence:** Although ChatGPT can produce coherent sentences, it sometimes struggles with maintaining a natural flow of thought, resulting in responses that may seem stilted or disjointed compared to human writing.
6. **Limited World Knowledge and Creativity:** ChatGPT's knowledge is limited to what it was trained on up until September, 2021. It lacks access to new information and developments that have occurred since then. Moreover, while it can mimic creativity to some extent, its creative output is often based on patterns in the training data, rather than genuine imagination.
7. **Empathy and Emotional Depth:** Humans can infuse their writing with genuine empathy, emotional depth, and understanding of the human experience. ChatGPT lacks true emotions and can't empathize in the same way.
8. **Subjective and Aesthetic Judgments:** Humans can make subjective judgments about aesthetics, art, beauty, and emotions that go beyond the scope of ChatGPT's capabilities.
9. **Adaptation to Individual Styles:** Humans can adapt their writing to various styles, tones, and preferences of the intended audience. ChatGPT's style may sometimes be inconsistent or not align well with specific audiences.
10. **Errors and Misinterpretations:** While humans can often catch errors, ambiguities, or misunderstandings in their writing, ChatGPT can generate responses that are grammatically incorrect, factually wrong, or contextually inappropriate without realizing it.
11. **Dynamic and Evolving Responses:** Humans can engage in dynamic, evolving conversations, responding to changing contexts and adjusting their responses accordingly. ChatGPT may struggle to adapt to rapidly shifting conversational dynamics.

In summary, while ChatGPT is a powerful tool for generating text and assisting with various tasks, it lacks the depth, authenticity, understanding, and genuine creativity that humans bring to their writing. It's important to recognize its limitations and use it as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, authentic human writing.

Everything above that line was written by ChatGPT in response to this prompt: "In what ways is ChatGPT inferior to authentic human writing?" The only edits above were to correct for punctuation errors (yes, ChatGPT messes up its punctuation sometimes).

So, if those are the problems, how can ChatGPT help social media managers produce quality content?

Brainstorming

There's nothing I particularly disagree with up there and I doubt I would have thought of all those problems with ChatGPT on my own (though it was a bit repetitive at times).

That's the first hint about writing with ChatGPT. It's good at gathering a range of ideas that you might not have thought of all by yourself. ChatGPT is good at brainstorming.

If you're a social media manager, the pressure to constantly be coming up with new content can be frustrating, especially as you get the feeling that you have already posted similar content in the past. ChatGPT can help you come up with some new content ideas.

Outlining

Similar to brainstorming, ChatGPT will suggest an order for how information should be provided. It might need to be corrected, but it's a starting point for how to organize your longer content, such as a blog article.

Speed

Even the most prolific writers with the quickest fingers in the planet would be hard pressed to produce quality original content at faster than 50 words per minute. (Yes, folks can type faster, but as they do, their ability to focus on quality content goes down.)

On the other hand, ChatGPT can produce about 400 words of passable—though rarely great—content in a few seconds. But there's the problem again: a large amount of quickly available text is only good if the text is good; it's mostly in the range of “okay.”

What does that mean for social media managers? ChatGPT can increase the speed of producing draft paragraphs. As noted above, ChatGPT loses the plot after a while, so you can't use it to produce a first draft of a long document, but you can use it to produce a few paragraph, perhaps one contained section, as seen above. Given the problems, you'll need to re-write those paragraphs to inject emotion and examples. You'll need to make sure there's continuity from one section to the next. But you'll have a bit of draft material to work with more quickly.

Availability

Your generative-AI writing assistant never sleeps and never takes a day off. We mortal humans, on the other hand, need sleep and days off. Without that, our writing quality gets worse and worse.

Appropriateness

As a follow-up to the previous paragraph, ChatGPT never shitposts or drunk posts. The program is less likely to make embarrassing typos from fatigue or intoxication. For example, how easily can you post about your organization's pubic places, instead of its *public* places? Oops for you, but that's a mistake ChatGPT is unlikely to make.

A mistake ChatGPT will sometimes make, though, is to produce content that is politically problematic, such as reinforcing negative stereotypes. That must be accounted for and corrected.

And, for the record, when you're tired, it's time to stop posting on behalf of your organization. Never use social media while intoxicated.

Enhancing Vocabulary

In the same way that ChatGPT can help with brainstorming, it can help with rephrasing and vocabulary. The program can be asked to explain something better or with new word choices. In this way, it's like a thinking thesaurus.

Role Playing

If you're wondering how your audience might respond to a post, try asking ChatGPT. Ask the program how a well-defined audience (give some demographic and other information about the audience) would respond to a tweet you've drafted. Try it out with a few different audience archetypes described. Let this help you anticipate how people might engage with your content. Revise to get the results you want and see what happens.

So much of what is described above boils down to this: ChatGPT will save you time and effort, but you must intervene to ensure you're posting quality content. As the program wrote previously, "while ChatGPT is a powerful tool for generating text and assisting with various tasks, it lacks the depth, authenticity, understanding, and genuine creativity that humans bring to their writing. It's important to recognize its limitations and use it as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, authentic human writing."

Chapter 14: Social Media Style Guides

What does the voice of a construction company sound like in social media? What about a non-profit that gets used sports equipment to impoverished kids? What vocabulary should a vaccination campaign use? What colours work for a political candidate?

These are the questions that need to be answered through the branding process and articulated through a style guide and/or visual identity standards.

Some organizations have one and lump everything applicable into the one document; some organizations have both, letting one speak to the writing of the organization and the other to the image of the organization. Unfortunately, many organizations have neither a style guide nor any visual identity standards.

Without such documents, how can various employees—social media managers, HR recruiters, executive assistants, marketing interns—maintain a consistent voice and image for their organization? The answer is that they can't—a shame for the organization and for them.

Social Media Style Guides

This chapter specifically deals with social media style guides, which necessarily means it focuses on digital voice and style, rather than style and visual identity concerns that exist in the material world, such as how a logo should be presented on a billboard or how it should be placed under another organization's logo when sponsoring an event. Those aren't

issues in social media, but they would be part of a convention set of visual identity standards.

On the other hand, a conventional style guide doesn't need to deal with hashtags, emojis, avatars, or how often to post content, which are all features of a social media style guide.

A social media style guide needs to cover all such points—and much more—so that everybody in the organization who is posting anything or interacting in any way with the organization's social media accounts does so in the same voice as everybody else in the organization, creating a consistent experience for the audience. (How weird would your social media account seem if it was formal from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, but then was funny and full of emojis from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm, all because the people operating the account switched to the night shift?)

An organization's social media style guide needs to give employees clear guidance on such points. For example when discussing vocabulary, do you write at a fourth-grade vocabulary, as would be seen with sports organizations, eager to appeal to their young fans, or do you write at a university level, as a college would when trying to impress parents and students with the educational value that a college education represents?

The guidance provided should be clear, instructional, and comprehensive, ideally in all of the following areas.

Target Audience

The audience your organization targets through social media is likely different than the audience it may target through radio ads, news interviews, or direct mail sent to their homes. Define the target audience group(s) you're trying to engage with through social media, providing demographic, behavioural, contextual, and psychographic descriptions (see Chapter 7).

Also, create audience archetypes (see Chapter 8) to help visualize the audience you're writing for.

Brand Voice and Tone

Give your social media accounts a personality. Are they glib, aggressive, and funny, like [Wendy's](#)? Are they formal and informative, such as the [British Columbia Wildfire Service](#) account? What kind of person is your account? This isn't a question about the people operating the account; they need to play into the persona that your organization presents for itself online and that persona needs to be defined in the style guide. Give your persona traits and project those traits into all social media posts.

Whatever you come up with, make sure it fits with the organization's overall brand identity (previously discussed in Chapter 9).

Language Guidelines

Flowing from the discussions about your target audience and brand persona, questions about language choices need to be addressed.

If your organization operates in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, and Australia, whose versions of English are you going to use? Is that "colour" or "color"? What about punctuation marks? Are you using the North American conventions or the British conventions? Are there rules you're going to deliberately break, such as having spaces on either side of a dash (which don't belong there, but are often placed there)? These might seem like pedantic

questions, but you need to present your voice the same way consistently, right down to the [Oxford comma](#).

You'll also want to plan out the level of sophistication in word choices; think about who your audience is and why you're writing to them. For some audiences, you may want to flex the vocabulary; for others, you may want to be as simplistic as possible. You also need to be clear about whether you can use industry-specific terms or if you need to either explain those terms or use more accessible vocabulary.

Visual Guidelines

An organization needs an attractive logo and clear rules about how to treat that logo.

For example, what colours can it be presented in? Can you invert the colours, such as by clipping the image from black background with green text to a green background with black text? What about a green background with white text? What about just black and white? Also, what shade of green and is that black totally black? Those need to be defined in [hexadecimal codes](#) for a social media style guide (and often [CMYK](#) for conventional style guides, as that's what printers ask for).

Other rules also need to be created, such as how close can text or other images can get to the logo (the necessary blank space around a logo is known as "protected" space).

Beyond your brand (or brands) logo, visual guidelines may need to account for what types of images are used in your social media accounts. For example, does your organization use stock photos (hopefully not, but your call)? Does it have a blanked "no children" policy about photos? What does it want to achieve with photos? What about short video clips?

There are other style rules that may need to be accounted for, such as what typeface you use, when to use boldface text,

italics, and underlining (though many social media accounts give you no control over typeface, only the latter font points of bolding, italics, and underlining).

You should also clearly indicate what your rules are on emojis, icons, and avatars, too.

Every part of the organization's visual projection to social media audiences should have either rules or guidance in the style guide.

Hashtags and Links

Similar to language rules and visual presentation rules, the organization needs some guidance about its use of hashtags and links. What is the maximum number of hashtags included in a single social media post? What is the preferred number? What about external links? Do you ever “@” another account? If so, how many? Do you ever post in social media without any form of hashtag, link, or tag?

When using hashtags, surveil the social media environment to see what hashtags are popular in your industry, especially with target audiences and competitors. Also keep an eye on trending hashtags, but [never use a trending hashtag without understanding what it is and why it's trending](#).

Content Types and Posting Schedule

Provide your social media communicators with guidance about the types of content you'll share, including text posts, images, videos, and articles, plus how often and at what times of day you'll post them.

