

# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Social Media

### An Art and Science

#### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- 1.1 Define social media
- 1.2 Compare and contrast social media platforms
- 1.3 Explain the evolution of social media over time
- 1.4 Identify the main considerations for using social media strategically
- 1.5 Identify the key characteristics of the science and art of social media

#### Introduction

Social media is no longer a “fad” that might go away; it is a profession that has matured over the past few decades and has become a mainstream industry in the strategic communication and marketing sector. At the beginning, social media was limited to college students; now, it is a powerhouse medium bringing communities together, breaking down barriers, raising awareness of issues around the world, and creating movements to spark impact. With the tap of a button, we can update, comment, snap, duet or stitch, and go live with our thoughts, perspectives, and stories for a global audience. We can build entire personal branding empires for businesses based on our perspectives and authentic stories we share with our communities. We have the ability to create change with impact based on what we advocate on our platforms. We bypass mainstream media to create our own communities, channels, and personal identities, opening up more opportunities we could never have anticipated.

Events that spark on social media can change the field to be more established, diverse, and integrated. Sometimes it has been brands that have led the way to this change. To take advantage of real-time cultural moments, Oreo created the iconic “You can still dunk in the dark” tweet that went viral at the Super Bowl in 2013. Ryan Reynolds and Maximum Effort brought American Aviation Gin to new heights with their original, and culturally relevant, response marketing campaign for Peloton in 2019. Liquid Death, Dunkin’, Sweet Green, and Marc Jacobs have brought forth their personalities with brand partnerships that may or may not have been anticipated by others in 2024 and beyond.

Social media allows brands and individuals to create movements and support causes. One of the most successful campaigns in social media history was the 2014 amyotrophic

lateral sclerosis (ALS) Ice Bucket Challenge, which gained momentum on social media from celebrities and everyday people sharing videos of themselves dumping buckets of ice water on their heads to raise awareness for ALS (Braiker, 2014). The \$115 million raised by this campaign in 2014 helped scientists discover a new gene tied to ALS (ALS Association, n.d.; Rogers, 2016). Movements around the world have become synchronous to the power of social media, including the Ukraine-Russia or Israel-Palestine conflicts, raising additional challenges as fake news, mis- and disinformation, and generative AI images go viral in efforts to sway perceptions and opinions for either side of the conflicts. The 2020 and 2024 presidential campaigns integrated social media across party lines and platforms to persuade audiences to vote for their candidate and compare followers and engagement rates.

There have been many brands that have found success with utilizing a social first perspective for their strategic communication efforts. Some brands have catapulted their names into the spotlight thanks to creative partnerships and innovative strategies, including the following:

*Microsoft and Keith Lee.* Keith Lee, a TikTok star famed for making restaurants go viral with his reviews, has teamed up with Microsoft to tackle the challenges these eateries face post-viral fame. The partnership focuses on using Microsoft's digital tools to help restaurants manage increased demand and sustain long-term growth. This collaboration aims to provide lasting support and resources to businesses experiencing sudden popularity due to Lee's influential platform.



Keith Lee and Microsoft

<https://hashtagpaid.com/banknotes/keith-lee-makes-restaurants-go-viral--now-microsoft-is-helping-him-address-what-comes-next>

*Walmart.* The giant store brand has been not only engaging with creator relations and influencers for a while now, but they are also bringing forth a new perspective of activating and building relationships with influencers. Walmart has partnered with Forbes to start the Creator Upfronts event, which will allow creators to pitch their ideas to executives with the chance of partnering with the brands and getting exclusive access to key executives.

*Netflix and SKIMS with Nicola Coughlan.* Nicola Coughlan, star of Netflix's *Bridgerton*, has partnered with SKIMS, showcasing the seamless blend of celebrity influence and brand collaboration. This partnership underscores the cultural relevance of social media and current trends, demonstrating how popular figures can drive brand visibility and

consumer engagement. Through this collaboration, Coughlan and SKIMS highlight the power of social media in shaping fashion and entertainment landscapes.

*Churchill Downs and Unwell.* Alexandra Cooper and Alix Earle have partnered with the Unwell Network and the Kentucky Derby 150, merging modern influencer marketing with a historic event. This collaboration emphasizes the importance of relevance and targeting younger audiences by leveraging popular creators to bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary trends. By engaging influential social media personalities, the Kentucky Derby aims to rejuvenate its image and attract a new generation of fans while celebrating its 150-year legacy.

*GE Appliances.* Actress Ashley Park's collaboration with GE Appliances began organically when she shared her thoughts on renovating her kitchen, prompting the brand to reach out. This partnership highlights how genuine engagement and listening to consumer conversations can lead to authentic and successful collaborations. By connecting with Park in a natural and relevant way, GE Appliances effectively blended celebrity influence with their brand, enhancing their appeal and relatability.

*Autodesk.* Autodesk leverages B2B strategies and compelling corporate storytelling to enhance its brand presence and market leadership. Under the savvy guidance of their chief marketing officer, Dara Treseder, Autodesk effectively uses social media and branding initiatives to connect with their audience and showcase their innovations. This approach highlights the importance of strategic leadership in crafting engaging narratives that resonate within the industry and beyond.

Social media has built on its strong foundation to become a staple in our global society. Many schools now offer courses, certifications, and majors in social media, positioning it alongside marketing, strategic communication, public relations, computer science, sports management, and more. Social media is an evolving specialization and constant focus within society that continues to expand. Brands, businesses, and universities are realizing the power social media has and how it can be applied for personal branding.

This chapter will discuss social media as a concept, profession, and specialization in the twenty-first century. Over the course of this book, we will discuss social media tools and the behaviors and strategies behind these tools.

## Humans of Social Media

**Matt Navarra, social media consultant and author of Social Geekout newsletter and group**

**Tell us a little bit about yourself. How did you get started in social media?**

I didn't really come into it with a goal of working in social media and I didn't really know when I started. That's very similar to other people where it might go, um, but, uh, where would be the best place to start? Well, I left uni in 2002. I did a degree in business, um, and marketing in Bristol.

Years later, I was doing all the stuff I shouldn't be doing on social media, I found the name of the director of social media, the most senior, most well-known person in British government about doing social media, and I thought they don't know me, I don't know them, but I'm that I'm going to email them.

So I did, and I emailed them and sent them an email. To this day, I'm very good friends with this person, but at the time I didn't know them. They were in their late 40s, very successful. I was in my late 20s, not very successful. Um, and I just basically begged and pleaded and said, you don't know me. I love social media.

My boss doesn't want me to do lots of social media. I'd love to learn from you. You know, I think you've got great experience. And would you take a chance on me? Give me a, give me a break. Um, and they emailed me back and said that, um, we'll get you up here to do some training and to spend some time here.

And my boss, I thought she's never going to let me. But then this woman was so senior that she rang through to the government department and said, we're requesting that we have him come to us, which basically means they can decline the request. And I ended up working for the government digital service, which was kind of a, at the time, very prestigious place to be in digital for government.

And whilst I was there, I'd become really good friends with this woman called Ema Coleman, a really stern, hard looking Irish woman with a skinhead, grey hair, very, you know, by all parts, I should not have gone on with her given my relationship with the previous bosses, but we did. We got on well, and then she said, one day, do you want to work in government to do, in Downing Street, to do social media for the Prime Minister for a bit?

Since then, I've gone freelance and have been speaking at more events than I thought one day I'd write a newsletter. I thought one day I'd do a podcast and I just made it up as I went along. And I can dig into the specifics of coming up with those things and then working out in many ways.

### **What is your favorite part about working in the field?**

Connected with other people, which is kind of the core of social media. I would say that in, in years gone by, like, I probably would have been classed as being an extrovert who was kind of uncomfortably extrovert.

I had no problem talking to people and, you know, chatting to people, but underneath it all, I experienced anxiety. I enjoyed the company of other people and engaging with other people and so the role obviously that's at the heart of it and understanding how people think and what how people might react and to certain scenarios or pieces of news or ways of saying things or doing things and so the human element of it is what excites me.

### **What's the most unexpected or quirky way you've leveraged social media to achieve a goal or connect with your audience?**

The value in that was immense and so I think those those connections were particularly good. Um, but in terms of like, you know, there's lots of funny things in terms of my career. Like, you know, I got found out that the, um, Jack Dorsey was text, texting Elon Musk about my tweets, which was amusing. Someone messaged me and said, did you see you in the court documents for the Twitter acquisition court stuff?

I said, what are you on about? And then they sent me the docs that are online, available from the court to download. And it had this like, text message from Jack Dorsey saying to Elon Musk, Did you see Matt Navarro's tweet today about you? Or something along those lines. And him saying, lol. And it was, and so I was like, this, this is very strange.

### **Can you share a memorable "fail" or blunder you experienced on social media, and how did you turn it around or learn from it?**

This still feels quite a trivial one, to be fair, but there is certainly, uh, having someone who, as someone who's worked in social media, you know, we all do make mistakes, and I've made mistakes, and sometimes brands, you know, humorously by accident, sometimes accidentally on purpose, make mistakes.

We now have much more seasons to the fact that these brands are not, you know, faceless kind of entities. There is a person behind them and it's like me or you, who runs the accounts. Um, but you know, for years, you know, you'd see something like, I don't know, a government account or Coca Cola saying post something, clearly they've screwed up, and they've messed up, and they've made a mistake.

Sometimes it's the mistake is funny because the way the mistake has happened has led to a, you know, an accidental innuendo or type that's just really badly timed in the way it's framed or something. Or it's just because, because of the fact it's a mega company you think would never make a mistake and they screwed up.

And there was, there was a period of time that I, as part of all of that industry would celebrate those mistakes and kind of make fun of the fact and kind of like, you know, isn't this funny that this make a brand and jump on the mean bandwagon and all of those sorts of things. And for a long time, you know, that was just the way the industry was.

Mistakes being funny and newsworthy is actually quite a lot higher than it was before. And so in some ways it's less of a problem, but I think it's a message of more like, you know, we screw up, we move on and the world moves on and no one's gonna, you know, die in a ditch over it.

### **What best advice or tip did you get to be successful in the industry, or in your professional career?**

Trust in your instincts, but ignore the pessimists, because there's enough, there's so many people in my career where, I've suggested things when I've been really junior about things that seem a bit wild or out there or different and dare to be different which is what you have to be I think and they're like oh it won't work or we tried it and it doesn't work and there is no point and we've got you know and just real naysayers and There's been times when they've been completely right.

## **How Do We Define Social Media?**

Social media has been defined, classified, and conceptualized in probably a billion different ways. Everyone has their own definition, perception, and perspective on what social media is. Wherever you go, there is a new term, definition, or way of looking at social media. Every discipline wants to own the term and its definition. Every industry wants to control the duties assigned to social media. Social media is a powerful yet transdisciplinary profession, requiring an understanding of all integrated perspectives, approaches, and views.

Let's take it first from an academic perspective. Social media combines "a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service rating websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, [and] microblogs" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media is about people (Marken, 2007), and the technology not only provides means for establishing and maintaining relationships but also allows users to create their own (user-generated) content to share with others in the online community (Waters et al., 2009).

Some of the content that individuals share with others in their online networks includes information regarding news events, updates on personal and professional achievements, and multimedia content. Social media has "amplified the power of

consumer-to-consumer conversations in the marketplace by enabling one person to communicate with literally hundreds or thousands of other consumers quickly and with relatively little effort” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 361). As a result, official messages are competing for consumer attention with many other sources of information.

Some professionals classify it as a group of social networks that allow conversations and relationships to emerge. Others focus on the community aspect in which people are able to converse together in a centralized location to collaborate and initiate dialogue. All of these are key characteristics of social media, but in any case, keep in mind that this definition will need to be fluid and adaptive to the growing list of tools, features, and changes we are seeing in this particular space.

For the purposes of this textbook, one way to define **social media** is that it can provide a personalized, online networked hub of information, dialogue, and relationship management. These new communication technology tools allow individual users and organizations to engage with, reach, persuade, and target key audiences more effectively across multiple platforms. Industry professionals, scholars, and social media users have contributed a number of different definitions and conceptualizations of the concept of social media. Some emphasize the role of social media as a toolkit that allows users to create and share content. Others focus on how social media extend Web 2.0 technologies to bring communities together. (Freberg, 2016, p. 773)

The overall functions of social media are not limited to communicating messages designed by professionals for audiences, in parallel to message construction in traditional media. In addition, social media allows users to participate to an extent not seen previously in traditional media. Increased empowerment of the individual stakeholder leads to greater feelings of control over a situation and a willingness to help others in the community, which could potentially be used by brands and corporations to engage with audiences, formulate message strategies, and evaluate their own reputation in the eyes of their online audience members. This also shows a shift in influence and credibility toward the source of the information. The more transparent and authentic a person is on social media, the greater the impact in the relationship with their community members, leading to a shift in power for share of voice and narrative in the digital sphere.

With these new shifts in power and breakdown in barriers, brands are expected to listen and respond to stakeholder concerns in new ways. Recognizing the influence of social media provides professionals with the opportunity to use social media strategically to discover potential issues and emerging challenges relevant to their stakeholders, to prepare for different scenarios and situations, to implement online communication strategically, and to evaluate results of communications in real time.

In addition, social media platforms serve as gateways where content and conversations are created and ignited between individuals, brands, organizations, and nations. Essentially, social media platforms provide first-impression management tools for corporations and individuals to showcase their own brands and reputations. Although individual social media platforms may be somewhat separated at times from others, they are all part of the same ecosystem. Each platform has its own features, dynamic characteristics, and community attributes, but they are integrated with the organization, brand, or individual’s persona online. In addition, they are also one part of the overall communication mix of media channels that can be utilized to share information, establish communities, and forge relationships for a brand. Earned, paid, shared, and owned media have converged to formulate this new ecosystem of communities and networks. Social media is more than just a set of tools to use; it is also a larger network of communities tied together through virtual and offline connections.



All of the various platforms that make up this social media ecosystem can be quite daunting to visualize. As shown in Figure 1.1, JESS3 and Brian Solis created an infographic outlining the conversation prism of all of the social media platforms out there for users, businesses, and organizations to take advantage of (JESS3, n.d.). Essentially, this infographic highlights the various platforms available as well as categorizes them based on the function they serve. Note, this infographic is “old” in social media standards, but the key concepts are still important. This is different from most of the other visualizations out there for social media, which focus more on the application of the social media platform rather than the specific type of platform.

Figure 1.1 ■ Social Media Conversation Prism



Source: Jesse Thomas (JESS3)/Brian Solis

Several other defining characteristics should be noted when it comes to social media. Each of these computer-based applications and platforms allow users to share and create information, disseminate ideas in various forms, share content, and respond to these pieces of content. In addition, each platform allows you to create your own personal identity with a picture or avatar. An avatar is acceptable to use on certain platforms, but most individuals use one consistent photo across all of their respective accounts online. This is done for several reasons, but a prominent one is to establish a proactive positive **online reputation**.

In addition, there is a possibility for these pieces of content (videos, images, posts, updates, etc.) to go viral. **Virality**, or rapid dissemination of information from person to person, is one way in which news, stories, and updates reach across various networks in a short amount of time.

There are various examples of a post, update, story, or even video becoming viral. Let's take McDonald's for example in capturing the attention of audiences, but doing it in a way with intention, forming the important difference between an *attention strategy* versus an *intention strategy* in social media. An attention strategy for social media focuses on addressing the interest of audiences for a specific period of time, motivating them to share and disburse what they have experienced and seen to their community. However, an intention strategy focuses on capturing attention with a specific purpose in mind for the audience to act on this strategy, but also aligning it with the core brand purpose in a campaign. McDonald's was able to accomplish the attention strategy when their Grimace Shake trend on social media went viral due to its unique and humorous user-generated content, where fans of McDonald's and Grimace posted videos of themselves pretending to suffer comedic "side effects" after drinking the purple shake. McDonald's smartly capitalized on the trend by engaging with these posts, which amplified their reach and created a sense of community participation. This viral phenomenon highlighted the power of social media in driving brand awareness and engaging audiences in a fun, interactive way, and continued with their partnership with the New York Mets and Grimace character.

Now, if we were to look at the intention strategy for marketing efforts on social media, one campaign that did really well at this was the marketing for the Marvel movie, *Deadpool and Wolverine*. Both actors Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman were actively present in engaging with content on social media for their own channels to promote the movie, but they also were intentional in where they were going to make sure their content and presence went viral online. For example, both appeared on the popular channel First We Feast for the show #HotOnes, where they were interviewed about pop culture over chicken wings that range from normal to intense spicy. This entertainment is memorable, but it is intended to be aligned with the overall goals, objectives, and purpose for a campaign.

Another case can result from being a trending topic due to other circumstances. Sometimes brands are brought into a conversation due to a viral post from a celebrity, reality star, or influencer. This is what happened to Chanel, when former reality TV star and entrepreneur Bethenny Frankel shared on TikTok her experience with the luxury brand's customer service when she arrived to the store in Chicago dressed differently on two separate occasions. Frankel has been known for her candid and frank (literally!) comments and opinions on her channels, which sparked a viral discussion related to customer experiences and how luxury brands like Chanel need to do better. As a result, more brands realized they have to be accountable for their actions and how user-generated content through testimonials and stories could have a significant impact on a brand's reputation on and offline.

In other cases, brands have used certain platforms, such as TikTok, to go viral. Drunk Elephant, a skincare line, has become a popular product for Gen Alpha to the point where young girls between the ages of nine and ten were flocking to makeup stores like Ulta Beauty and Sephora to purchase the products (Armstrong, 2024). How did Drunk Elephant go from a skincare line to a viral sensation with this generation? As one *Glamour* story explained, the reason was social media:

The most obvious answer is, obviously, social media. They see it; they want it. . . . Forever in history, from the time girls were little, they were given what? Dolls. What is a doll? A doll is to be a mommy. We also know that little girls have always loved to play



dress-up, and they love to play with mommy's makeup. This is not new [behavior] to try to be mature a little faster and test things out. (Armstrong, 2024)

The overall fundamental use and motive behind social media has been to establish personal connections with others and tell our stories virtually. Why do we share what we share online for the world to see? What motivates us to create content for others to see? Think about the last time you used social media—what did you share? Why did you share it on a particular platform?

It's important to explore not only where you shared this information, but how and why you decided to share it with one person, a few people, or everyone in your respective communities. Sometimes, what you share, post, comment, and discuss on various social media platforms is not just for your friends but for the entire world to see. What you say on social media is public and can be used as documentation. Each action taken on social media has a specific purpose—whether we are creating the content ourselves or consuming the content to be shared with our communities. Yet we also have the power to comment on and engage with the content as we see fit.

Some fundamental characteristics make social media unique compared to other types of media platforms. First, the platforms are web- and mobile-based applications. Most of the rising applications are mobile based to fit the growing trend for more mobile capabilities without a desktop- or web-specific requirement, like Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others have done.

Second, the power of **user-generated content (UGC)** is a prominent characteristic of why businesses and individuals like social media. UGC is content that is created directly by a user. This could be a video that you created over the holidays showcasing your hiking experience in the Swiss Alps with a DJ drone camera, or even an infographic outlining the main items to bring to the Super Bowl or a Taylor Swift concert, SXSW, Bourbon and Beyond, or Coachella. UGC is not the only type of content that can be created on social media; for example, there is **branded content** (BC or brand storytelling), which a lot of businesses create. This type of content allows brands to emerge as their own media outlets and create their own content uniquely aligned with their goals, mission, and brand voice. We have seen this for various brands, especially in the entertainment industry. Take the Netflix show *Emily in Paris*, for example. The star of the show (Emily, who is played by actress Lilly Collins) works in marketing and social media, but the show has its own handle on Instagram (@emilyinparis) like the character does in the show. Why is this an effective strategy? This can help brands create advocates or brand ambassadors to help pass along these pieces of branded content (or assets) to other communities around the world. Social media provides an open and dynamic online community. Individuals and corporations can participate in various communities linked together by similar interests and backgrounds. These communities can brainstorm ideas, share perspectives, and engage in dialogue to formulate networking relationships.

For example, Stanley, the famous stainless steel cup that has captivated the hearts of Gen Z and millennials thanks to social media, not only has an affiliate program, but also a student ambassador program for college students to take advantage of. Other companies (such as Sephora, Gymshark, Alani Nu, Bumble, and Lululemon) have similar programs to bring together fans, customers, and loyal advocates for the brand to establish a community. Adobe, for example, has created an ambassador program in two different areas of the company. Adobe Insiders, a group of professionals across the social media and creative marketing industry, focuses on using their platforms to share insights, stories, and experiences using Adobe products for their work. Adobe Education Leaders make up educators who are at all levels in a program that focuses on creativity, education, and bringing together ideas and perspectives in and out of the classroom.

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Social media has been characterized as distinguished compared to other forms of media due to the power of its real-time content creation and the level of engagement it offers to users across many respective platforms. That said, social media provides a range of different opportunities, challenges, and experiences for users to take part in, such as the following:

- Dialogue on a one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many format in real time
- New relationships, connections, and professional and personal opportunities for your personal brand
- Visual and immersive storytelling through video, chats, stories, live video, photos, and other multimedia content
- Providing awareness of the brand voice, story, and people behind the scenes
- Sparking creativity with communities through challenges that can go viral in popularity
- Becoming a resource for valuable education, training, and support resources and insights for the community
- Entertaining through memes, trends, collaborations, and video content that capture current trends and views on topics in society
- Initiating behaviors and call-to-action statements for audiences to note
- Sending persuasive messages that are strategically targeted using advertising and personalized data
- Responding immediately to customer inquiries and providing updates on crisis situations

One of the most important things to be aware of is that the definition as well as the statistics, practices, and strategies of social media will change on a frequent basis. You do not need to have all of the answers or even know all of the platforms in play. If you try to learn every single change that happens with each platform, that will become your life as a social media professional. However, it is important to note you may be asked to come up with your own definition of social media, *per se*, so think about the defining characteristics, features, and overall attributes that make up this dynamic and evolving set of platforms.

## How Has Social Media Evolved?

Social media compared to other disciplines is still considered to be “new,” even though it has matured and become mainstream over the years. At each stage, expanded sets of features have been added to meet the increasing expectations of audiences. With each new feature being implemented by one platform, others follow and sometimes take the idea and incorporate it into their own version. The platform competition to be ahead of the game on features to attract new users and attention is intense, so make sure to grab your popcorn and watch the drama unfold. One thing you can always count on for the social media industry is this: There is always going to be a new platform everyone wants to be a part of, and everyone will steal the feature to add to their own.

For example, Google launched Google+ (RIP) to compete with Facebook. Instagram created Instagram Stories to compete with Facebook and took this feature from Snapchat. Instagram added Reels to compete with TikTok. LinkedIn jumped on the Stories bandwagon to compete with TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, but then it shut down this feature. TikTok was rebranded from the success of Musical.ly, and to compete with other platforms has added features such as longer videos and their own photo app and e-commerce program. Facebook is offering a Jobs feature to compete with LinkedIn. LinkedIn offers LinkedIn Live to compete with Facebook and Twitter/X live video features. Instagram added Threads to compete with Twitter/X. YouTube features Shorts to compete with Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Pinterest has ads, but everyone else has an ad manager platform. All of the social media platforms have AI integration within their platforms.

Okay, did you get that? See, so much drama! So many different platforms competing with each other—it’s essentially a digital media soap opera or Game of Thrones episode. Every platform is out there to buy, conquer, and get as much digital real estate as possible to garner the most attention and use time. However, the goal should not be getting all of the attention, but focusing on the intention of where to go, what features to embrace, what community and users want, and what is overall sustainable for the long term. Yet, the social media industry is a battlefield where platforms clash like the warring factions in House of the Dragon, each vying for the coveted Iron Throne of digital dominance.