Provide guidelines for each type of content and note the optimal times for different platforms and audiences.

Rules of Engagement

This is where you remind your team: “never feed the trolls.” If somebody is trolling your account, engaging with them makes the matter worse, not better. At the same time, you need to encourage authentic engagement with authentic concerns and complaints. Even a hostile audience needs attention and deserves two-way communication, so long as they aren’t simply trying to bait you into embarrassing your organization by being drawn into an unwinnable conversation (if you can call it that with a troll).

Explain how to interact with followers, respond to comments, and handle customer inquiries or feedback. This may also link back to the discussion of brand voice and tone.

This section is also a good place to note whether your posts will include any acknowledgement of the authorship of each post (because a brand can’t actually post on its own; it needs people to make that happen). As an example, some organizations have their staff note the authorship in short form, such as by adding a circumflex (the “^” symbol), followed by the real author’s initials. This allows readers to track who is responding to their comments and gives a sense of personal connection to the person on the other side of what might otherwise seem like a faceless organization or brand.

This section is also a good place to give guidance about sensitive topics. What do you do if somebody starts engaging your brand about a political or religious subject that isn’t really a part of your organization’s mission? If a politician, religious leader, union leader, or other such figure comments on one of your posts with some challenging commentary, does that merit standard engagement or do you need to bring in management to consider the broader public relations implications? If one such leader makes a post relevant to your mission, do you engage there pro-actively? Give your team guidance on these matters.

Content Approval

The discussion of sensitive topics segues well into a discussion about content approval processes. Who has the authority to post? Does anybody else need to sign-off before a post is made? Who has the authority to delete a post?

Have clear guidelines for your organization so that nobody makes a mistake.

Platform-Specific Guidelines

Not all social media platforms are created equally. If your content varies by platform, such as the number of characters, use of hashtags, or inclusion of images or video, then you need to provide clear guidelines to your team.

Beyond simple rules, also provide guidance about best practices for each unique platform your organization uses.

User-Generated Content

Describe how UGC will be used, credited, and monitored. Encourage interactions by outlining guidelines for reposting user content.

Legal Issues

Include legal requirements, such as disclosure of sponsored content, copyright considerations, and adherence to platform terms of service. A word to the wise: if you're paying a celebrity or influencer to do something, but forthright about that. You'll

enter a world of trouble if you try to hide that and it is later revealed.

Exceptions

Almost every rule has an exception. What are yours? Give guidance to your team when they can bend the rules and when they don't need to enforce a rule that somebody else (such as an audience member) is bending—or breaking.

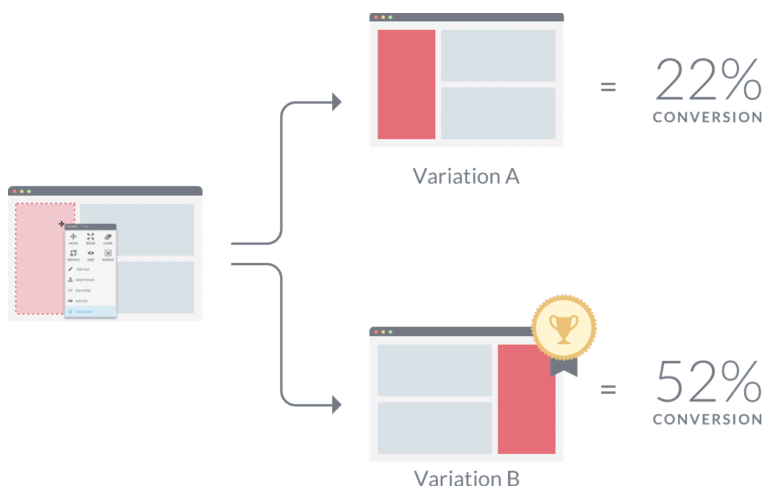
Updating

Establish a process for updating the social media style guide as needed; you need to keep up with changing trends and platforms.

A well-crafted social media style guide serves as a valuable resource for maintaining brand consistency, fostering engagement, and effectively conveying your brand's message across various social media platforms. Your social media guide should ensure that your team knows how to communicate on behalf of your organization through all social media channels used by the organization.

Chapter 15: A/B Testing

In its simplest form, **A/B testing** (also known as split testing) is the process of comparing two variations of a message (e.g., a webpage element, an email, a fundraising letter), usually by testing users' responses to two versions of the same message (known as "Variant A" and "Variant B") and concluding which of the two versions is more effective.



Why You Should A/B

Many marketing, fundraising, and communications departments rely on A/B testing because it is one of the most effective ways to tailor your approach to target audiences. While data and trend analyses are important elements in designing engaging web pages or email broadcasts, A/B testing provides practical, tangible evidence of your most impactful communications techniques.

Modern online metrics and analytics also make create convenient evaluation information, so you will accurately assess your A/B testing. With analytics, you can easily monitor key metrics:

- how many people were exposed to each version
- how long they interacted and engaged
- what percentage completed the intended task and converted

An A/B test takes a significant amount of guesswork out of communications. For example, if you think of a new fundraising approach that could improve your organization's revenue stream, you can set up an A/B test and then monitor the data.

If you're right and the new option gets better results, you can move forward with your new plan. If the original technique still performs better, you can continue with your regular routine and think of different approaches in the future.

Ultimately, A/B testing helps you make decisions based on data. This way you know when a particular tactic or campaign is working or, more importantly, when one is failing.

Since every organization is different, don't assume that what worked for others will automatically work for you. When you A/B test your activities and content, experiment with different ideas. This is useful because sometimes a small change can make a big difference in the results you get.

Common Areas to A/B Test

While not exhaustive, the following list presents several common key areas where communicators use A/B testing:

- **Headlines and subheadings**

Whether the "titles" on a webpage, headlines for a piece of content, or the subject line of your email, you may want to experiment with these to see if small changes make a difference in engagement rates.

- **Copy**

Copy is simply the text that you have written in your communications materials. While copy can include the words and text itself, copy can also include the location of your text. Presenting two options and seeing which version is more engaging and/or converts more people could be an area to explore.

- **Form design**

When you look at your forms and the fields to be filled out, think about the number of fields and the information requested to see what potential leads submit and when completion rates drop significantly.

- **Calls to action**

As marketers, having compelling calls-to-action is critical to getting leads to convert. Testing a variety of options provides data on which words deliver the best results. Here's an article explaining [how you can test CTAs using Hubspot](#).

- **Images**

Like calls to action, you can test different images and image types. For example, try different photos to see which one(s) capture your audience's interest more. You might even explore different types of imagery, e.g., photos, icons, avatars, emojis, and so on.

- **Colours**

And, finally, sometimes colour can have an impact in how your target audience behaves. Testing contrasting colours, complementary colours, or brighter colours can often provide insights as to what catches your target audience's attention and what they prefer.

For more A/B testing ideas, here's an article, [60 A/B Testing Examples to Get You More Conversions](#).

How to Conduct an A/B Test

1. **Gather insights**

Before starting your split tests, gather any information you have about your customers, donors, or other audience members (as the case may be). This can include both direct observations about your audiences and industry insight data about ideal characteristics related to your target audience's preferences. The more detailed your understanding of potential audiences, the easier earning positive results will be. (Remember your audience archetypes? Here's a chance to study them and update them.)

2. **Set your goals**

Not all marketing activities have the same goals. For example, the metrics you will monitor for a brand awareness campaign will be different than those for a campaign focused on maximizing sales. A stated goal clarifies which metrics to focus on.

3. **Build your variations**

Although most content systems will allow you to perform A/B tests with many different variants, it is usually best to limit each round of testing to two or three variations. This allows you to quickly hit sufficient traffic numbers or volume for each option so you can compare them. Doing so also isolates differences in the options to determine which technique led to better results.

4. **Run A/B tests**

After building your variants, launch them and allow the A/B tests to run. There is no perfect sample size. Instead, the right size depends on your priorities. Targeting a smaller sample size will allow you to analyze your results and adjust more quickly—and at a lower cost—while targeting a larger sample size provides you with more information to support long-term decisions. Clearly, there

are benefits and drawbacks to each approach. So, the decision will be based largely on your goals, objectives, and needed levels of confidence.

5. Analyze the results

Once you have gathered enough data to make an informed decision, you can begin looking at the data gathered. Make note of the key metrics you are tracking as a priority, but do not entirely ignore other metrics. For example, if you are running a campaign to build brand awareness and discover that one version is generating significantly higher sales numbers, while this may not make it the ideal option for the current campaign, it still provides valuable information you can use to monetize other campaigns. The winning option is the one that is performing best, and that version should become the basis for your activities as you move forward.

6. Make adjustments as needed

After you discover which option won the A/B test, adjust your activities as needed. If the metrics for the winning variant are clear, expose your entire target audience to that option. If it is somewhat unclear which option is clearly the winner, perform a new A/B test by adding in new options and test against the leading variation. When testing new versions against the previously leading variation, take results from the first test into account when deciding on the best option.

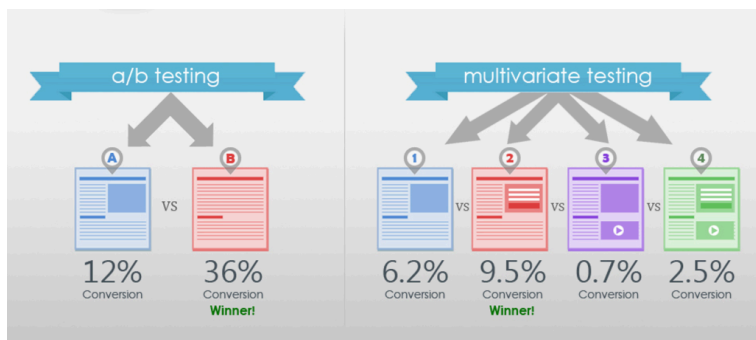
7. Continue monitoring

Even after multiple rounds of A/B testing, you will still need to regularly monitor your activities to ensure they are still effective. Tactics will commonly reach points of diminishing returns, either as the content becomes less relevant or you begin to run out of potential ideas for a specific campaign. Make a habit of monitoring the campaign's performance, even after you have found a winning variant and exposed the entire audience to it.