## The Current State of Social Media

Social media platforms are in constant flux and evolution, and managing the change in those platforms could become your job in addition to your other responsibilities. Keep in mind that you want to take a tier system approach to looking at social media in general. Social media platforms are divided by function and overall purpose. However, most social media platforms are indexed, edited, and revised over time, as well as categorized and searchable online through search engines. Some of the main types of social media platforms

are wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs (e.g., WordPress, Squarespace), video conferencing platforms (Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams), collaborative crowdsourcing sites (e.g., Google Drive, Box, Slack, Asana, Trello, and Monday.com), messaging (e.g., WhatsApp, WeChat, Messenger), microblogging (e.g., Twitter/X and Weibo), live streaming (e.g., Twitch, Live on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and more), mobile-based platforms (e.g., TikTok, Threads, Snapchat, and Instagram), newsletters (e.g., Beehiiv, Substack), podcasts (e.g., Spotify, Apple Podcasts, etc.), and business networking (e.g., LinkedIn), to name a few.

Facebook, the largest social media platform in the world, is an example of a **social networking site (SNS)**. Social networking sites can be defined as “(1) web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Using an SNS, an individual can control personal information to share with others. Users can also affiliate with businesses and large organizations that have a presence on these sites by adding them as “friends” (boyd, 2006).

Twitter/X, on the other hand, allows individuals and brands to create, curate, and communicate information in real time in a limited number of characters. Twitter/X allows users to push content to their followers that can include textual information, hyperlinks, images, videos, and even interactive GIFs for entertainment, information, and conversation purposes. Users can also participate in chat sessions surrounding particular common interests and topics by following a hashtag, which is a keyword preceded by a # sign to allow users to track and follow certain conversations. Many corporations have now integrated a branded hashtag to help manage their reputation (e.g., Disney+ shows and movies, Olympics, etc.), as well as embracing user-generated hashtags from their community. Some examples of branded hashtags include #DeadpoolAndWolverine (for Marvel’s *Deadpool and Wolverine* movie), #LifeNeedsFrosting (Cinnabon), and #Election2024 (2024 election). Corporations are able to monitor, track, and evaluate the success of a hashtag within a campaign through social media monitoring platforms and analytics using an application programming interface (API). Using API, corporations can create tools and software programs to work with Twitter/X. In addition, users can get content out to audiences who are not part of the community with the use of hashtags for key terms on trending topics, news items, community events, and industry-related issues. However, Twitter/X changed hands when it was purchased by billionaire Elon Musk, who rebranded, restructured, and recreated the platform from the microblogging site’s previous era. The change has been met with some criticism and concern, but it is still a platform that is at the heart of breaking news (e.g., President Joe Biden’s resignation from the 2024 presidential race), exclusive trailers for movies and shows (e.g., *Succession*, DC’s *Superman*, and *House of the Dragon*), and pop culture-driven memes (e.g., Charli XCX’s *Brat* album, Blue Origin’s all-celebrity female crew trip, and Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce memes).

Of course, with the change of leadership at Twitter/X, this made many professionals and users want a different platform to share breaking news, build community, and have discussions similar to the Twitter/X experience. Many platforms emerged, such as Mastodon and Bluesky, but it was Threads (launched in July 2023 by Meta [Facebook]) that has generated the closest connection and similarity to Twitter/X. Threads is connected to Instagram, which allows users to go back and forth between the platform and have the same username, as well as verification if needed. However, there were some concerns related to Threads as the terms of services agreement states that a user cannot delete their account once it is created.

Visual and “snackable” content forms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, are emerging as dominant platforms among users, particularly in the younger generations of audience members. These two platforms are constantly challenging each other with their features. Facebook tried to buy Snapchat in 2013 for \$3 billion (Bercovici, 2013), which caused the social networking giant to continue advancing Instagram (which it bought in 2012) with similar features to compete with Snapchat. Since then, Instagram has grown not only in popularity but in features that make it competitive in the social media landscape. Going live, having stickers supporting causes, raising money, and shopping capabilities are just some of the features that have been added. However, TikTok has risen in popularity as a visual and snackable content platform that combines music, entertainment, and culture. Creators, influencers, and brands have all flocked to the platform to capture the virality and presence the platform has among certain audiences, such as Gen Z. Other platforms are somewhat embracing a mobile yet exclusive visual experience with invitations, such as Dispo, which is a visual-first platform that shares snapshots, but taking a more simplistic approach in sharing visual content. This social platform, which was founded by influencer David Dobrik and colleagues, is considered to be the “anti-Instagram,” where it forces users to post pictures, but prohibits adding a caption explaining the photo.

Make sure you are on the main platforms being discussed and highlighted in society (see Table 1.1). In this case, Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and TikTok are some of the most familiar. Each of these key platforms has set forth some interesting advances and experienced changes throughout its history within the industry.

**Table 1.1 ■ Key Players in Social Media**

| Platform  | Founded        | CEO             | Key Features                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook  | February 2004  | Mark Zuckerberg | Profile, News Feed, Groups, Events, Video, Photos, Search, Messenger, Pages, Video Meetings, Metaverse                                                |
| Instagram | October 2010   | Adam Mosseri    | Profiles, Business Pages, Layout, Stories, Instagram Live, Stickers (Donations, Photos, Links, Music, Shopping, Reels), GIFs, Shopping, Subscriptions |
| LinkedIn  | March 2003     | Ryan Roslansky  | Business Profiles, Pages, Groups, Lynda, LinkedIn Live, LinkedIn Stories                                                                              |
| Twitter/X | March 2006     | Linda Yaccarino | Profile, Newsfeed, Live Video, Images, GIFs, Paid Subscriptions for Accounts, Verification                                                            |
| YouTube   | March 2005     | Neal Mohan      | Video, YouTube Red, YouTube Live, YouTube Shorts                                                                                                      |
| Snapchat  | September 2011 | Evan Spiegel    | Snaps, Snapchat My Story, Live Stories, Discover, Spectacles, Lens Studio                                                                             |
| TikTok    | 2012           | Shou Zi Chew    | Feed, Challenges, Filters, Music, Effects, Live, Videos, Stories                                                                                      |
| Threads   | 2023           | Rousseau Kazi   | Feed, Newsfeed, GIFs, Images, Threads                                                                                                                 |
| Pinterest | 2010           | Bill Ready      | Feed, Ads, Boards, Images                                                                                                                             |



With the key players in social media, it is important to note that each of these platforms has evolved and had some significant milestones as a company. Some have been bought, transformed, and evolved through the years. Table 1.2 presents some of the main milestones for each platform.

**Table 1.2 ■ Major Milestones for Key Players in Social Media**

| Platform                                        | Major Timeline Events                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook<br>(newsroom.fb.com/<br>company-info/) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>February 4, 2004: Facebook is founded by Mark Zuckerberg along with Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes, and Eduardo Saverin</li> <li>March 1, 2004: Facebook expands from Harvard to Stanford, Columbia, and Yale</li> <li>September 1, 2004: Facebook Wall is launched</li> <li>2005: Photo uploading option is offered</li> <li>April 1, 2006: Mobile is launched</li> <li>February 9, 2009: Like button is introduced</li> <li>September 22, 2011: Timeline is introduced</li> <li>April 9, 2012: Facebook buys Instagram for \$1 billion</li> <li>February 19, 2014: Facebook buys WhatsApp</li> <li>March 25, 2014: Facebook buys Oculus Rift</li> <li>March 25, 2015: Messenger is launched</li> <li>September 25, 2015: Facebook 360 video is launched</li> <li>December 3, 2015: Live video for profiles is launched</li> <li>February 24, 2016: Facebook Reactions is launched</li> <li>June 9, 2016: Facebook 360 photos are made available</li> <li>October 16, 2016: Workplace by Facebook is introduced</li> <li>October 8, 2018: Portal is introduced</li> <li>March 2020: Measures and features to support small businesses impacted by COVID-19 are introduced</li> <li>May 2020: Facebook purchases GIPHY for \$400 million</li> <li>June 2022: Meta Avatars Store is launched</li> <li>July 2023: Threads is launched</li> <li>September 2023: Meta smart glasses with Ray Ban are launched</li> <li>September 2023: Meta AI is launched</li> </ul> |
| Instagram<br>(about.instagram.<br>com)          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 6, 2010: Instagram is launched</li> <li>April 9, 2012: Facebook buys Instagram</li> <li>June 30, 2013: Instagram video is launched</li> <li>December 2013: Instagram Direct is launched</li> <li>July 2023: Threads platform is launched and connected to IG account</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

| Platform                                            | Major Timeline Events                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 26, 2014: Hyperlapse is launched</li> <li>• March 23, 2015: Layout from Instagram is introduced</li> <li>• September 1, 2015: Improvements are added for Instagram Direct</li> <li>• October 22, 2015: Boomerang is introduced</li> <li>• August 2, 2016: Instagram Stories is introduced</li> <li>• August 31, 2016: Zoom is introduced</li> <li>• January 24, 2017: Live Stories are available globally</li> <li>• August 31, 2017: Live Stories are available on the web</li> <li>• January 23, 2018: GIF Stickers are introduced</li> <li>• February 1, 2018: Type Mode in Stories is introduced</li> <li>• 2019: Instagram introduces cyberbullying, shopping, and AR filter tools</li> <li>• 2019: Instagram introduces Reels first in Brazil, and then more than fifty countries in 2020</li> <li>• May 2020: Instagram introduces Challenges</li> <li>• March 2021: Instagram introduces Live Rooms</li> <li>• February 2023: Paid verification through subscription service is launched</li> <li>• July 2023: Threads platform is launched and connected to IG account</li> </ul> |
| Twitter/X<br>(about.twitter.com/en_us/company.html) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 21, 2006: Jack Dorsey sends out his first tweet</li> <li>• March 2007: Twitter makes a splash at SXSW Interactive</li> <li>• August 2007: First Twitter hashtag is proposed by Chris Messina</li> <li>• April 2010: Promoted Tweets are launched</li> <li>• June 2010: Promoted Trends are launched</li> <li>• May 2011: Twitter buys TweetDeck</li> <li>• June 2012: Twitter receives a new design</li> <li>• January 2013: Twitter launches Vine</li> <li>• November 2013: Twitter files for initial public offering (IPO)</li> <li>• August 2014: Promoted Video is launched</li> <li>• January 2015: Direct Messages and mobile video are introduced</li> <li>• March 2015: Twitter buys Periscope</li> <li>• October 2015: Twitter launches Moments and Polls</li> <li>• January 2016: Periscope is embedded in tweets</li> <li>• November 2017: Twitter allows tweets to grow from 140 characters to 280 characters</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |

(Continued)