Should performance begin to slip, you can end the campaign or return to Step 1 and go through a new round of A/B testing.

Multivariate Testing

Multivariate testing is a technique for testing a hypothesis in which multiple variables are modified. The goal of multivariate testing is to determine which combination of variations performs the best out of all of the possible combinations (see image below).



Tools for A/B Testing

Now that you understand what A/B testing is and how to conduct one, the following links provide a few frequently used tools for A/B testing:

(Please note that the tools listed below are all free or offer free trials.)

- [Google Optimize](#) – Google Optimize is a Google tool that lets you test and tailor different variations of your website.

The main selling point of Google Optimize is its native integration with Google Analytics, allowing you to gain automatic access to rich behavioural insights.

- [Kameleoon](#) – Kameleoon is an advanced optimization platform that offers a variety of features. Using Kameleoon, can run advanced A/B, split, and multivariate tests quickly and easily. You can also see key user insights with their navigation analysis tool and test different user segments with over 40 targeting criteria. Dynamic traffic allocation algorithms also make sure your traffic is optimally divided in order to shorten your decision cycle and improve return on investment.
- [Simplify](#) (formerly SiteGainer) – Simplify is a company that offers a full suite of conversion optimization tools, including A/B testing, multivariate testing, personalization, heat maps, popups, and surveys. They also have a team of experts to assist you with test ideas, design, programming, analytics, and personalization.

The A/B testing software market is in a healthy place, with solutions for every size and type of business. Most of the options include a free trial (some as long as 60 days), so there is no reason not to try them for yourself.

A/B Testing – Additional Resources

Below are some articles with more details about A/B testing:

- [How to do A/B Testing and Improve Your Conversions Quickly](#)

- [19 Best A/B Testing Tools in 2021](#)

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Chapter 16: Customer Journey Mapping

What is a Customer Journey Map?

In our customer-centric world, providing a superior customer experience is a priority for any organization pursuing real success. Today's organizations are doing everything they can to better understand their customers. Whether your brand is business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C), a start-up or a corporation, global or local, providing exceptional customer experience is a must. One of the best ways to get to know your target audience is by walking in their shoes and mapping each and every interaction you share. This is where the customer journey map comes in.

We should note here that not every organization has “customers” in the commercial sense of the word. Healthcare agencies have patients and their families; non-profits have donors, members, and supporters; governments have citizens, residents, and taxpayers (with many people being all three, but some people fitting into only one or two categories, such as recent immigrants or children). In this chapter, the term “customer” is used to mean the target audience the communicator is hoping to motivate to behave a certain way and take certain actions; the text is written with a commercial setting in mind, but this is also applicable to other settings, such as non-profit organizations or government agencies.

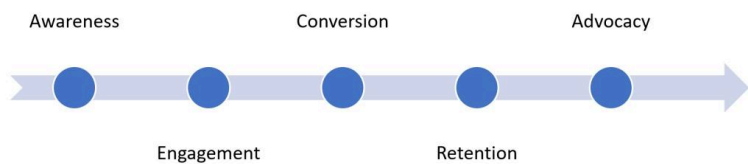
Customer Journey Map - Example



A customer journey map is a visualization of an end-to-end customer experience. It's essentially a visual narrative that allows you to understand each process your customer encounters with your organization, spanning each step from their initial engagement to, hopefully, a long-term relationship. As Matthew Fairweather, Director of Matthew Fairweather Ltd., stated:

Customer journey mapping is really a mixture of art and insight ... But that's just a visual aid. The real work in journey mapping is using all of the customer information and data available to you from across the business and delivering a process and structure to their experience.

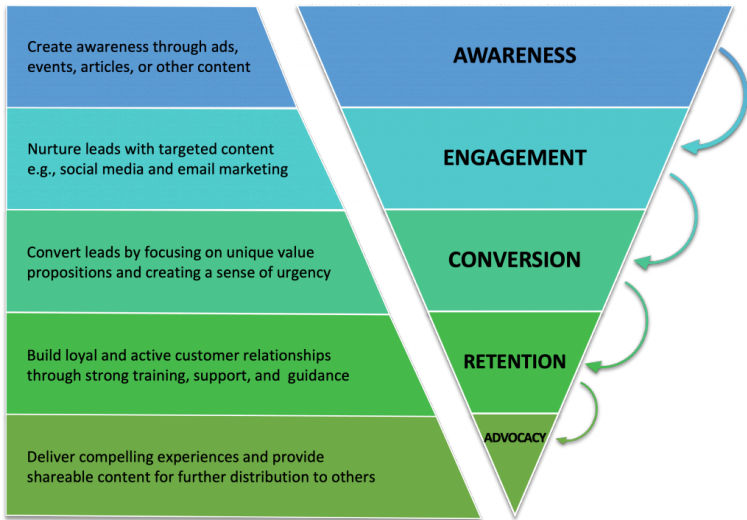
A great customer journey map should highlight how your customers discover, research, purchase, interact, and even promote your offerings. One of the easiest places to start is by outlining all the touch points your organizations has with its target audience. In the graphic below, the touch points are listed in the boxes and represent customer interactions as they move through each of the stages. And, as you can see, these touch points can be either online or offline.



Touch Points at Various Stages in the Customer's Journey

Stage	Touch Points
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paid ads (online and offline)• Radio/TV/print/outdoor ads• Email/direct mail• Promotions, sales, coupons• Word-of-mouth• Events (online and offline)
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website• Blog• Social media• Retail store• Salesforce/call centre• Events (online and offline)
Conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website/eCommerce shop• Social (media) commerce• Retail store• Demo call/salesperson• Online chat/IM• Customer success reps
Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training materials• Support portal• Customer success reps• Tech support reps• Online chat/IM• Social media support
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Newsletters (online and offline)• Loyalty and incentive programs• Community forums• Events (online and offline)• Endorsements• Social media shares/reviews

Simply stated, a customer journey usually includes the following five stages:



Please note that depending on your organization, you may choose to rename some of the stages from above or perhaps even break up a stage into multiple stages. For example, if you are in HR and mapping the “customer journey” for recruiting new employees, “Conversion” could be changed to “Application Submitted” and “Engagement” might be broken up into “First interview,” “Second Interview,” and so on. So, feel free to tweak the *specific* names and number of stages to best fit your organizational processes. But do make sure that you are capturing all the steps in your target audience’s journey.

In addition to specific stages and touchpoints, a great customer journey map also includes additional information and details. Here are six more areas to consider when building a comprehensive customer journey map:

1. **Customer’s Perspective**

When you build your customer journey map, ensure that you are mapping and presenting everything truly from

the customer's perspective. This is a great opportunity to use the [audience archetypes](#) that you have created to closely map out their customer journeys. Organize the stages to reflect the conversion process from your customer's perspective, as opposed to your own internal processes. This can often include aspects out of your direct control, such as social media influences, web searches, and steps your customers take even before you enter the picture.

2. **Customer's Thoughts, Emotions, Pain Points, and Goals**

For every stage of your customer journey map, write out what your customers are thinking, contemplating, feeling (even fearing), struggling with, and what they hope to accomplish. This will help you, as an organization, meet and address those specific needs. Here are a few examples:

1. **Customer Thoughts**

Customer thoughts represent what customers are thinking at a specific stage of their customer journey. Examples include:

- I hope I can find ____?
- Is this organization credible?
- How do I use ____?
- Is there support post-purchase?
- How does ____ compare to other offerings in the market?
- How much does it cost?
- How long will it take to get it?

2. **Customer Feelings**

Customer feelings reflect what customers might be feeling at a specific stage of their customer journey. Examples include:

- Excited – often at the beginning when a “solution” is a possibility
- Curious – usually at some point when doing research or trying to find out more information
- Confused – for complex or complicated products/services
- Hopeful – perhaps after purchase, but before using the product/service
- Impressed – post-purchase
- Frustrated – when things go wrong
- Overwhelmed – too much information

(For visualization purposes, emotions are sometimes represented by emojis.)

3. **Customer Pain Points**

Customer pain points are specific problems that prospective or existing customers are experiencing at a specific stage in their customer journey. Examples include:

- ____ takes too much time. (process pain point)
- ____ is too complex and I don't understand how to use it. (product/service pain point)
- I can't find the information I need. (accessibility pain point)
- I can't connect with the appropriate person. (support pain point)
- It's too expensive. (financial pain point)

4. **Customer Goals**

Customer goals highlight what a customer is looking to accomplish at a specific stage of their customer journey. Examples include:

- I want to find out how much it costs.

- I want to solve “this” problem.
- I want to learn about ____.
- I want to buy ____.

3. **Customer Activities**

What does the customer actually do at every step along the customer journey?

4. **Content**

As you review each stage of your customer journey, think about what content (articles, FAQs, video, white papers, videos, training materials) you need to provide to address the customer’s issues.

5. **Time**

The length of a customer experience provides important context. Does a typical stage last minutes, days, weeks, or months? How long does your customer remain in a specific stage? A great journey map recognizes that this information is essential and takes time into consideration.

6. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)/Data Collected**

At each stage, the organization should think about what data it will collect, measure, evaluate. What are the key performance indicators (KPIs) that show the organization is performing well (or not) in meeting the target audience’s needs at that specific stage? Often organizations will focus on high-level KPIs and outcomes, but by creating KPIs for each stage, an organization can better identify function and dysfunction in the customer journey.

7. **Opportunities**

Once mapped out, where are the gaps and the possibilities? The main purpose of any customer journey map is to improve your customers’ experiences and satisfaction. Given all of the above considerations, where is there room for improvement or new opportunities?

If you want to see some very good, visual examples, please read the following articles, [Nine Sample Customer Journey Maps – And What We Can Learn from Them](#) and [144 Best Customer Journey Map Templates and Examples](#).

Hopefully, you now have a better understanding of customer journeys. To better complete your customer personas and customer journeys, you will need to collect and analyze lots of data about your customers. This customer research is critical to the accuracy, precision, and validity of these tools. While the goal of these tools is to improve the customer experience and to make better customer-focused decisions, if the underlying data is not appropriate, recent, and/or accurate, your entire analysis may be flawed. So, if you are planning to use customer personas and customer journey maps as a strategic, decision-making tool, do make sure you have the appropriate data to support it.