**Table 1.2** ■ Major Milestones for Key Players in Social Media (*Continued*)

| Platform                                                                                                                                                                                 | Major Timeline Events                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2019: Bookmarks and dark mode features are introduced</li> <li>• 2020: Twitter launches Audio tweets</li> <li>• 2020: Twitter releases Fleets to audiences, adding another platform incorporating stories</li> <li>• 2021: Twitter releases Spaces to compete in the social audio space</li> <li>• April 2022: Elon Musk and Twitter reach board agreement for purchase of Twitter for \$44 billion</li> <li>• April 2022: Elon Musk completes acquisition of Twitter</li> <li>• July 2023: Twitter is rebranded as X</li> <li>• May 2024: Twitter URL is changed to X.com</li> </ul>                         |
| <b>Threads</b> ( <a href="https://about.fb.com/news/2023/07/introducing-threads-new-app-text-sharing/">https://about.fb.com/news/2023/07/introducing-threads-new-app-text-sharing/</a> ) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• July 2023: Threads is launched</li> <li>• August 2023: Web experience of Threads is discussed and eventually launched</li> <li>• October 2023: Ability to add GIFs to updates is added</li> <li>• March 2024: Treading section on Threads is added</li> <li>• July 2024: 33 million users are active on Threads</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| LinkedIn<br>( <a href="https://about.linkedin.com/">about.linkedin.com/</a> )                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 2003: LinkedIn is launched</li> <li>• April 2007: LinkedIn reaches 10 million users</li> <li>• February 2008: LinkedIn launches mobile version</li> <li>• January 2011: LinkedIn launches IPO</li> <li>• May 3, 2012: LinkedIn buys SlideShare</li> <li>• April 9, 2015: LinkedIn buys Lynda.com</li> <li>• June 13, 2016: Microsoft buys LinkedIn</li> <li>• 2019: LinkedIn Live is available in beta form</li> <li>• May 2020: LinkedIn Stories are available</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |
| YouTube<br>( <a href="https://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a> )                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• February 14, 2005: YouTube is created and founded by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim</li> <li>• November 2005: YouTube has its first million-hit video with Nike</li> <li>• February 2006: YouTube negotiates deal with NBC</li> <li>• November 13, 2006: Google buys YouTube for \$1.65 billion</li> <li>• May 2007: YouTube launches Partner Program</li> <li>• June 2007: YouTube hosts presidential debate with CNN</li> <li>• August 2007: YouTube launches ads</li> <li>• August 2009: Usher and Justin Bieber video is posted</li> <li>• January 2010: Movie rentals are available</li> </ul> |

| Platform                           | Major Timeline Events                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>July 2012: Olympics are available to live stream</li> <li>December 2012: “Gangnam Style” hits 1 billion views</li> <li>2014–2016: YouTube Red is created</li> <li>April 2020: PewDiePie is the most followed YouTube account with 104 million subscribers</li> <li>2020: YouTube marks 2 billion users on the platform</li> <li>2020: YouTube Shorts is launched</li> <li>2023: YouTube cracks down on adblockers on platform</li> <li>2024: MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson) becomes the most followed creator on YouTube with 305 million subscribers</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Snapchat</b> (www.snapchat.com) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>September 2011: Snapchat is initially released</li> <li>October 2013: My Story is launched</li> <li>May 2014: Video Chat is launched</li> <li>September 2016: Snapchat is rebranded to Snap Inc.</li> <li>September 2016: Snapchat Spectacles are introduced</li> <li>March 2017: Snapchat files for IPO</li> <li>2017: Snapchat launches SnapMap</li> <li>2019: Snapchat launches Lens Studio</li> <li>2023: Snapchat launches my AI</li> <li>2023: Snapchat introduces new Creator Collab Campaigns</li> <li>2024: Snapchat launches new AR experiences, powered by generative AI</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>TikTok</b> (www.tiktok.com)     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2014: Musical.ly is founded by Alex Zhu and Luyu Yang</li> <li>2016: Musical.ly claims 70 million downloads</li> <li>September 2016: ByteDance merges to create new app and rebrand it</li> <li>November 2017: ByteDance purchases Musical.ly for almost \$1 billion</li> <li>2018: TikTok is available in 154 markets and in seventy-five languages</li> <li>2019: TikTok becomes fourth most popular app downloaded in 2019 and has 800 million users worldwide</li> <li>2020: Charli D’Amelio becomes the first creator to hit 100 million followers on TikTok</li> <li>September 2020: TikTok works with Oracle and Walmart for U.S. presence to avoid being banned</li> <li>2021: Oracle and Walmart collaboration is put on hold</li> <li>2022: TikTok expands into e-commerce with TikTok shop</li> <li>2023–2024: TikTok is in the news for concerns related to algorithm targeting, data privacy and protection, and data ownership and hosting</li> </ul> |

(Continued)

| Platform                                                                                                       | Major Timeline Events                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2024: TikTok launches new features (e.g., Stories, etc.) along with TikTok Notes</li> <li>• 2025: TikTok is banned for twelve hours, then the ban is delayed after President Donald Trump takes office</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Pinterest<br>( <a href="https://newsroom.pinterest.com/company/">https://newsroom.pinterest.com/company/</a> ) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2010: Pinterest is launched</li> <li>• 2011: Pinterest mobile app is launched</li> <li>• 2019: Pinterest launches IPO and goes public</li> <li>• 2019: Pinterest Academy is launched</li> <li>• 2021: Pinterest Premiere, a video ads product, is launched</li> <li>• 2021: Pinterest launches the “Power to Positivity” campaign to combat the negative effects social media has had on society</li> <li>• 2024: CEO Bill Ready states that Pinterest will be using AI to generate positivity</li> <li>• 2024: 518 million monthly active users on Pinterest</li> </ul> |

Sources: Meta (Facebook), Instagram, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, Pinterest, and Snapchat

## Who “Owns” Social Media?

Indeed, a lot of marketing professionals, PR practitioners, communication scholars, and others have discussed and proposed an argument for why their discipline should “own” social media. Everyone wants to claim ownership of the social media discipline and profession (it’s almost like the Iron Throne from *Game of Thrones*), yet not every profession knows how to make the most of the emerging platforms. Each profession may know how to use social media specifically for its industry or discipline, but it may not be aware of the vast possibilities or ways in which others are using it.

There are many answers to this question, and this has arisen at many professional conferences, academic sessions, and discussions online. Some would say marketing has ownership of social media from a business and analytical standpoint. Marketing most of the time has the finances and support needed to provide businesses and organizations with the means for creating, disseminating, and analyzing the content and how well it is received. Yet some would say the platforms themselves “own” social media. Social media is not like traditional media in a way that we would classify it on the media spectrum, but there has been a shift in the “pay-to-play” model, essentially forcing users and corporations to pay for their content to be seen by the right target audience at a specific time on their platform. Both Google and Facebook have led the way in this area and have forced this transformation, which has led to this current paid content model for social media.

There is a difference, of course, between owned media platforms (e.g., blogs) and earned or shared media platforms (e.g., social media). One way to approach the difference between these types of media is to recognize that one is controlled by the user and the other is controlled by others. Blogs essentially are controlled by individual users who are given the opportunity to decide how their page should look, what content to share, and

whether or not they want comments to appear. The power of control is quite prominent, and one way to think about it is like owning a house. You can do whatever you want to it. On the other hand, social media is somewhat controllable by the user or brand, but the user or brand is somewhat “renting” the space like an apartment. There are terms of service agreements to follow, and the platform has the opportunity to change these agreements, switch up the features and designs, or even shut down its services.

So, with everything being said, who “owns” social media?

The answer is no one owns social media. Social media is open for everyone to use, create, share, engage, and come together on. No discipline is the primary owner of social media. All disciplines need to collaborate and work together. Most of the time, social media is its own department, where it works with others internally and externally. The barrier of entry is minimal, and the opportunity to be part of many diverse communities has never been more accessible for professionals, businesses, and organizations.

The correct question would be who collaborates with social media, and who needs to know social media? The answer to this question is simple: Everyone works with and needs to know social media.

## Using Social Media Strategically

Social media can be for personal use, but you can also use it professionally. Many times, we see how a group uses it for one community it is interacting with, but we forget how this is perceived from other perspectives. On social media, you need to find the balance that allows you to interact and create content that educates and informs your professional audiences of your level of expertise and thought leadership, but you also want to be personal enough so you are not perceived as a robot. There is a fine line between these two worlds, and that is why it is important to use social media strategically and effectively based on your own needs and expectations in the field. Each person is different—there are certain etiquette and professional guidelines to follow and review, but you have to be confident in knowing your own community, voice, and presence online. Social media is all about first impressions, and you want to make sure your name stands out for the right reasons.

## Which Social Media Platforms Should I Use?

Choosing the right platforms for your role comes down to a few factors. First and foremost, you do not have to be on every single platform. Facebook still remains the most popular social media platform, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, and Messenger. Yet, like all reports on social media, once content is published, it is out of date and has not accounted for other mobile-based platforms (e.g., TikTok) gaining traction within the community and in society.

To choose a particular platform, a social media professional must consider the following:

*Audiences.* Make sure to look first to where your audiences are going. Who are these individuals, and where are they having their conversations? You will of course be able to collect some information from these audiences (demographics, etc.); think about the amount of information Facebook has collected about you over the years from likes, comments, shares, and even videos watched. In addition to clear demographic points, understanding



the lifestyle, opinions, interests, and behaviors (otherwise known as psychographics) of audiences is a key indicator for understanding our audiences more effectively.

*Purpose.* Platforms will continue to compete with each other to grab the attention and number of users from other platforms. Take the example of Facebook, which acquired Instagram for \$1 billion and has transformed it into a dominant multimedia platform. Yet when Facebook wanted to buy Snapchat as well, Snapchat said no. As a result, Facebook has tried to copy various features of the mobile application for its own platform, ranging from filters on Instagram to the Messenger app. Each platform essentially has a specific function and audience in mind. Not all platforms are equal or founded on the same vision or principles. As time goes by, the competition among these brands for eyeballs and usage will only become bigger and more prominent.

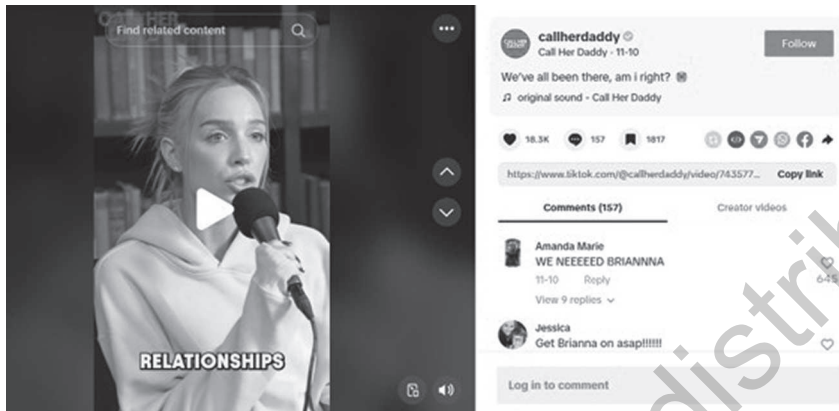
For a social media professional, not only is understanding the functions and specifics of the tools important, but so is understanding the behaviors and reasons why people are using these tools in the first place. Each platform has a different overall purpose, as well as trustworthiness factor, whether it involves getting news, creating personal content, engaging in customer service, sharing negative experiences or responding to a crisis, sharing and creating stories, or initiating a call to action to drive sales, strengthen reputation, and build on an established community.

*Relationships.* Identifying the current state of relationships between users on social media platforms is crucial at first. Some users will be your biggest fans and want to be on every platform you are on. However, some users may just want to be on one channel with you based on your brand voice there. This has to be determined and thought out carefully to make sure you are spending the appropriate time, resources, and engagement necessary to foster these relationships as proactively as possible. When it comes to being on social media, you want a strategy in place for why you have a presence on each platform. Your network is indeed your net worth, and there is no better way to connect, engage, and proactively seek out professionals in the field. #MarketingTwitter, for example, is a great way to start to learn, engage, and be active in the community to meet some of the game changers in the social and digital industry.

*Personality.* Determining the platform you feel best establishes the personal voice for your business, organization, and even individual brand is something to consider and keep in mind. Certain platforms will feel more natural to you, but try to utilize each platform consistently to present a comprehensive brand across the board. Everyone wants the power to showcase who they are and why they are unique.

Showcasing your personality could come in a variety of different forms, from creating content on platforms like Instagram or TikTok to showing videos about various trends and daily activities (e.g., Gary Vaynerchuk and his posts on TikTok at events or conferences, Alex Cooper and her podcast sessions for *Call Her Daddy*, or creator and fashion designer Kristin Juszyk with her videos showcasing her latest athletic brand creations on Instagram or TikTok). Other professionals in the industry showcase their personality based on the content and insights they share. Social media professionals such as Matt Prince (Taco Bell) share insights for students on what it is like to work in the social media industry. Jess Zafarris (*PR Daily*) has created unique insights on what certain industry words mean and defines them in creative and informative videos on TikTok. Brands have to showcase their personality with content showing not only what they are doing

but also what they can do to become a resource for their respective audience members. White papers, e-books, webinars, blog posts, podcasts, and video recaps are just some of the methods that are highlighted and expanded on for brands.



Call Her Daddy podcast

TikTok/@callherdaddy

**Content.** The new model for content creation and marketing on social media has shifted from just pushing content for the sake of self-promotion to becoming more personalized, interactive, and focused on storytelling. Develop the messages and pieces of content that your audiences want. The ideal situation is to think about pieces of content your audiences want, but do not realize they want, from you. This will take some additional brainstorming sessions and strategic planning in order to uncover the messages, pieces of content, and stories to showcase on social media. If you have strong content, this will allow you to become known as a resource for your **thought leadership**. Brands, individuals, and organizations can become thought leaders in their area as they continue to produce, share, and create content as a go-to resource for innovative ideas; persuade people to take action in response to their created content; and are viewed as trusted sources of information in their area. Social and digital publications such as *AdAge*, *Social Media Today*, *Social Media Geekout*, *Adweek*, *PR Daily*, *Digiday*, and more are thought of as resources to get news out about trends in the industry, but many social media professionals become contributors to publications such as *Fast Company* and *Forbes* to showcase their thought leadership and expertise on various topics in the industry.

Some pieces of content will resonate with an audience on one platform rather than another. You do not always want to post the same content across all platforms. There are some combinations that will work (e.g., Instagram and Facebook with videos), but you want to repurpose and reformat content that is designated with a particular community, platform capabilities, and purpose in mind. In addition, the content needs not only to reflect on the brand's voice but also to connect with the audience in terms of user expectations from a brand using this platform.

**Innovativeness.** Users want to be part of a platform that continues to raise the bar for what a social media platform should be. Responding to user audiences and suggestions is another focus these platforms have to be aware of. People have noticed that Facebook has copied a lot of its new features from other platforms like Snapchat. Yet other platforms have been willing (or at least appeared willing) to listen to their audience members' suggestions for

new features. Adam Mosseri, head of Instagram, is active on Threads and Instagram to ensure he is able to answer questions and provide updates on new features on the platform for audiences and get their feedback. One of the benefits to platforms like Twitter/X is the opportunity to not only get access to breaking news but also connect with the game changers in the field immediately, bypassing some of the traditional gatekeepers pre-social media.

*Analytics.* Data will of course be your friend when it comes to engaging with content and audiences on social media, depending on the platforms in question. You will be able to determine the time, frequency, responses, and views you will get. These data and insights will help you determine when it is appropriate to post content and share videos, and even how long a response people expect from a customer comment on social media. In addition, analytics and data will help you determine at the end how well you (or your team) did in addressing the question, challenge, or content created for a campaign. Most of the links, updates, and conversations are archived online and available for collection either through the native measurement programs on the platform itself or through a third-party service.

*Actions.* After we have an idea of the audience we want to engage with based on user activity level, we can determine some of the actions these individuals take to participate in our communities online.

Ultimately, you want to take all of these important factors into consideration to determine whether or not you want to be on particular social media platforms. One way to do this is by thoroughly identifying which platforms you are currently using (inventory), determining how well they are performing (audit), and making a choice on what to do with each platform (decision action steps) as outlined in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3 • Performance and Decision Action Audit**

| Activity Level                                | Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inventory + Benchmark Audit                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key audiences and where they are in their relationship with the client (organization, business, agency, etc.) on social media</li> <li>• Identify the rationale for why they are on each platform (e.g., to be educated, consume content, gain insights, build communities, or host events and promotions)</li> <li>• Evaluate each platform to determine audience, content, relationships, analysis of brand voice, and overall purpose</li> </ul> |
| Evaluation (Short-Term and Long-Term Impacts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at each platform to determine how well it is doing in terms of its key performance indicators and the overall health of the brand community, voice, and investment</li> <li>• Evaluate the longevity of the platforms that are aligned with the brand's mission and business objectives, and determine which platforms to keep and which ones to vote off "social media island" (a.k.a. shut down)</li> </ul>                                           |

| Activity Level          | Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision + Action Steps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate a decision tree to determine the overall actions that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating social media platforms</li> <li>• Invest in platforms that have an established community but are growing in audiences so more resources and support is needed, or perhaps shut down platforms that are not bringing back return on investment to the client or are no longer available</li> <li>• Determine whether some platforms are fine, so there is nothing that needs to be done</li> <li>• Set a timeline and date for when you do the evaluation and health report again for all of the platforms</li> </ul> |

## Working in Social Media

Working in social media can be very exciting yet demanding, and the roles constantly change as quickly as the platforms do. Neill and Moody (2015) explored the changes and duties happening for social media strategists and discussed the various tasks, experiences, and expectations facing these professionals in their roles. These duties ranged from handling communication issues to testing emerging technologies, and even discussion of the importance of understanding the collection and analysis of data emerging from these platforms. Yet one of the growing areas of discussion about working in social media is whether or not you need to have the same principles and practices for your personal use as your professional use, which Moreno and colleagues (2015) examined in their research. Professionals working in social media have a high level of usage of these platforms for the sole purpose of creating influence in their community, establishing proactive relationships, and becoming relevant influencers in their own right in their thought leadership circles.

The workload and skills necessary to succeed in the field are changing. Some underlying skills and abilities are still important for organizations looking to hire social media professionals. Writing, research, and creative execution are traditional skills seen in marketing, public relations, and other communication disciplines. However, the rising expectations of the maturing field have also allowed the expectations for young professionals entering the field to be a bit higher. Of course, this depends on the industry, business, and even company or organization in focus. There is no real set “standard” for the expectations, roles, or even qualifications. Yet, certain fundamental skills, experiences, and qualifications do need to be taken into consideration (these are discussed and highlighted in greater detail in Chapter 5).

The information we share on social media is vastly different from the capability of the original platforms. When Facebook got started in 2004, you were only able to share updates via text, but it has evolved to allow chatbots, AI (images, avatars, and more), live video, metaverse, and 360-degree immersive experiences. Now, we are able to do much more and as platforms evolve, so do their applications and capabilities for businesses, creators, and community members.

## Bridging the Science and Art of Social Media

Social media encompasses both the research and theoretically driven work being done to explore networks, relationships, and how individuals respond and react to various messages and information online. Understanding the foundation of why people share information publicly and privately provides social media professionals with a sound view of why certain things occur without reinventing the wheel. On the flip side, exploring the creative possibilities for these insights turning into actionable steps and strategies is also important. Bridging these two perspectives together in a way that is both integrated and comprehensive is one of the most important accomplishments of a social media professional.

### What Can Science Tell Us About Social Media?

Researchers who have explored social media in their work have used a variety of different theoretical frameworks to help explain and predict why certain attitudes, behaviors, and actions are taken online. These frameworks include dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 2016; Yang & Kent, 2014), user gratification theory (Gao & Feng, 2016), psychological empowerment theory (Li, 2016), and theory of planned behavior (Freberg, 2012). Even in social media research, there are still some challenges and opportunities for researchers to determine how to effectively measure certain concepts in the field, such as engagement (Jiang et al., 2016; Sisson, 2017; Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Further research in understanding these concepts, as well as how they can be strategically applied, needs to be taken into consideration. Even though social media is a source for engagement and an opportunity for users and businesses specifically, little research up to this point discusses how exactly social media fits in the overall strategy from a marketing and communications standpoint (Killian & McManus, 2015), which brings forth the growing need for a bridge between practice and research to address this.

Social media can be accomplished by looking at the scientific elements that make up the communities. It helps the strategist understand not only what is happening but also why and how things happen and evolve at any given time. The tools and methods used in traditional disciplines like marketing, education, computer science, public relations, advertising, and communication, among others, can help test and evaluate online behaviors. Social media professionals cannot rely just on the creative artistic opportunities social media allows us to use and take advantage of. Instead, we have to hone our analytical and scientific approaches and fine-tune our research skills. This will allow us to make sense of the substantial unstructured data available so we understand what is being presented and in what context it is presented. This adds to the growing expectation and need for social media professionals to have a solid research foundation and background to help them make sense of the data and apply it in a creative and innovative way.

*Research.* You will have to become one with statistics, Excel spreadsheets, data, and many other mathematical elements when it comes to social media. There are two parts of the equation a successful social media strategist needs to be aware of when looking at the various platforms. First, the actual information and data are collected in a systematic way from the various platforms or third parties. Also consider the physical elements that are created, shared, and constructed on social media. Social media strategists have to organize the information in ways that show us what is going on. This will help identify trends, gaps, opportunities, or even challenges that need to be addressed in a systematic and applied

manner. The second element is that research comes down to a science in the systematic process in which the data are analyzed. Most of the time, the data are in raw form and need to be organized in a way that makes sense and is understandable to both the strategist and the client/organization in question.

## How Is Social Media Like an Art?

While the previous sections briefly discussed the science (research- or theory-driven) aspect of social media, it is also important to note areas on the other side of the social media coin. Understanding the creative execution is an area most people associate with social media, but each platform has a strategic purpose behind each area.

*Creativity.* The demands of being creative today in social media are more important than ever. Without creativity, there is no buzz, excitement, or word-of-mouth conversations that spark audiences to share content. New tools, software programs, and people are coming on board with social media, which is raising the bar to take ideas that would be considered good at any other point in time to the next level. Any person can go about sharing and creating content, but content that is unique, invokes an inspired and emotional response, and can cut through the digital and irrelevant noise really makes an impact on the audience. That's what creativity does for social media. It's about not just looking at the tools or thinking creativity is all about being artistic. It is the light that shines on the brand and communities that help generate these innovative conversations through insights and data that leads them to have these great ideas. **Informed decision-making** (coined by Rich Calabrese) is about taking creativity, data, and insight into account for social media. Creativity can be disseminated from the top down (organization to key publics), but there is also the co-creation aspect of creativity, where you are able to use your community to help share, brainstorm ideas, and discover content, stories, or original ways of approaching an idea. The ultimate goal is not just to have one organization or brand tell a story but also to create a spark for others to be motivated to participate and share these conversations and stories with others.

When it comes to being creative with content, certain campaigns and brands have been particularly innovative. Brands now realize that if they extend their presence by embracing their culture and popularity among their audience members, they can achieve great things. Consider The Cheesecake Factory. They realized there was an opportunity to interject themselves into the conversation when audiences were commenting about how an outfit worn by Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce looked like their logo, so the restaurant brand immediately capitalized on this moment on social media (Shorty Awards, 2024a). Many media outlets like *Today*, *People*, *US Weekly*, and more commented on the post, including Kelce, resulting in a win for the brand (Shorty Awards, 2024a).

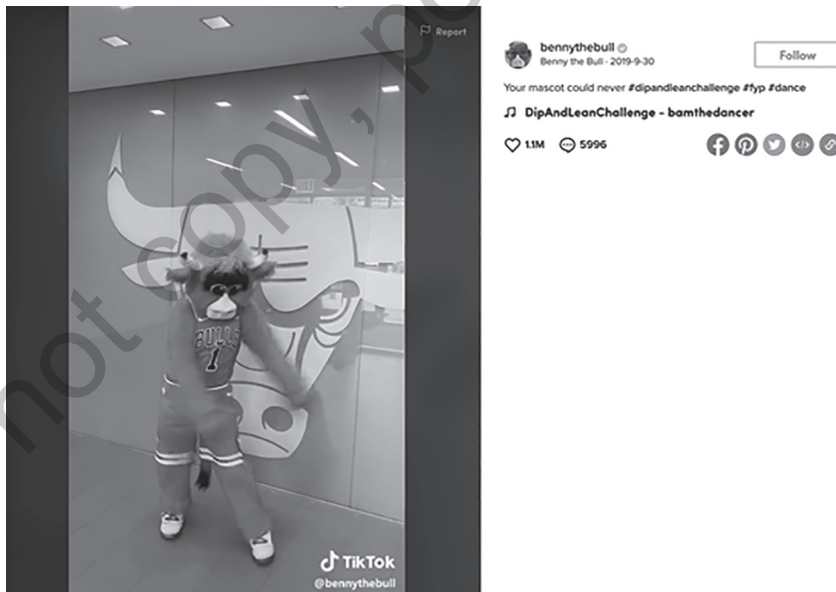
Other tactics—like offering new limited edition products to create a buzz, or generating fear of missing out (FOMO) moments—can also drive brand awareness and creativity to new heights. Going against the grain and in a space where the brand would have never been conceived before could be one direction to go. There are some combinations that go well together like french fries and ketchup, but you probably did not think mustard and candy would. Well, that's what French's mustard (which is not immune to creating partnerships with other consumer brands you would never have guessed!) did with the popular candy brand Skittles. The brands partnered with each other for National Mustard Day, and gave out limited versions of their mustard-flavored Skittles. The French's and Skittles collaboration proves that if life gives you lemons and you need a little bit of sunshine, you



can also make tangy mustard-flavored candy—because why not? Because it creates an experience others will want to share.