Here is a YouTube video (6 mins), [Customer Journey Map Workshop](#), that does a good job explaining how data, audience archetypes, and customer journeys work together.

Benefits of a Mapped Customer Journey

This process takes a lot of time and effort; what makes that a worthwhile investment?

- **Consistency of touchpoints across the entire organization**

Similar to the audience archetype, customer journeys are a valuable tool in understanding your audiences and the various touch points across the entire organization, highlighting how the various departments and teams can work together to create a more seamless user experience.

- **Deeper understanding of audiences**

As mentioned previously, your customer journey should include your audience's needs, wants, pain points, and preferences at each specific stage of the journey. By identifying these characteristics, organizations can better provide support, content, and services.

- **Closer and stronger relationships**

Organizations with detailed customer journeys tend to develop closer and more meaningful relationships because they know exactly what audiences need, when they need it, and where/how they need it. This level of personalization and customer care translates into more loyal audiences and ones that often turn into brand advocates.

- **Tailored and timely communications**

From a marketing communications perspective, knowing what to communicate, when to communicate it, and through which specific channels ensures that organizations are optimizing their return on activities and investments. These activities deliver more personalized and targeted messaging, which can resonate more with target audiences.

- **More targeted product development**

As mentioned, customer journeys are also a great tool in identifying product or service development opportunities. For these development teams, customer journeys can identify areas where an organization might introduce new products and/or new ways to improve existing products and services to better serve your target audiences. In other words, customer journeys are not just about marketing, but about the overarching organizational customer experience.

- **Improved identification of cross and up-selling opportunities**

From a sales perspective, customer journey maps identify

those opportunities to create cross and up-selling opportunities that are complementary. Remember that this should not be the sole focus of your customer journey. However, there are times when complementary products or services will significantly improve the customer experience. Customer journey maps can serve as strategic tools in uncovering these opportunities.

Customer Journey Optimization

While customer journey maps are helpful in identifying new opportunities, they also allow organizations to quickly identify areas to optimize and/or automate processes or communications based on the data. In building your customer journey maps, think about the key data that you will collect along the journey and how that data can help in making better organizational decisions.

Customer Journey Online Tools & Articles

Here are some articles and online tools for developing your customer journey:

- [Nine Sample Customer Journey Maps – And What We Can Learn from Them](#)
- [144 Best Customer Journey Map Templates and Examples](#)
- [25 Tools to Create Stunning Customer Journey Maps \(Templates Included\)](#)

Depending on your needs and complexities of your customer journeys, there are several ways to map your customer journey. Here are a few examples and options:

- **Whiteboards and Post-Its**

Sometimes the easiest and simplest option is to get everyone together in a room and use a whiteboard and post-its to brainstorm and map out a customer journey. The Post-Its allow you move ideas around and can make creating a first version much easier. If you want to do something online / virtually, there are many free online whiteboard and collaboration tools such as [Padlet](#), [Miro](#), [Lucidspark](#), and [Ayoa](#) that allow groups to perform activities like these online.

- **Excel or PowerPoint Templates**

Depending on how much real-time collaboration you want, you can also create customer journeys simply using Excel or PowerPoint. There are websites that will sell you inexpensive PPT templates or you can simply search for free customer journey templates online. That said, here is an [Excel customer journey template](#) as a starting point.

- **Online Customer Journey Mapping Tools & Technologies**

As mentioned in our [Customer Persona Chapter](#), there are a several online services like [Smaply](#) and [Flow Mapp](#). If you are looking for tools that can incorporate data from other databases / services and apply machine learning to that data, check out Mnemonic AI, and [Delve AI](#), which combine

customer personas with the customer journey mapping process:¹

- [Mnemonic AI](#)
Mnemonic AI analyses publicly available data and internal data and extracts the crucial insights to generate personas for your product, service, or organization. Mnemonic AI can import your internal data such as surveys, interviews, CRM, email analytics, web analytics, and call logs, as well as leverage external data such as social media, reviews, and third party research.
- [Delve AI](#)
Create data-driven personas and customer journeys for your organization using your Google Analytics data. Delve AI also offers competitor personas and a variety of B2C and B2B industry-specific comparisons.

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2. [1]

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1. [Persona Creation. Automated. AI powered.](#) ↵

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Chapter 17: Social Media Portfolio Development & Integration

The above paragraph is the chatter in your brain you need to neutralize. It may even be the chatter in your workplace; it needs to be neutralized there, too.

Building a social media portfolio (that is, the collection of social media accounts your organization uses to engage with audiences) is a strategic process that is informed by audience analysis.

Who do you need to engage? Where can you engage them? What is the best way of engaging them there? What do you want them to do next?

Those are the questions that will lead you to choosing a limited number of social media accounts to use on behalf of your organization.

Constructing a Social Media Portfolio

Choosing which social media platforms to use—and which to forgo—is critically important for any organization looking to engage audiences through the digital world. While changing platforms later is always possible—and perhaps inevitable to a certain extent—there is a real cost to either expanding into a new platform or abandoning an old one.

Some of the heavy lifting on social media platform selection has already been done for you. Unless you are in a particular niche, you're going to be looking first at the major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X/Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn). If you're in a particular industry, such as the restaurant industry, other platforms will leap to importance, such as Yelp. If you deal with video games, you'll be on Twitch. Some of this is fairly intuitive.

However, having a meaningful social media presence on seven social media channels is a lot of work—and can cost a lot of money in staff time. Some of these platforms are going to be more fruitful for your organization than others, so you

need to narrow your selection strategically. Again, this is where audience analysis kicks in. Let's look again at the four questions posted above:

Who do you need to engage?

Hopefully, this is something you've gathered a lot of data about and something you've spent time carefully analyzing, even going so far as to create audience archetypes. (If not, for goodness' sake, go back and do your audience analysis; nothing in the world of communications is more important.)

Define the groups you need to target and analyze...

Where can you engage them?

Obviously, if you know which social media accounts they use, then that settles the discussion, right?

Well, a little bit.

If you know your target audience is going to be using Facebook more than any other social media platform, yes, you need to be on Facebook. You'll incorporate this decision into your social media style guide and your customer journey map, study how your audiences and competitors engage on Facebook, and prepare a stellar approach for communicating there. Easy peasy!

Well, not quite. There's another question you need to answer:

What is the best way of engaging them there?

If you simply need short blocks of text and an image—possibly a paid advertisement or boosted post—to get your audience to take the desired action, that's pretty easy. But what if you need more than that? What if your best pitch is a three-minute video that moves them from attention and interest to desire and action ([A.I.D.A.](#))?

Well, I guess if that's the case you now need a second social media account: a YouTube channel where you can post all those videos that you'll push into Facebook (or whichever other social media platforms you're using).

Your social media portfolio has now made an important (and time consuming) expansion.

What do you want them to do next?

For many organizations, the above pattern will check. For some, however, this pattern does not check.

Some organizations, for example, are producing extremely high-value video content on YouTube that spans 20+ minutes per video. For them, YouTube is the first and primary point of social media contact. Their goal is to create a conversation through YouTube. But how else can they engage this audience?

Maybe their secondary goal is to get them into text-based exchanges in X/Twitter. If that text-based conversation eases the process of making a conversion, then the organization wants to connect YouTube viewers with their X/Twitter account to make that happen.

As you can see, the customer journey needs to be mapped after the fact, but it also needs to be anticipated before the social media portfolio is created.

To Thine Own Self Be True

Every organization is going to have different motivations and needs for how and why they develop their social media portfolio. As emphasized, audience analysis is at the core of these decisions, but even further into the core is a matter of fundamental truth to the organization: what are your own unique and authentic communication needs for connecting with your target audience(s)?

Chasing the competition is tempting, but the return on investment in a particular social media channel may not be worthwhile for your organization—or perhaps it may be worthwhile after a period of growth. Whatever decisions the organization makes in constructing its social media portfolio, the decisions must be based on truthful self-analysis, truthful

and accurate audience analysis, and a careful investigation of each social media platform being considered.

Social Media Integration

For convenience and cost, smaller organizations often have one person running their website and social media accounts, but most medium or larger organizations will have one team that manages their website and another that leads social media communications. These are often situated in a marketing or communications office (or a “MarCom” office that integrates the two). Both the web team and the social media team need to interact and communicate regularly so that the website and social media accounts have consistent messaging, tone, and usability.

Web Teams

Front-End Developers

A front-end developer is someone who works on the style and design of a website. These developers need to know HTML, CSS and usually be comfortable with [JavaScript](#). Other web programming languages that are often desired for front-end developers are [jQuery](#), [Angular JS](#), and [Polymer Web Components](#) (to name just a few).

More specifically, front-end designers are often called UX (User Experience) Designers. Having the ability to wire-frame or create sample website layouts in graphics imaging software, such as Photoshop, is an asset to this position.

Back-End Developers

Back-end developers are more in-depth programmers who

add dynamic functionality to a website. For example, they would be needed on a team for websites that have any user login, e-commerce database, server-side forms, etc. These developers enhance websites by using programming languages such as JavaScript (or [node](#)), [PHP](#), [MySQL](#), [Java](#) as well as complete knowledge of the most current CSS and HTML to build more advanced functionality into the website.

Marketing/Communications Teams

Copywriter

A copywriter is often the person who is responsible for creating the web content (blogs, snappy intro text, news releases) and making sure that copyright laws are not being broken. This individual usually works closely with both the communications team and the web team.

Social Media Manager

The Social Media Manager is in charge of creating, maintaining, and executing social media strategy and content. They are at the center of managing an organization's online presence and should have excellent leadership skills, writing and editing capabilities, and advanced knowledge of web analytics. Other titles for this position might include social media strategist, social media coordinator, or digital communications manager.

Social Media Assistant

The social media assistant is typically the individual responsible for posting to social media and maintaining the voice of the company on all social platforms. The strategy will be determined by the social media manager and the assistant(s) will be in charge of ensuring the execution of the campaigns and following up with comments and questions. The social media assistant needs to have excellent written and oral communication skills and be able to effectively multi-task

numerous projects and expectations from the team. They are often responsible for delivering reports to the manager on the success of various campaigns and, more specifically, on the ROI of various campaigns, platforms, and even individual actions (such as paid advertising).