Another option is making your brand or product look different in a way that is not common, like looking at macaroni and cheese as art. That's right, one of the favorite snacks of our childhood (or adulthood) created a campaign to tap into nostalgia and creativity with their Macterpiece exhibit (Shorty Awards, 2024b). Heinz partnered with artist Jason Mecier who created an art piece that was titled *Macaroni Monet*, and created promotional materials to spark conversation on whether or not mac art was “real art.” This spurred a lot of online discussion, comments, and, of course, word-of-mouth moments to inspire others to create their own art (Shorty Awards, 2024b).

Creativity can be experimented with. A brand's message does not have to be delivered by the lead actors (i.e., the company itself). Supporting actors (i.e., spokespeople) can play a role as well. In fact, many sports teams and brands have used their mascots as the vehicle for testing out messages, content, and platforms. Mascots are a great way to go about this, as many teams such as the Savannah Bananas (King Potassium) and the University of Louisville (Louie the Cardinal) have done. However, one of the most followed mascots out there, Benny the Bull, the mascot for the NBA's Chicago Bulls, has a channel that the professional team has used to put forth new ideas, content, and entertainment for their audiences in unique ways (Shorty Awards, 2020). Benny the Bull is successful on TikTok because of his constant dance moves and choreography to popular songs and challenges. Benny also embraces pranks, duets, and fashion inspired trends that are aligned with their brand. Although Benny is present on other platforms, TikTok allows creativity and the emphasis on popular music and audio tracks to make a strong connection with the audience.



Benny the Bull on TikTok

TikTok/@bennythebull

Creativity doesn't always mean thinking completely outside the box when it comes to proposing new ideas for a campaign. What it does mean is making informed decisions

based on the landscape, industry, audience, and brand through brainstorming sessions, data analysis, and insights gathered.

*Storytelling.* Everyone has a unique story to share. The worst thing to do is try to tell a story just like someone else's because that will not be authentic to your brand. Plus, stories that are not executed correctly will be lost in the mix. You could have the best visual effects and videographer out there, but if the execution of your story is not there, it is a waste of time.

Successful stories connect and resonate with audiences on a personal level to drive them to feel a specific emotion based on what they have seen from you. Whether via a video or post, you will make a strong connection if you tap into the emotions of an audience member. Once this connection is made, a memorable experience is added to the story, and this allows the receiver to consider what actions to take. Users may just view the piece of content, but they may also be compelled to share it with their network for others to see and experience as well.

The best person to share your story according to what best represents your personality and vision is you. All successful social media brands, companies, and professionals spend a lot of time and energy sharing their stories in creative and unique ways.

Brands and users can use storytelling effectively in several ways:

- Allow users to be part of the experience. Some brands allow users to get these experiences and share their viewpoint with others on behalf of the brand. Build ambassador programs, loyalty programs, and communities to gather insights, formulate relationships, and bring forth new stories into the spotlight for the brand as a whole.
- Listen and create relevant content. Data will be your friend when you need it to be in social media. Use data as a guide to what stories and pieces of content you feel will most resonate with your audiences. Taking the initiative to ask questions or telling your audience to do something specific (e.g., snap us back a selfie, post a picture on Instagram, etc.) allows you to gauge the user-generated content aspect but also use the buzz, insights, and data to make a more informed decision on what stories to showcase next.
- Showcase your values. When you are looking at brands or individuals, they may want to focus on their products and services as well as what they can offer you in terms of making a sale. Yet sometimes brands and others stand up for what they believe in and share content featuring what they want to be known for in a different way. For example, brands and organizations such as Dove have been against using AI-generated photos as part of their campaigns on social media (and elsewhere) due to their strong values for real beauty standards and self-esteem.
- Share your point of view. Kelly Clarkson, singer and talk show host, has been able to share her perspectives on her personal channel as well as the platforms associated with her popular talk show, *The Kelly Clarkson Show*. Clarkson documents her interviews, but also has behind the scenes features, dedicated segments where she performs covers to popular songs, and shares with her community members updates and where she is at in a consistent, sustainable, and personable manner.

## How Can We Bridge Science and Art Effectively?

Throughout this book, you will note there is a growing need for understanding both sides of what makes social media a strategic profession and industry to work, research, and teach in. Most of the time, only one side of the coin is presented. Having a balanced approach to research and practice is not only necessary but expected by those working in the field.

Several new expectations are outlined for social media professionals to adapt to, not only for their own sakes but also for their clients, organizations, businesses, and communities. Some of the following will be discussed in later chapters:

- Social media is not owned by one person or platform. It is owned by the community.
- Social media is an established field to be in. It is not easy, free, or replaceable. Social media professionals serve as the digital front door for brands. The field and profession need to garner the same respect as other roles and departments.
- Social media is more than just posting updates and taking snaps. It's a strategic mindset to embrace.
- The primary reason for social media is not to publish content to generate hype or FOMO, but to have a purpose and rationale behind it and to be a win-win for you and your audiences.
- Saying you are an expert or guru on social media doesn't truly show your expertise. Your work and the relationships you formulate do.
- Social media needs to shift from promoting to everyone, to fine-tuning your efforts on engaging with your audiences at the right time, on the right channel, and in the right situation.
- Quality over quantity—whether it is followers, content, or conversations—always wins.
- Social media roles will evolve, blur with other duties, and sometimes actually disappear.
- Social media is not about audiences just “seeing” your content. It's about your audience sharing and responding to your content.
- Social media is about being “social.” Don't be a programmed robot.
- Social media has challenges. Which field doesn't? It has a dark side. However, we must look at the field in a balanced perspective.
- You are what you present yourself as online. First impressions are all that count.
- People want engagement and content that resonates with them, not spam.
- Be authentic and consistent, not a constant salesperson.
- Social media is more than just content. This is surface level, and there's much more below that is planned, brainstormed, argued, and executed before the post button is even pushed.

## Chapter Summary

Social media is an evolving area of professional activities and personal relationships. These platforms will continue to evolve or, in some cases, disappear completely. This is an industry where change comes at a rapid pace and is always on the move. Social media professionals may at times feel they are “out of date” with the technologies even though they are just catching up on last week’s news. There are many areas in which social media can be viewed as both an art and a science, but some fundamental aspects create bridges between these two areas. Relationships, strategy, and people are what make social media the platform, community, and industry it is today.

## Thought Questions

1. What is your definition of social media? What are some attributes you would assign to social media and why?
2. What are some of the biggest milestones for social media in your opinion?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities in social media? How can creativity and strategy come together?
4. Discuss why research, creativity, and practice are key parts of what makes social media prominent today.

## Exercises

1. You enter a job interview and the human resources director asks you to define *social media* and answer the question, “Is social media dying or becoming out of date?” Discuss your thoughts on this and use a current campaign or case study not mentioned in this chapter as evidence to support your points.
2. You are applying for a summer internship with Bubba 33, a rising brand for Texas Roadhouse, and the manager has asked you to come up with some potential ideas for the restaurant to use for storytelling on social media. Provide a few suggestions for content Bubba 33 could consider creating that is both branded and user-generated, and include a rationale for each.
3. You have been asked to create a social media audit for a local nonprofit in town. The firm is on all of the social media platforms but does not get as much engagement on Twitter/X as it wants. Discuss the process you will go through in determining which platforms to use and no longer use.

## Key Terms

Branded content (BC)  
Informed decision-making  
Online reputation  
Social media

Social networking site (SNS)  
Thought leadership  
User-generated content (UGC)  
Virality

Do not copy, post, or distribute

# Chapter 2

## Ethical and Legal Fundamentals in Social Media

### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- 2.1 Define ethics, as well as your own ethical standards for social media
- 2.2 Examine the legal and ethical consequences and challenges social media raises
- 2.3 Define fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and deepfakes as it relates to growing issues and ethical challenges in social media
- 2.4 Explain key ethical and legal principles for establishing a social media and AI policy
- 2.5 Describe the ethical and legal best practices to work in social media

### Introduction

To succeed in social media, we need to be aware of the underlying legal and ethical implications that guide our practices, communication efforts, and behaviors online. You may ask, “Do I really have to understand law when it comes to social media?” More than you might think. Law is a moving target—as platforms evolve, the law slowly but surely follows with new rules and regulations. It is important to understand the law to navigate the growing changes and expectations arising online.

This is true for ethics as well. “No one is going to know, right?” Wrong. The internet (and social media community) never forget if you do something against community, brand, or individual codes of ethics. You may be able to recover eventually, but it will take time, resources, and a lot of forgiveness depending on the actions and situation in question. You need to understand ethical practices in social media and the importance of applying those practices in your day-to-day interactions online. Many professionals face these questions in the social media field—make sure you know how you will answer and act on them:

- Do I care if people search previous updates (pictures, DMs, chats, videos, blog posts, etc.) to use for job interviews?



- Do I comprehend the ethical, legal, and professional practices of using AI for my social media work?
- Do I understand the legal and ethical implications for sharing fake news, disinformation, or misinformation on my channels?
- Am I fully aware of how much data I have on social media that could be used to train AI for other individuals and companies to use?
- Do I know what the implications and risks are associated with the rise of deepfakes on social media for my personal brand?
- Do I know (and understand) all of the terms of service (TOS) for the platforms I have a presence on? What about the associated tools I use to create, share, and manage content on the platforms?
- Do I understand what I have been willingly giving brands and platform companies over the years in terms of my personal information and data?
- Do I understand the practices for identifying, reporting, and determining what is fake and what is real online?
- Am I aware that while I have my account settings set to “private,” they really are not?
- Do I care if I send out a tweet, story, or snap that may look “cool” online with my friends but could reflect poorly on my future goals and endeavors?
- Am I aware of the consequences of posting information that may not be true or may be misleading?
- Do I know the risks and challenges associated with the social media platform algorithms and data protection issues?
- Do I know what I need to do in case someone uses my profile picture to create a fake account or create deepfake content of me?
- Do I know how to identify real versus fake accounts before engaging with them on social media?
- Am I aware that an update made in a spark of emotion or outrage could cause me to get suspended from my job, miss out on a job opportunity, or even get fired?
- Do I understand the impact of sharing my opinion online for the world to see, and do I understand the community, professional, and global implications toward my personal brand?
- Am I aware of the power (and risks) associated with saying something online and the effects it may have on another person?

You may be wondering how this all pertains to social media and working in the industry. The answer is simple: Social media is not only about building an online brand, building a community to become a creator or influencer, establishing paid ads or sponsored posts to help with sales, or even setting up a place to tell your own story to enhance your presence online. All of these are important, but fundamentally, social media is about being “social.” Being social means establishing and maintaining relationships over time that is both sustainable and consistent. It’s an art form in itself, since users must be skilled

at navigating their various relationships with colleagues, friends, peers, and community members. Relationships have layers (like onions from the iconic movie *Shrek*); these layers are complex and constantly evolve from experiences. Relationships evolve and change over time, based on the level of investment and time that is needed to maintain them. People have expectations when it comes to social media from a communication standpoint and how we should operate and present ourselves. Issues arise when users' expectations for the brand or profession are violated online. A lot of ethical issues could be addressed if people were aware of how their actions and behaviors might be perceived based on first impressions. First impressions are powerful, so you want to make sure you are communicating the messages you want to present, not ones that would present you in a different or even negative light. Essentially, what we say and stand for online must be supported by our actions.

When it comes to social media ethics, it is very easy to talk about being professional, but it's a skill to consistently act ethically. Ethical and professional behavior is a habit that needs to be integrated with all aspects of a person's personal and professional life. This builds trust, which is earned over time, as well as building on the goodwill and positive associations toward your personal brand. One incident can change someone's opinion of you as a person. Ethics and professionalism are at the forefront of the profession and the curriculum across various disciplines, but we are still facing an uphill challenge in teaching others how to be proactive members of society on social media.