Graphic Designer

An in-house graphic designer can be an invaluable asset for an organization, but is often seen as a luxury. As the web becomes more and more emoji and image-centric, clear, clean graphics are more and more in demand. Online solutions such as [fiverr](#) and [logo tournament](#) are significantly lowering the bar for entrepreneurs to access high-quality graphics, but there is no substitute for genuine, professional, in-house skill.

Bridging Your Website and Social Media Accounts

Creating meaningful content for your website is essential, but if it is not publicized (usually by sharing across social media networks), the only way it will be seen is if people know to go to your website for it or if it gets picked up by a search engine. Social media posts that link back to your main website can help draw people to your content and to your organization's products/services.

The first step to integrating your social media accounts and website is to add links from your social media accounts to your site and vice-versa. Adding social media icons is reasonably simple to do within a variety of CMS (content management systems), such as WordPress.com.

Adding links to related posts, in-line with the body of the text on your website, can also result in a higher share rate on your blog. In reality, it is a circular process, with links from your social media posts to your website and your website to your various

social media accounts. This allows your visitors to enter into the loop at any point and get access to both your other social media posts and your site content.

For example, if one of your social media campaigns uses a contest, it might be useful to have a supporting page on your website that outlines prizes, expectations, and rules for participation. You can then link to this web page in your contest post.

Evaluating Your Content's Lasting Value

Evergreen Content

Evergreen content is when you design your web and social media content to be worthwhile for years to come. This allows your posts to get more clicks over time. To do this, avoid the use of specific dates/time (e.g., “here’s what to do this New Years,” rather than “Here’s how to bring in 2024”). Refresh your content regularly to ensure it remains relevant and create posts with topics that have either more generic value or answers specific questions in an broadly applicable way.

Analytics

Analytics can help you find out more about how traffic is accessing your website. Are people clicking through to your site from Facebook or Twitter? By integrating [Google Analytics](#) on your website ([not available on the free plan of WordPress.com](#)), you can find out what the bounce rate (time before people leave) of each page of your site is, and specifically whether they come from Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. This

information can help “turn insight into action” (Google Analytics, 2017). By evaluating website traffic and the behaviour of individuals who access your website, you can gain knowledge about what is and isn’t working on your website.

Evaluating social media analytics (e.g., Facebook business analytics) and any other campaign analytics will also help you better define and refine your target audience, and get to know what your customers want from your business.

See the later chapter in this OER textbook for more about analytics (as well as search engine optimization and algorithms).

Attributions

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Chapter 18: Policies & Terms of Use

Organizations that communicate online must keep up-to-date with current world events. You do not want to be caught posting a “Motivational Monday” quote or a scheduled humorous anecdote right after a natural disaster.

In fact, [companies have been warned time and time again](#) to not post about the death of a famous individual, terrorist attacks, or other sensitive events on social media. In these types of situations, many still feel that companies should stay silent. Individuals who feel passionately about responding to the tragedy should use their personal accounts to do so.

Creating Policies

Policies are required to be proactive to mitigate potential risks of posting on social media.

Audiences are turning more and more to social media to find information about organizations, products, and services. Organizations are realizing the importance of creating policies to control their website’s “official” presence, which may include any of the digital platforms or content discussed previously in this OER textbook.

Policies can ensure messaging delivered online plays a positive role in creating and maintaining a brand’s reputation. Organizations may also have an “unofficial” presence—developed by employees’ personal blogs, posts, online interviews, reviews, YouTube videos, LinkedIn accounts, and so on.

“Policies that draw clear lines on what employees should and shouldn’t say online, whether in company-authorized content or in personal posts, can help you make sure that your company is being represented

positively and appropriately in cyberspace.” (Guerin, 2017, p. 7)¹

Social Media Policy

The following is a hypothetical social media policy to guide online interactions for the fictitious business: Land. This policy has been modified and updated from a template provided by Lisa Guerin, J.D., in *Smart Policies for Workplace Technologies*.

Example of a Social Media Policy

Our Company's Social Media Presence

Social media is an important technology for our Company. Social media tools, including Company-sponsored blogs and microblogs, social networking sites, video or picture sharing sites, wikis, and other means of communicating online, are a key part of our Company's face to the public. These social media offer opportunities to shape opinion about our products and our company, to communicate directly with customers and clients, to provide added value for our customers, and to be part of the online conversation about important developments in our field.

Social Media Goals

We use social media primarily to communicate with and add value to our clients' lives. Our Company uses three separate social media platforms to engage with clients and target future customers through paid, owned and earned marketing

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campaigns. Our company maintains Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok accounts and uses them separately to connect with a variety of audiences. Our goal is to keep our content original and not to post duplicate content across all of our platforms. Our company uses each account for a specific purpose, laid out more specifically in the Sponsored Social Media Strategy document.

Who May Post

Only authorized employees may post to Company-sponsored blogs, social networking pages, or other social media. Authorization is granted by both co-owners. Before you begin posting content, you must have attended a BC accredited social media training course and have official authorization from both co-owners.

Guidelines for Employees Who Post

1. **Be respectful.** When you post about the Company, its products and employees, customers, and competitors, use good judgment. Make sure your posts are professional and respectful. Disagreement is fine, so long as you do so in a civil way and you're not offensive.
2. **Add value.** We expect you to write about new developments and trends in your area of expertise. Don't just recycle news or posts; add your perspective and provide useful advice to enable consumers to better use our services.
3. **Post often.** We want readers to return and see what's new at our Company and the best way you can help make that happen is to post at least every other week.
4. **Be part of the conversation.** When appropriate, link to other sites, articles, blogs, and media on the same topic. By sharing our partners' content, we show that we are part of the Metro Vancouver community. And, of course, link to our Company site when appropriate.
5. **Accuracy counts.** Before you publish a blog post or a

social media entry, review it for accuracy. When writing about Company business, check with the appropriate people in-house to make sure you've got the facts straight. If you later learn that you've made a mistake, say so and correct it.

6. **Avoid inappropriate topics.** We want you to generate interest, but there are many ways to do that without offending readers or placing the Company in the midst of a controversy. All Company policies, including those that prohibit harassment, discrimination, and unprofessional conduct apply with equal force to your online posts.
7. **Respect ownership of intellectual property.** Don't copy or use work by someone else (including text, photos, and video) without proper authorization and, if required, attribution. If you're referring to a copyrighted story, keep your quotes short; if you want to refer to another's work, link to it in its entirety.
8. **Keep the Company's secrets.** Don't refer to or reveal the Company's trade secrets and proprietary information. This includes stock offerings, financials, products in development, and other confidential information. If you aren't sure whether to reveal particular information in your post, speak to your manager.
9. **Maintain customer and employee privacy.** Do not mention customers by name or identifying details without authorization from your manager. If you want to discuss or mention coworkers in your posts, you must get their written permission first.
10. **Ask—and think—before you post.** Remember, your posted content represents you and the Company to the public. All of us want that representation to be positive. If you aren't certain that what you plan to post is appropriate and legal, check with your manager before you post. Your questions are always welcome.

Identify Yourself

When you respond to a post/comment/DM (direct message) on any Company-sponsored social media, such as our Facebook or Instagram pages, you must identify yourself by name and by your position at the Company. Anonymous responses or posting under pseudonyms or aliases is prohibited. The same rule applies if you are posting comments on behalf of the Company to one of our competitors' social media accounts, websites, or product pages.

You Are Responsible for Your Posts

Remember, you are legally responsible for what you post online, whether on a personal site or a Company-sponsored site. You can be held personally liable for defaming others, revealing trade secrets, and copyright infringement, among other things. All Company policies apply to your online posts on Company-sponsored sites.

Handling Comments

We encourage reader responses and comments to our social media postings. However, not all reader commentary is fit to print. If you post entries that elicit reader responses or comments, you must follow these guidelines:

1. Do not allow the posting of spam, advertisements, or comments that merely link to another website (unless they are responsive to the original post). Delete these posts.
2. Do not allow the posting of any comment that is obscene or offensive. Delete these comments.
3. Do not allow the posting of any comment that reveals trade secrets or proprietary information. For example, if a competitor's employee reveals that company's confidential information in a comment, remove it immediately and report it to your manager.
4. Do not remove relevant anti-Company comments simply because they are negative. Do not engage in online

arguments or “flame wars” through social media commenting. Talk to your manager about how—and through which medium—to respond appropriately.

5. If you receive a complaint about the company or its products in a comment, immediately notify the Co-Owners, so it can handle the situation directly.

Because of the time and resources it would require to screen comments to our Company's blog(s), we do not post reader comments. Please turn off the “comments” feature of any Company blog.

1. Guerin, L. (2017). *Smart policies for workplace technology*. Berkley, CA: Nolo [↩](#)

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Chapter 19: Social Media ROI and Analytics

What is the ROI of Your Mother? (Gary Vee said it, not me.)

Around 60% of the world's population is on the internet. Your competitors are likely advertising on digital platforms and interacting with their target audience(s) via social media. If you don't engage, you may end up losing your relationship—or your chance to build a relationship—with that audience.

With targeted social ads, you can effectively run campaigns to increase brand awareness, increase traffic to your website, convert visitors into customers, or engage the existing audiences. If you want to make the most of these platforms, you must embrace analytics.

Gary Vaynerchuk, commonly known as Gary Vee, is the king of digital marketing. During a corporate meeting, he was enquired multiple times about the ROI of social media campaigns at his company. When the top executive manager kept asking the same question, he came back with a question of his own: “What's the ROI of your mother?”

While it may seem a personal attack to many, Gary Vee actually raised a great point. Being the marketing genius that he is, he highlighted the importance of context and efforts when it comes to social marketing. How exactly would you put a value on the life-time investment parents make in their children? If you can't put a number on it, does that mean there's no value? Of course not! The investments parents make in their children are extremely valuable—*incalculably so*.

Vee shared this memory in a 2011 event. At that time, not many tools were present to calculate the return on investment for social media campaigns. He implied that it's not possible

to measure the ROI of his mother, but it reflects in his achievements. If his mother didn't encourage him to be his best and boost his self-esteem, he wouldn't be able to reach where he is today. Calculating the exact ROI of certain actions is challenging, but it doesn't mean those actions aren't valuable.

With time, businesses became more familiar with social marketing and a myriad of tools and metrics are now available to communicators. Therefore, he rephrased his earlier claims in 2015 and enlightened us with the fact that the ROI of social marketing can be measured and organizations must keep track of these performance indicators.

ROI of a tool is directly proportional to the time and efforts you invest in mastering it. For instance, the ROI of you playing basketball may be zero or a few hundred dollars if you bet on games. But a game of basketball will have a much higher worth for LeBron James, considering that he [earns over \\$49 million per annum](#), excluding sponsorship deals and other income. Only because he spent years learning the game and investing in improving his skills is he able to realize that ROI.

The same goes for social platforms. If you keep investing in social media and build your brand online through aggressive organic and paid marketing, then the ROI will (or should) go up in the future.

Increasing the ROI of Social Media Campaigns

Social media works best when you create long-term goals instead of focusing on short-term benefits. Your campaigns should align with the organization's vision and promote a positive image. Moreover, you should also define clear objectives you intend to achieve with social media campaigns.

This way, you can increase the monetary and non-monetary revenue earned against these efforts.

Time

Regardless of which organization you're with, you will need time for efforts to translate to success. You ought to build networks, create goodwill, connect with audiences, and improve cash flows. Social media campaigns are no different.

You need to spend a lot of time understanding the social world. Once you have set up profiles on social platforms of your choice, you have to come up with the right content strategy. You need to learn who your ideal audience is and create content as per their interests. You also need to determine what your competitors are doing differently and learn from them.

Your social media efforts may not give much ROI during the initial days or even months, but if you come up with an effective plan, outcomes will improve with time. So, keep exploring the world of social media and your brand will eventually grow online with time and effort.

Money

A prevalent myth is that social media is free. Let me clear this misconception for you: social platforms aren't free for organizations or even individuals. You spend your precious time chatting with friends and scrolling the timeline when you could have spent it doing more important tasks. So, you pay the price in the form of time.

However, organizations shouldn't only rely on organic social marketing for growth. Social media ads are extremely helpful in meeting goals. Not only are they relatively cost-effective as

compared to traditional marketing channels, but they also offer better targeting options.

Businesses spend millions on social ads, but you can invest in these ads as per your budget. There are a myriad of targeting options available and you can reach the audience based on their gender, location, interests, devices, online activities, behaviours, demographics, or many other specific options.

Furthermore, for sales-oriented organizations, you can also run social media campaigns for the audience depending on their buyer's journey stage:

- **Awareness Stage** – Brand Awareness and Reach
- **Consideration Stage** – Traffic, Engagement, App Installs, Video Views, Lead Generation, Messages
- **Conversion Stage** – Conversions, Catalogue Sales, Store foot Traffic

Analytics Tools for Social Media ROI

The best way to track your social ad campaigns is through analytics tools. You can find various tools and software that provide useful information. With the help of this data, you can optimize your social media strategy and meet predefined marketing goals.

So, here are some of the best analytics tools that may prove the right choice for you:

Hubspot Marketing Analytics

Hubspot Marketing Analytics dashboard offers a unique solution for your social marketing needs. It tracks the ROI of ad campaigns on any social platform, assists you with creating

Calls-to-Action that drive results, guides you about the best SEO strategies, and lets you create attractive landing pages for lead generation.

Google Analytics

With Google leading the tech industry, one should not be surprised that their social media analytics tool is also one of the best options out there. It is compatible with Google partner platforms, including YouTube. You can also integrate it with your business website to monitor website traffic. You can determine how much traffic each social platform directs towards your website and find out detailed information such as engagement, bounce rate, conversion rate, and so on.

Mention

Mention is an innovative tool through which you can find out how your brand is doing online. It informs you about discussions related to your brand and lets you know what your audiences are saying about you. You can also use this tool to learn about your competitors and take appropriate actions to further improve your social presence.

Keyhole

If your social marketing strategy revolves around X/Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, then Keyhole may be the ultimate solution for you. Not only can you explore the performance of social campaigns, but also find out when your target audience is online and how they engage with social posts. You can also

learn about reach, impressions, engagement, and conversion from individual posts as well as the entire ads campaign.

Aside from these standalone tools, you can also utilize analytics dashboard offered by different social platforms. They include Twitter Analytics, Facebook Insights, LinkedIn Analytics, Pinterest Analytics, last but not the least, YouTube Analytics.

Further Reading:

[Social Media Analytics: 12 Hidden Reports to See if Your Social Strategy is Working \(neilpatel.com\)](https://neilpatel.com/blog/social-media-analytics-12-hidden-reports-to-see-if-your-social-strategy-is-working/)

[How to Get Your Business the Most Attention Possible in 2020 | Game Changers Summit Keynote 2019 – YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

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Chapter 20: Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a planned manipulation of search engine algorithms to earn higher rankings for your organization's webpages and content in non-paid (also known as "organic") search engine results. This is done to increase the quality and quantity of traffic to your website or content.

Please note that the goal of SEO is not simply to optimize for the search engines, but rather to structure your content so that target audiences can easily find the information they seek. Understanding what people are searching for online, the kinds of words or terminology they are using, and the types of content they want to consume are critical in any search engine optimization strategy. When done correctly, SEO allows organizations to better reach and connect with people searching for the products and services their organization offers.

From your audience archetypes, you should have a clear interpretation of what your target audience wants and is interested in. SEO structures content so that search engines can find, understand, and index it and, ultimately, prioritize its delivery when anybody is looking for it online.

Why is SEO Important?

Effective communications plans direct use of paid advertising, social media, and other online platforms to generate traffic and interest. However, the majority of online traffic is driven by search engines. For example, of all Canadian searches, only ~2.8% of people click on paid advertisements. SEO delivers ~20X more traffic opportunities than paid advertising on both mobile and desktop.

Search engines also produce some of the most qualified leads because, when someone is searching, you know what that person is looking for. Capturing a lead with a very specific

search intention allows organizations to deliver a specific solution based on what that person needs at that very moment. Generally, search intentions are categorized as follows:

- **Informational**

This is when someone is searching for information.

For example: “What is the best type of laptop for photography?”

- **Navigational**

This is when someone is searching for a specific website.

For example: “Best Buy”

- **Transactional**

This is when someone is searching to buy something.

For example: “good deals on Samsung tablets”

Understanding the above objectives allows communicators to create content that specifically addresses these distinct intentions.

Over time and if set up properly, SEO can also organically grow and increase your traffic without additional investments, especially if your content is the best match for specific search terms. In essence, by spending time to properly structure your content for search engines, your organization could see increased traffic, engagements, and customers/donors/users over time.

On-Site SEO & Keywords

Within search engine optimization, there are two primary strategies that most organizations will want to explore: on-site and off-site SEO.

On-site SEO focuses on optimizing the content and structure of a website so that it ranks well (typically within the first 10

search results, or on the first page of search engine results) for specific search phrases (also known as “keywords”) that are relevant to an organization’s website or content.

A key element of on-site SEO is ensuring that the keywords or key phrases your target audience searches for are contained in the content and structure of your webpages.

Let’s walk through an example. Fable Ice Cream, a Saskatoon-based ice cream shop, has heard about SEO and wants to improve how often they show up in organic search results. To do so, they might ask questions such as:¹

- What types of ice cream, desserts, and snacks are people searching for?
- Who is searching for these terms?
- When are people searching for ice cream, snacks, and desserts?
 - Are there seasonality trends throughout the year?
- How are people searching for ice cream?
 - What words do they use?
 - What questions do they ask?
 - Are more searches performed on mobile devices?
- Why are people seeking ice cream?
 - Are individuals looking for health-conscious ice cream or just looking to satisfy a sweet tooth?
- Where are potential customers located—locally, nationally, or internationally?

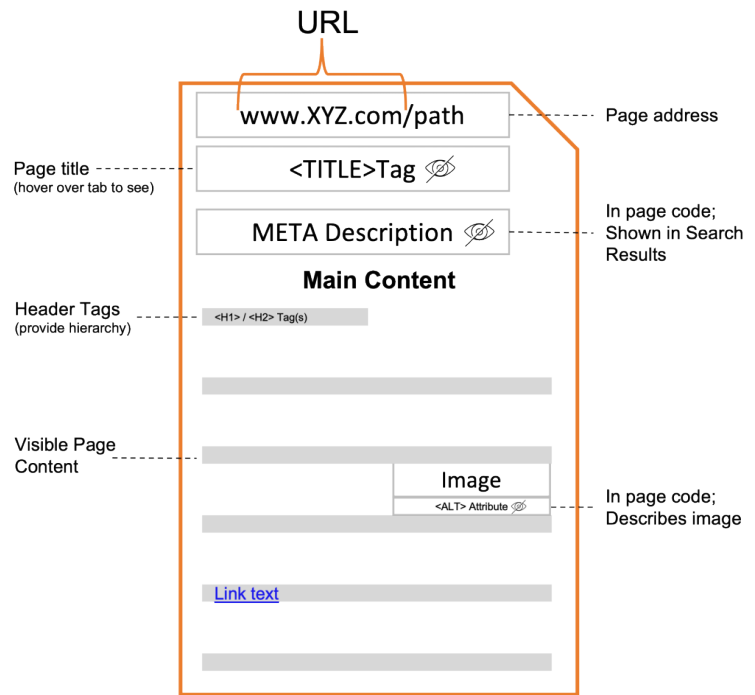
Asking these questions is a crucial planning step that will guide Fable Ice Cream’s keyword research and help them craft better content. Understanding how a target audience searches for a

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product, service, or information is a crucial first step and in answering the above questions, organizations can come up with several keyword and key phrase ideas.

Often communicators will then start thinking about creating content using these terms. However, there are other structural and hidden areas of your webpages that should be considered, as well.