## Humans of Social Media

### Chris Yandle, PhD

Associate commissioner for public affairs, Louisiana Board of Regents  
Adjunct professor, LSU Manship School of Mass Communication

#### Tell us a little bit about yourself. How did you get started in social media?

If I had to write in the form of a tweet, it would be something like this: #DadLunchNotes Award-winning PR Guy @namicomunicate #MentalHealth Advocate @manshipschool Adjunct Professor

Currently, I serve as the Associate Commissioner for Public Affairs with the Louisiana Board of Regents, where I oversee our branding and external communications strategy. Additionally, I hold the role of adjunct professor in the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University (LSU).

I take pride in being a "recovering" college athletics administrator, having dedicated over a decade to five different NCAA Division I programs. At one time, I was recognized as a leading communications professional in the industry. Notably, I led social, digital, and external communications efforts at the University of Miami (2012–2014) and the Georgia Tech Athletic Association (2014–2016). Prior to my tenure in Miami, I spent four years at Baylor University (2008–2012), where I played a pivotal role in quarterback Robert Griffin III's successful Heisman Trophy campaign in 2011 and contributed significantly to Baylor's expanded presence across social media platforms.

I am also a mental health advocate for the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) and I am an active volunteer in one of the local Louisiana chapters.

My initiation into social media was purely accidental. In 2009, as Twitter gained momentum across college athletics programs, our athletics communications team at Baylor was tasked with exploring its potential. Our digital expert at the

time suggested experimenting with Twitter to enhance Baylor's online presence. As an introvert, Twitter became my preferred platform for communication, allowing me to engage without depleting my social energy.

### **What is your favorite part about working in the field?**

I think my favorite part has been the people I've met and have built real-life friendships—from Dr. Karen Freberg and Jessica Smith to J.W. Cannon and Kevin DeShazo and more. We hear so much about the trolls online and the hate, but my favorite part continues to be the people I've met these last 15-plus years.

### **What's the most unexpected or quirky way you've leveraged social media to achieve a goal or connect with your audience?**

I think the most unexpected way for me has been through the handwritten notes I share during the school year. I never anticipated it going much further than that school year, but the overwhelming response from people I never met kept me going with it. Four years later, NBC's Craig Melvin stumbled upon one of my notes, leading to Addison and I being interviewed for a *TODAY* story in January 2021. That appearance then led to a special spot for the Father's Day episode of *The Kelly Clarkson Show* and a long feature story on *Good Morning America*. All of this resulted in us becoming an overnight sensation in Korea and Japan (an oddly true story). The 2024-2025 school year will be the eighth year of writing notes to my daughter and the fourth year to my son. I am still surprised by the number of parents who send me messages or those who share their own notes with their kids.

### **Reflecting on your journey so far, what's one piece of advice you wish you could go back and give to your college about the complexities of social media and career development?**

As cringy or commercialized as this sounds, I wish we would have taken branding and personal marketing more seriously in the early social media years. Many of us (me included) were trying to be funny and would share stream-of-consciousness posts on Twitter. While I have never posted anything that has put my career in jeopardy, what if I would have early on? Would I be where am I now? I know my kids aren't thinking about how their digital footprint will affect them later in life, so I must be the one to remind them of the pitfalls. It's a complexity that most kids, teenagers, and young adults don't fully understand, and I wish we would have a better handle on—even if it were a high school course or a college credit course.

### **Can you share a memorable "fail" or blunder you experienced on social media, and how did you turn it around or learn from it?**

I have been fortunate to be on the outside looking in when it comes to fails and blunders. I have had to help athletes navigate out of holes their posts have dug, but thankfully, that has been the extent of my failure experience.

### **We often see the highlight reels of success on social media. Can you shed light on a time when things didn't go as planned, and how you navigated through the challenges?**

Contrary to what you may see on social media, no one has any idea why something goes viral or how to make said content "go viral." I say that to prove this point: everything we post, and share is a learning experiment. We have previous data that says if something should or should not perform well, but truly, we don't know until we try. That's what makes it fun *and stressful*. If something works well, then

you look at the data to understand why it performed so well. If something bombs, then you look at the data to understand what you did wrong or what you could do better next time. With the goal posts constantly changing, the way we navigate success and failure on social media constantly changes.

**Social media platforms are constantly evolving. How do you stay ahead of the curve and adapt your strategies to keep up with changing trends?**

Honestly, I have stopped trying to stay on top of things. Each week during the semester, I am updating my class content in real time, but my students are the ones who keep me updated on the latest apps and trends. It's a humbling exercise that I enjoy having with my students each semester.

**Favorite account or connection from social media? Share a story about a particularly memorable interaction or connection you made with someone through social media that impacted your work or perspective.**

I have interacted with so many brands and accounts over the years. There have been several connections that still stick with me all these years later. One example, in particular, was when I tagged Chili's Twitter account on the anniversary of my wife and I's blind date—at Chili's. They sent us some Chili's swag and a gift card to celebrate the anniversary of our first date. It's those types of interactions that can build lifelong brand appreciation. Another example was when Sophia Bush bought a copy of my book at an independent bookstore and tagged me in her post. Similar instances of other celebrities stumbling upon my notes on Instagram and then sharing them in their feeds. It's moment like these where we are reminded that we are all interconnected somehow and that celebrities are just normal people with extraordinary jobs.

**What best advice or tip did you get to be successful in the industry, or in your professional career?**

I can harp on the use of social media for your professional gain and to prepare your future self for success, but as I've gotten older, I think the best advice I can offer is to **"Be in the moment."** We are always looking for the next best thing or the next viral sensation, but the more we are present in the current moment, the better we will be in the end. Enjoy the journey we are on, be appreciative of the steps you've taken along the way.

**What would be your walk out song for a presentation or talk? "**

The Best of You" by Foo Fighters.

What would be the title of your memoir of your professional journey in life?  
*Juggling Balls and Books: My Career in College Sports and Higher Education.*

**If you had someone play in you in a biopic, who would it be and why?**

Of course, my first choice will always be Ryan Reynolds because I think he is the coolest dad alive. I am also a huge fan of the show "Psych" and I think James Roday Rodriguez who played Shawn Spencer would be an excellent choice as well. Both guys are witty, sarcastic, and have an uncanny ability to weave pop culture references into conversations with ease . . . like me.

## What Is Ethics?

**Ethics** is a set of moral guidelines and principles that influence our behaviors and interactions. Having a set ethical code of conduct is essential when exploring how to react and respond to various situations that may emerge when we are working in social media. These guidelines help us tell the difference between what is wrong and what is right. Most of the time, people have a set of values that they hold dear and feel are important for them to follow. These ethical principles can be personal behaviors and actions, but they also translate into professional circles. All professional organizations (advertising, public relations, marketing, journalism, communications, and additional disciplines) have a professional code of ethics for members to follow when they are working and practicing in the field.

Social media professionals may face a variety of different situations while they are employed for a large corporation, start up, university, media outlet, agency, or consulting firm, or even when they are part of an organization (e.g., student athletes). Access to information pertaining to personal accounts on social media sites has been discussed in the online community as well as in the court of law.

Certain behaviors are not universally accepted when it comes to social media professionals. Steph Parker (2013) discussed some of these “new deadly sins of social media.”

*Misappropriation.* This particular sin focuses on the timing and appropriateness of jumping into a conversation that is not entirely relevant or necessary for a brand. It is all about understanding the overall context of the situation and determining whether or not you are able to be part of the conversation. For example, some brands have gotten mixed reviews on when they have (or have not) commented on various topics ranging from global events to social issues (e.g., racial injustice cases) to security and privacy issues for conversations on certain platforms (e.g., recording conversations or layoffs on TikTok) to leadership concerns (e.g., Boeing and X) or current pop culture cases (e.g., the legal cases between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard, and Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni). It really comes into play when brands try to jump on board with a trend (**trendjacking**) on social media. The trends can be viral, such as *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* or Josh Wine memes, among others, but there is a time and place for brands and professionals to promote themselves. This is especially true when the trending topic focuses on an emotional situation (e.g., brand comments related to the Israel-Palestine conflict) or global trending topics (e.g., elections, global athletic events, award shows, competitions, and other newsworthy events).

*Abandonment.* As mentioned earlier, social media is about the conversation, and you can't have success with a community if you are not actively participating in the community. Social media communities need to be built as well as maintained. Brands, organizations, and professionals must decide which platforms to be on and how invested in these platforms their communities should be. The worst thing that can happen is to jump on board a platform and then leave it before it can really be embraced. Abandonment is an extreme case, but the point is to make sure you are using a particular platform for the conversation and community. As they say, if you build it, they will come. However, if you leave, so will your community. This has happened a bit with brands moving from Twitter/X after Elon Musk purchased the social media platform, but there are still community members using the platform for customer service, news updates, and community building initiatives.

*Manipulation.* This is where **disinformation** (purposefully sharing false information to audiences to manipulate behaviors and perceptions) comes into play. There is a time and place to ask your community to take action to support a cause, share a post or update, or even help another member of the community. Yet social media is not the place to ask your community to reach a certain number of followers so you can get paid more for speaking opportunities, which is sometimes seen in the professional social media circuit. The ultimate goal is to be yourself and present your brand in the most authentic way, and that comes from not using cheap tricks and measures to generate a false view of who you are. Be willing to share content that is relevant with your community, but respect the fact that people may or may not be influenced by what you ask them to do. That comes with trust, credibility, and a relationship.

On the flip side, you do not want to manipulate or present a false sense of community or success by using services to make it appear like your account or campaign is successful when in reality, it is not. For example, some businesses and agencies have had their employees try to go viral based on how many likes they can get for a TikTok video, and would pay them \$1 for every like. This particular case falsely alludes that this employee would benefit financially if the video goes viral, and that is both misleading and unethical.

*Ignorance.* The topic of ignorance comes with a lot of components to address, and it's important to highlight the ones most at risk of being committed by social media professionals. There is the ignorance of basic terms and practices in social media. Be aware of the main terms, jargon, and legal obligations for social media practices (e.g., asking permission to use a TikTok video for a story, or to livestream a college football or Olympics competition knowing you are in violation of TV rights). This goes back to knowing the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines as well as terms of service for each platform you are using for your social media practices. Then, there is the ignorance of not seeing what your community members are sharing and thus failing to respond to them. With no engagement or interaction from either side, there is a risk to the overall health of the community on social media. If people feel ignored, they will go somewhere else. View exchanges and questions not as threats but as opportunities to learn how to improve.

*Monotony.* Passion is a great element to connect audiences on social media, but social media professionals do not want to push the same content over and over again. Content needs to be fresh, relevant, and tied to the audience's needs and expectations. These needs and expectations change over time. Keeping a constant pulse on what is happening in the community and among the different audience groups is critical. Audiences do not want to receive updates sharing "Like this comment or page" or "Tag three people to win this contest" because businesses and brands have been using these tactics on social media since the beginning. They want to be entertained, inspired, and motivated to share because the content they see connects with them on an emotional level. Although it can be challenging for brands to recognize, this is how audiences now operate, and it is going to take more time (and investment) to bring forth creative and fresh new pieces of content online. Continuing to push the same content to audiences is no longer going to cut it in the digital-first world.

*Narcissism.* Since social media is public, what you share with the world is for everyone to see. Essentially, you are what you share, so make sure to keep that in mind. There are many influencers and creators who may come to mind, such as the Kardashians, Mikayla Nogueira, James Charles, and others. There is a time to personalize your brand, but you



do not want to spam people with your logo, catchphrases, merch and contests, brand trips, YouTube videos, and every piece of content you have ever created. Also, do not worry about how many people are following you or your ratio between follows and followers. Social media professionals have been guilty of following, and then unfollowing, a lot of people so their numbers stay up but others go down. You do not need to share your own content all the time or quote it on Twitter/X.