In the above image, you can see the anatomy of a webpage and, when you are incorporating your keywords, be sure to include them in the following:

- **URLs and Paths**

While not as creative and brandable, domain names that are descriptive (e.g., wine.com) work well for SEO. And if you have multiple webpages on your website, consider

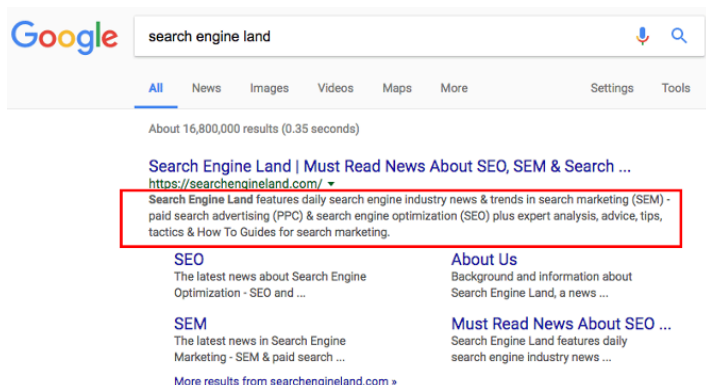
including keywords in your paths (i.e., the text after the slashes (/), such as wine.com/red-wines).

- **Title Tag**

The title tag is one of the most important page factors because it tells the search engines what the entire page is about. While this tag is hidden when viewing a webpage, it is the web page title (in blue) that search engines show in their results (see image below – “Search Engine Land | Must Read News ...”). To see the title tag for a webpage, simply hover your mouse over the top of any web browser tab.

- **Meta Descriptions/Snippets**

A meta description is the short summary that appears underneath your website title on the search engine results page and includes information about your webpage (see red box below). Again, this information is not visible when viewing the actual webpage, but rather is information created for search engines to display in their results. Many website builders (e.g. WordPress, Wix, Weebly) will have settings where you can enter this description and the title tag for each webpage. However, in some cases, you may need to ask your website developers how this information can be entered.



- **Main Content/Body Copy**

The main content, also called Body Copy, is the visible

content you see when you visit a webpage.

- **Header Tags**

Header tags, also known as heading tags, are used to separate headings and subheadings on a webpage. They rank in order of importance, from H1 to H6, with H1s being the most important. Header tags improve the readability and SEO of a webpage by creating a hierarchy similar to a table of contents or outline. For example, in this chapter, “Why is SEO Important” and “On-site SEO & Keywords” are H2s, which means that all these headings have the same importance.

- **Image Alt Text**

Search engines cannot “see” images. As a result, images should always have alt text to describe what is in the image. Search engines will then use this alt text to match searches. Even though alt text is not visible, it is an important addition for SEO and for any visitors using screen readers to view a webpage.

- **File Names (including images)**

When saving and uploading files, try to incorporate the appropriate keywords into the file name. For example, an image file with the name wine-glass.jpeg is much better than IMG4095.jpeg.

- **Link Text**

When creating links to internal and external webpages, make sure the text used for the link is descriptive. For example, instead of writing “click [here](#) to read an article,” write “read this [article from Google on Link Text](#).”

Now, that you have considered incorporating keywords into the structural areas of your webpages, you can create visible content that answers the questions your target audiences ask.

If you want to further research and identify related or similar keywords, there are many online tools that can help. First, create a list of potential keywords, phrases, and questions and

then, enter those terms into any of the following online services:

- [Google Search Console](#) – shows a lot of data about the keywords that you **already** rank for.
- [Google Keyword Planner](#) – finds other keywords, but only list ranges for search volumes.
- [Google Trends](#) – visualizes the relative search popularity of a keyword over time.
- [Keyword Generator](#) – finds up to 150 keyword ideas for any seed keyword.
- [Keyword Sheeter](#) – pulls thousands of autocomplete suggestions from Google.
- [Answer the Public](#) – finds questions, prepositions, comparisons, alphabeticals, and related searches.
- [Keyword Surfer](#) – is a free Chrome extension that shows estimated global and local (for 19 countries, including Canada) monthly search volumes for any query typed into Google.
- [Keyworddit](#) – pulls keyword ideas from Reddit.
- [Questiondb](#) – finds the questions people are asking about a specific topic (sourced from Reddit).
- [Bulk Keyword Generator](#) – is a keyword research tool for *local* SEO. It generates keywords based on industry type.

You can also conduct a Google Search using your keywords, phrases, and questions and look at the results. Pay attention to the “People also ask” box for search suggestions. Now that you have a better sense of what on-site SEO covers, let’s take a look at off-site SEO.

Off-Site SEO

Off-site or off-page SEO involves any activities that drive

awareness and referral traffic **to** your website from other sites. For example, if you have a link to your website in your Twitter profile, there is now a link from Twitter back to your website.

This is important because search engines rank a website based on the reputations of those websites linking to it. So, if you have links from industry associations, media sites, or educational institutions, search engines will rank your website much higher than links from smaller or less reputable websites. These external websites become part of your “online digital network/family” and directly influence your website’s “reputation.” As a result, link building is often considered the main off-site tactic and can include a variety of tactics:

- Guest blogging
- Content marketing
- Social media marketing
- Image/video sharing
- Podcasts and articles
- Customer reviews
- Directory listings

These are a few key considerations and concepts for off-site SEO:

- **Outbound Links**

Outbound links are links from your website to websites with a different domain name. When you make these connections, keep in mind that the other website will become part of your website network. In other words, your reputation and their reputation are now linked.

- **Inbound Links/Backlinks**

The opposite of outbound links, inbound or backlinks come from other websites with a different domain name and point to your website. To improve your off-site SEO, increase the number of relevant, related websites that link

to your website. Keep in mind that recent links rank higher than older links and it is still important to have keywords in any link text, as mentioned above. If, for some reason, you discover a website linking to yours and want to remove that connection, you can make use of [Google's Disavow Tool](#).

- **Content**

Creating content is a significant part of any off-site SEO strategy. However, not all content is equal. For search engine purposes, high quality content is defined as original, recent, accurate, grammatically correct, appropriate in length, and unique. Websites that produce high-quality content will rank higher in search engine results. So, a robust content strategy helps an organization's off-site SEO, especially for newer websites that are establishing their credibility and building an audience.

- **Link Diversity**

To improve your off-site SEO, create a variety of outbound and inbound links (i.e., to and from a variety of *different* domains). Link diversity increases your off-site SEO ranking.

- **Social Signals**

Be sure to include links to your website in your social media profiles and posts. And encourage your followers, employees, strategic partners, etc. to post and link to your content so that you build your link network.

For more ideas on link building strategies, please read this article, [15x Incredible Link Building Strategies](#).

SEO – Additional Resources

To dive into SEO in more detail, here are some additional online resources:

- [The Beginner's Guide to SEO](#) (7 Chapters – Moz)
- [SEMrush SEO Toolkit](#) (3 hrs. – SEMrush)
- [SEO Fundamentals Course with Greg Gifford](#) (4 hrs. – SEMrush)
- [SEO Marketing with Ahrefs](#) – (5hrs. – Ahrefs Academy)

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1. [Fable Ice Cream](#) ↵

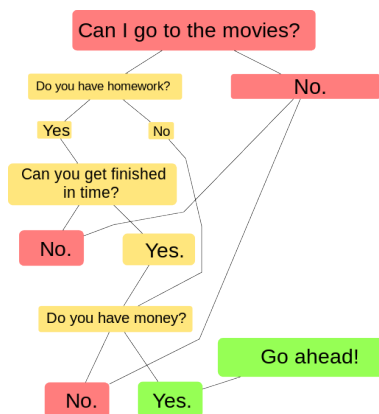
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Chapter 21: Algorithms

Nearly any software platform you use performs its work based on algorithms, which enable it to make rapid decisions and respond predictably to stimuli. An algorithm is a step-by-step set of instructions for getting something done, whether that something is making a decision, solving a problem, or getting from point A to point B (or point Z). This chapter looks at how computing algorithms work, who tends to create them, and how that affects their outcomes. We will also consider whether certain algorithms should be used at all.



Algorithms: They can all be reduced to simple steps, which computers need in order to follow them.

Humans Make Computers What They Are.

Most platforms have many algorithms at work at once, which can make the work they do seem so complex it's almost magical. But all functions of digital devices can be reduced to simple steps if needed. The steps have to be simple because computers interpret instructions very literally.

Computers don't know anything unless someone has already given them instructions that are explicit, with every step fully

explained. Humans, on the other hand, can complete their understanding if you skip unimportant steps, and can complete tacit or incomplete instructions. But give a computer instructions that skip steps or include tacit steps, and the computer will either stop working or get the process wrong.

Here's an example of the human cooperation that goes into the giving and following of instructions, demonstrated with a robot.

As an instructor, I can say to human students on the first day of class, "Let's go around the room. Tell us who you are and where you're from." Easy for humans, right? But imagine I try that in a mixed human/robot classroom. All will probably go well with the first two (human) students, but then the third student, a robot with a computer for a brain, says, "I don't understand." It seems my instructions were not clear enough. Now imagine another (human) student named Lila helpfully tells the robot, "Well, first just tell us your name." The robot still does not understand. Finally, Lila says, "What is your name?"

That works; the robot has been programmed with an algorithm instructing it to respond to "What is your name?" with the words, "My name is Feefee," which the robot now says. Then Lila continues helping the robot by saying, "Now tell us where you're from, Feefee." Again the robot doesn't get it. At this point, though, Lila has figured out what works in getting answers from this robot, so Lila says, "Where are you from?" This works; the robot has been programmed to respond to "Where are you from?" with the sentence, "I am from Silicon Valley."

In the above example, human intelligence was responsible for the robot's successes and failures. The robot arrived with a few communication algorithms, programmed by its human developers. Feefee had not been taught enough to converse very naturally, however. Then Lila, a human, figured out how to

get the right responses out of FeeFee by modifying her human behaviour to better match behaviour FeeFee had learned to respond to. Later, the students might all run home and say, “A robot participated in class today! It was amazing!” They might not even acknowledge the human participation that day, which the robot fully depended on.

Two Reasons Computers Seem So Smart Today

What computers can do these days is amazing, for two main reasons. The first is cooperation from human software developers. The second is cooperation on the part of users.

First, computers seem so intelligent today because human software developers help one another teach computers. Apps that seem groundbreaking may simply include a lot of instructions. This is possible because developers have coded many, many algorithms, which they share and reuse on sites like [Github](#). The more a developer is able to copy the basic steps

others have already written for computers to follow, the more that developer can then focus on building new code that teaches computers new tricks. The most influential people, known as “creators” or “inventors” in the tech world, may be better described as [“tweakers”](#) who improved and added to other people’s code for their “creations” and “inventions.”

The second reason computers seem so smart today is

```
1 /* This line basically imports the "stdio" header file, part of
2  * the standard library. It provides input and output functionality
3  * to the program.
4  */
5 #include <stdio.h>
6
7 /*
8  * Function (method) declaration. This outputs "Hello, world" to
9  * standard output when invoked.
10 */
11 void sayHello() {
12     // printf() in C outputs the specified text (with optional
13     // formatting options) when invoked.
14     printf("Hello, world!");
15 }
16
17 /*
18 * This is a "main function". The compiled program will run the code
19 * defined here.
20 */
21 void main() {
22     // Invoke the sayHello() function.
23     sayHello();
24 }
```

Source code of a simple computer program:

This code written in the C programming language will display the “Hello, world!” message.

because users are teaching them. Algorithms are increasingly designed to “learn” from human input. New algorithms automatically plug input into new programs, then automatically run those programs. This sequence of automated learning and application is called artificial intelligence (AI). AI essentially means teaching computers to teach themselves directly from their human users.

If only humans were always good teachers!

Teaching Machines the Best and Worst About Ourselves

In 2016, Microsoft introduced Tay, an AI online robot they branded as a young female. Their intention was for Tay to learn to communicate from internet users who conversed with her on Twitter—and learn she did. Within a few hours, Tay’s social media posts were so infected with violence, racism, sexism, and other bigotry that [Microsoft had to take her down and apologize](#).

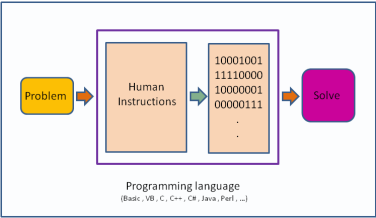
Microsoft had previously launched [Xiaolce](#), an AI whose behaviour remained far less offensive than TAY, on Chinese sites, including the microblog Weibo. However, the Chinese sites Xiaolce learned from were heavily censored. The English-language Twitter was far less censored and rife with trolls networked and ready to coordinate attacks. [Developers and users who were paying attention already knew Twitter was full of hate](#).

Tay was an embarrassment for Microsoft in the eyes of many commentators. How could they not have predicted and protected her from bad human teachers? Why didn’t Tay’s human programmers teach her what not to say? It certainly involved a lack of research, since bots like [@oliviataters](#) have

been more successful and even benefited from a shared [list of banned words](#) that could easily be added to their algorithms.

In addition to these oversights, Tay’s failure may also have been caused by a lack of diversity in Microsoft’s programmers and team leaders.

Programming and Bias



Programming languages: Basic, C++, and Java are just a few of these. All translate human instructions into algorithms, which are instructions computers can understand.

Humans are at the heart of any computer program. Algorithms for computers to follow are all written in programming languages, which translate instructions from human language into the [computing language of binary numerals, 0s and 1s](#).

Algorithms and programs are selective and reflect personal decision-making. There are

usually different ways they could have been written.

Computer programming languages like Python, C++, and Java are written in source code. Writing programs, sometimes just called “coding,” is an intermediary step between human language and the binary language that computers understand. Learning programming languages takes time and dedication. To learn to be a computer programmer, you either have to feel driven to teach yourself on your own equipment or you have to be taught to program—and this is still not common in US schools.

Because computer programmers are self-selected this way, and because many people think of the typical tech geeks as white and male (as suggested by the Google Image search to the right), people who end up learning computer programming in the US are more likely to be white than any other race, and are more likely to identify as male than any other gender.



A Google search for “tech geek”: The many images of young white male “tech geeks” help explain why youth who are not white or male may feel out of place teaching themselves to code.

How Can Computers Carry Bias?

Many people think computers and algorithms are neutral—racism and sexism are not programmers’ problems. In the case of Tay’s programmers, this false belief enabled more hate speech online and led to the embarrassment of their employer. Human-crafted computer programs mediate nearly everything humans do today and human responses are involved in many of those tasks. Considering the near-infinite extent to which algorithms and their activities are replicated, the presence of human biases is a devastating threat to computer-dependent societies in general—and to those targeted or harmed by those biases in particular.



Google Glass was considered by some to be an example of a poor decision by a homogenous workforce.

Problems like these are rampant in the tech industry because there is a damaging belief in US (and some other) societies that the development of computer technologies is antisocial, and that some kinds of

people are better at it than others. As a result of this bias in tech industries and computing, there are not enough kinds of people working on tech development teams: not enough women, not enough people who are not white, not enough people who remember to think of children, not enough people who think socially, not enough people who prioritize user emotions.

Remember Google Glass? You may not; that product failed because few people wanted interaction with a computer to come between themselves and eye contact with humans and the world. People who fit the definition of “tech nerd” fell within this small demographic, but the sentiment was not shared by the broader community of technology users. Critics labeled the unfortunate people who did purchase the product as “glassholes.”

Code: Debugging the Gender Gap

Created in 2015, the film [Code: Debugging the Gender Gap](#) encapsulates many of the biases in the history of the computing industry, as well as their implications. Women have always been part of the US computing industry, and [today that industry would collapse without engineers from diverse cultures](#). Yet there is widespread evidence that women and racial minorities have always been made to feel that they did not belong in the industry. [And the numbers of engineers and others in tech development show](#) a serious problem in Silicon Valley with racial and ethnic diversity, resulting in [terrible tech decisions](#) that spread racial and ethnic bias under the guise of tech neutrality. Google has made some headway in achieving a more diverse workforce, but not without [backlash founded on bad science](#).

Below is the trailer for the film. The film is available through most [college libraries](#) and outlets that rent and sell feature films, and through [Finish Line Features](#).

Exacerbating Bias in Algorithms: The Three “I”s

In its early years, the internet was viewed as a utopia, an ideal world that would permit a completely free flow of all available information to everyone, equally. John Perry Barlow’s 1996 [Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#) represents this utopian vision, in which the internet liberates users from all biases and [even from their own bodies](#) (at which human biases are so often directed). Barlow’s utopian vision does not match the internet of today. Our social norms and inequalities accompany us across all the media and sites we use—and are worsened in a climate where information value is determined by marketability and profit, as sociologist Zeynep Tufekci explains in [this Ted Talk](#).

Because algorithms are built on human cooperation with computing programs, human selectivity and human flaws are embedded within algorithms. Humans carry biases and algorithms pick those up and spread these biases to many, many others. They even make us more biased by hiding results that the algorithm calculates we may not like. When we get our news and information from social media, invisible algorithms consider our own biases and those of friends in our social networks to determine which new posts and stories to show us in search results and news feeds. The result for each user can be called their echo chamber or, as [author Eli Pariser](#) describes it, a **filter bubble**, in which we only see news and information we like and agree with, leading to political polarization.

Although algorithms can generate very sophisticated recommendations, algorithms do *not* make sophisticated decisions. When humans make poor decisions, they can rely on themselves or on other humans to recognize and reverse the error; at the very least, a human decision-maker can be held responsible. Human decision-making often takes time and

critical reflection to implement, such as the writing of an approved ordinance into law. When algorithms are used in place of human decision-making, I describe what ensues as **The Three “I”s**: algorithms’ decisions become *invisible*, *irreversible*, and *infinite*. Most social media platforms and many organizations using algorithms will not share how their algorithms work; for this lack of transparency, they are known as **black box algorithms**.

Exposing Invisible Algorithms: Pro Publica

Journalists at Pro Publica are educating the public on what algorithms can do by explaining and testing black box algorithms. This work is particularly valuable because most algorithmic bias is hard to detect for small groups or individual human users. Studies such as ProPublica’s presented in the “Breaking the Black Box” series (below) have been based on groups systematically testing algorithms from different machines, locations, and users. Using investigative journalism, Pro Publica has also [found](#) that algorithms used by law enforcement are significantly more likely to label African Americans as “High Risk” for reoffending and white Americans as “Low Risk.”

Fighting Unjust Algorithms

Algorithms are laden with errors. Some of these errors can be traced to the biases of those who developed them, as when a facial recognition system meant for global implementation is only trained using [data sets](#) from a limited population (say, predominantly white or male). Algorithms can become problematic when they are hacked by groups of users, as Microsoft's Tay was. Algorithms are also grounded in the values of those who shape them; these values may reward some involved while disenfranchising others.

Despite their flaws, algorithms are increasingly used in heavily consequential ways. They predict how likely a person is to commit a crime or default on a bank loan based on a given data set. They can target users with messages on social media that are customized to fit their interests, their voting preferences or their fears. They can identify who is in photos online or in recordings of offline spaces.

Confronting the landscape of increasing algorithmic control is activism to limit the control of algorithms over human lives. Below, read about the work of the Algorithmic Justice League and other activists promoting bans on facial recognition. And consider: what roles might algorithms play in your life that may deserve more attention, scrutiny, and even activism?

The Algorithmic Justice League Versus Facial Recognition Tech in Boston

MIT Computer Scientist and “Poet of Code” Joy Buolamwini heads the Algorithmic Justice League, an organization making remarkable headway into fighting facial recognition technologies, whose work she explains in the first video below. On June 9th, 2020, Buolamwini and other computer scientists presented alongside citizens at Boston City Council meeting in support of a proposed ordinance banning facial recognition in public spaces in the city. Held and shared by live stream during Covid-19, footage of this meeting offers a remarkable look at the value of human advocacy in shaping the future of social technologies. The second video below should be cued to the beginning of Buolamwini’s testimony half an hour in. Boston’s City Council subsequently [voted unanimously](#) to ban facial recognition technologies by the City.

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About the Author

Sam Schechter adapted *Social Media & Reputation Management* from a variety of sources, but much of the content is his original writing. Sam is a faculty member in the Communications Department at Douglas College. This is his fifth OER textbook in the field of applied communications. His first OER textbook, [*Professional Writing Today: A Functional Approach*](#), provides guidance for undergraduate students and entry-level employees looking to improve their professional writing skills. His second OER textbook, [*Public Speaking for Today's Audiences*](#), provides guidance for undergraduate students looking to improve their public speaking skills. His third and fourth OER textbooks focus on the field of public relations: [*Public Relations: From Strategy to Action*](#) and [*Public Relations Case Studies: Strategies & Actions*](#) (editor).

Sam Schechter's full biography and online profile can be found at www.schechter.ca.