The cardinal sin for social media is buying followers. Do not do this. Quality is always better than quantity when it comes to your community. While high numbers get a lot of excitement and praise from people, qualifying you for some of those “must-follow” lists you see getting published, it’s not worth it. Plus, it is very easy to find out who has real followers and who has **bots** (automated accounts to share and comment on posts) across these various platforms. A number of fake accounts and services do this, but you do not want to create a fake image for yourself—it will only damage your reputation.

*Uniformity.* Having a consistent image is one thing, but having the same content on every platform is another. Whereas on some platforms repurposed content is appropriate (e.g., Facebook and Instagram), this does not mean you share the exact same content all at once or in the same format. Consider the differences between Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram videos, or the different algorithm characteristics you need to be aware of on Facebook versus LinkedIn. Plus, each platform has its own communities and expectations, so make sure to personalize these experiences across the board.

## Additional Ethical and Legal Consequences and Challenges

As the platforms and social media field evolve, so do the ethical and legal consequences and challenges. Since *Social Media Today* author Steph Parker discussed these sins back in 2013, social media has come a long way in addressing them, but there are others we have to be aware of that can influence how we conduct our business, communication, and storytelling practices. With that being said, here are some additional “deadly sins” that should be added for social media practices:

*Losing control over personal accounts to employers due to influential presence.* Naturally, it is assumed that a person owns their own personal accounts on social media. What happens if a business sees one of their employees have an influential presence on social media—does that mean they own this personal account because the person works at the business? This is a growing legal and ethical issue as employees can become influential based on their expertise, personality, and the community they have built. This has been a focus in several cases, including the one involving wedding designer Hayley Paige. Paige, who has gained a presence in the wedding dress industry as a designer for her employer JLM Couture, lost access to her personal Instagram account to her employer in 2020. In March 2021, a New York judge upheld a restraining order saying Paige does not have the right to the account and Paige had “developed the account within the scope of her employment with [JLM]. Using the account to promote JLM’s goods was the kind of work she was employed to perform, as it was commensurate with her position as a lead designer” (Coleman, 2021). This case sets a significant yet serious precedent for ownership of personal social media accounts that social media professionals need to watch as future cases may come forward as more brands and businesses view ownership of popular and influential personal accounts from their employees. In 2024, Paige and JLM Couture finally settled in court, which allowed Paige



to purchase her name and label back from her previous employer and continue working in the wedding dress industry (Shamsian, 2024). This legal case has become a foundation for future personal social media account management and ownership cases.

*Bullying.* This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but essentially, you want to treat others how you would like to be treated. It is very easy to hide behind the screen and vent about someone, or even try to make people feel different based on what you share with them. Establishing fake accounts and bots, creating deepfakes about others saying something they never did, saying negative false things about people, being aggressive with hurtful messages, and sharing others' private information for the public to see are just some examples of bullying behavior. Bullying online and through social media is one of the biggest current challenges facing individuals—regardless of age.

*Not giving credit where credit is due.* Everyone wants to be acknowledged and praised for bringing a useful point to the discussion, sharing a good article, or even providing a great example of a campaign to a community. You want to give credit to the person who came up with the original idea—similar to citing a source in a research paper. No one likes it when someone else gets the praise and shout-outs when they were not the one who came up with the idea. That's not good manners. Giving praise and thanks does not cost anyone anything. In fact, it can actually be valuable and help contribute to your personal brand.

*Letting the drama escalate to new heights.* We get that social media is about entertainment, but can there be a time where it may just all be “too much” and people do not want to pick sides, such as when creators want to get fifteen seconds of fame for digesting and analyzing cases to build their personal brands? This has happened many times over the years, particularly in legal cases that involve celebrities. Take Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni, for example. Both teams have had stories, exclusives, lawsuits, and PR sharing their side of their legal battles on social media. Lively's team has used Twitter/X whereas Baldoni's team has used TikTok to get their stories out. This exemplifies the fact that the battle is not playing out only in the courtroom, but also in the public opinion and creator landscape on social media. There is a time and place for getting your story across, but this raises new concerns of having a fair and objective jury for when a case goes to court due to the heightened awareness and promotion of these messages and stories on social media.

*Intolerance.* One of the things that sometimes happens on social media is staying within circles where common values, views, and perspectives are universal, with no differences of opinion or debate allowed. This is what it means to be “bubbled,” being exposed only to one perspective and not others. As a result, when different opinions and perspectives arise, this can create some conflict and reactions online and in person, and sometimes leads to people blocking each other. This has resulted in some places like Twitter/X and other platforms to attack individuals—high profile or not—for having different views than their own. Or, this gravitates others to take actions to continue to isolate themselves from others on a designated platform ranging from unfollowing, blocking, or muting accounts, to the extreme action of deactivating their account entirely. Society is diverse in many ways, including differences of opinion. By understanding and acknowledging these differences, we are better equipped to understand others and have a complete view of our society as a whole rather than just one side.

- I. *Misinformation.* In a famous scene in *A Few Good Men*, Jack Nicholson says, “You can’t handle the truth!” Yes, we can handle the truth, but seeking the truth online can be challenging. One of the biggest challenges is the rise of online information that is fake, not true, or purposely manipulated to look as if it were real. Why do people believe inaccurate information? Psychologists Marsh, Cantor, and Brashier (2016) study “truthiness,” or the qualities of information that make it more likely to be perceived and remembered as “true.” People are predisposed to believe that information is true because in most situations in life, the information we obtain is, in fact, true. Simple processes, such as including a photo or repeating a message, make a piece of information more likely to be viewed as true. Although audiences understand that some sources are more reliable than others, the source of information is usually forgotten much faster than the information itself. The science of misinformation presents several practical pieces of advice to social media professionals. Twitter/X has provided some opportunities for users to contribute to community notes, and other platforms continue to work toward labeling items that are “fake” or even note if they were generated by AI. Be careful about repeating myths, even though you want to “bust” them. By repeating them, you make them more memorable.

Consider the images and videos that are shared during a trending event. We have all seen the photo with the shark swimming through flooded streets following a hurricane or other disaster. This is a fake photo, but it is shared all the time. A rising trend that has occurred on social media is misleading or framing coverage to tell a certain viewpoint or perspective on a situation. One example started with a viral video that sparked global and national attention in 2019. The video featured a high school student, Nick Sandmann, supposedly confronting a Native American peace activist, Nathan Phillips, in Washington, DC. Sandmann was wearing a MAGA hat and participating in a March for Life rally with fellow students, while Phillips was beating a handheld drum and singing. The short clip made it appear that Sandmann was antagonizing Phillips while he performed, as they stood face to face (Schwartz, 2019). After the video went viral through major media outlets, an investigation reviewed all of the footage that was being shared online and through the mainstream media and found the footage did not tell the full story of events that were originally reported and shared on social media (Schwartz, 2019). It was not proven that Sandmann initiated any confrontation. Sandmann and his family sued *The Washington Post*, CNN, and other media outlets for \$250 million for defamation as a result (Coffman, 2019). In 2024, Sandmann and his team brought his case of defamation to the Supreme Court, but the Court refused to take it up.

We also know what audiences should be doing to avoid believing false information: Consider the source, check the author, check who is sharing the information, check the date, look for supporting sources, read beyond the headline, ask if a piece of information is a joke or satire, look for other expert opinions, and finally, consider how your personal biases might make you more or less accepting of the information.

*Sharing too much.* Transparency is key to building authenticity online, but there’s transparency, and then there is transparency. You want to be transparent, of course, on social media, but you don’t want to appear to be spamming everyone. There is a right amount of content to present across the different platforms. Yet keep in mind that not everyone may want to know what you had for breakfast or what you experienced at dinner last night at the latest new restaurant. In addition, remember that some people use social

media to have conversations and a positive experience, but not to be bombarded with negativity all the time. Consider the balance between sharing your voice and point of view and how others may be responding to it.

*Sparking outrage.* Hell hath no fury like a social media user scorned by something they do not like. Have you ever been outraged by something online? Often, we vent or sometimes even try to strike up a **flame war** (a campaign to spark negativity toward the other party involved) online. We must maintain our cool and take a moment away from our keyboard before we start engaging. It is important that we collect ourselves and evaluate the consequences or effects of a particular post, update, tweet, or snap. Tea accounts, accounts that are dedicated to gossip and juicy details of online feuds, have been used to escalate influencer disagreements to enhance media coverage (Lorenz, 2019). Sometimes the best way to create discussion or publicity is to spark outrage. Consider what happened with reality stars Ariana Madix and Tom Sandoval from the show *Vanderpump Rules*. The reality stars were caught in a cheating scandal dubbed “Scandoval,” and sparked conversations, discussions, and more professional opportunities and sponsorships for Madix due to the outrage sparked online by fans and others (Selinger, 2023).

*Automation.* You can’t really phone in social media. While many tools allow you to schedule updates ahead of time, most businesses and social media professionals know of the dreaded “automated direct messages” that frequently emerge if you follow a new account online. These automated responses are impersonal and not really about connecting on a relationship basis with another person. Automation can also pose a challenge and risk if a business or professional sends automated updates when others may not want to see them (like during a natural disaster incident or breaking news). With automation, you lose the personal exchanges and conversations that make social media a great place to network and communicate. People follow you not because you are a robot, but because there is a human side to your personal or professional brand.

*Going rogue.* Social media is about representing yourself truthfully online. Posting opinions without permission or out of context while still representing the agency or organization of record (otherwise known as “**going rogue**”) can lead to a misinterpretation of the information shared on the platform.

There is always a social media manager or team that may not necessarily want to go out of their positions a normal way but rather choose to leave their positions with a bang by using their social media platforms to communicate this loud and clear to the global community. Take the UK Civil Service Twitter/X account. During COVID-19, the Twitter/X account stated, “Arrogant and offensive. Can you imagine having to work with these truth twisters?” in reference to the UK government’s take on lockdowns and pandemic strategies (Reid, 2020). The tweet was taken down within ten minutes but had considerable influence, nonetheless. This goes to show the power of social media in a time of great debate, uncertainty, and stress.

Another type of account that comes up on social media and pushes the envelope a little bit for brands and individuals is the alternative account. **Alternative accounts** serve as a notion to resist the official voice and stories they represent. Essentially, these accounts have tried to place themselves in a position to interconnect with the official ones, but they provide an alternative perspective and offer to spark dialogue with others who may or may not agree with the official voice. A lot of risk is associated with these rogue accounts that touches on the ethical and legal lines of social media.

First, we do not know who is behind these accounts or if they are who they say they are. Some individuals on these accounts have claimed they are employees (or former employees) of these organizations, but we do not know for sure.

Second, we are not aware of the ultimate goals of these accounts or if there is an alternative motive connecting these specific social media accounts to another task at hand (cybersecurity, hacking, etc.). Although some of these accounts have large followings, we do not know if they are “real” or authentic, which brings forth the importance of having an official stamp of approval from the platform itself. For example, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, and even LinkedIn offer verification checks to let others know this is the official account. Yet, Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram allow users to pay for verification now, opening the floodgates for anyone to be perceived as a credible resource, when they may not be. However, there are still parody accounts that get verified so they are perceived to be trustworthy, when they are not. There is no guarantee who is hiding behind the screen even for these official accounts.

Third, if someone decides to create the illusion of a real account with a fake message or update, this could also be viewed as going rogue and could damage a company’s reputation online and offline. For example, singer Taylor Swift found herself as a trending topic when there were fake AI-generated ads and social media content featuring Swift for Le Creuset’s kitchenware (Cerullo, 2024). The use of AI for these ads definitely sparked a lot of discussion related to the significant challenges and risks associated with fake messages, updates, and content being circulated as “real,” when they are not (Cerullo, 2024). Le Creuset also had to release a statement on this case:

“Le Creuset is not involved with Taylor Swift for any consumer giveaway. All approved Le Creuset giveaways or promotions come from the official Le Creuset social accounts. Consumers should always check Le Creuset’s official social accounts and website before clicking on any suspicious ads.” (Portée, 2024)



Taylor Swift and Le Creuset Fake Campaign

Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Images; iStockPhoto/heinteh

## Legal Fundamentals

*Terms of service agreements.* Before you sign up for a social media account, be sure to review the terms of service (TOS). A TOS agreement is common for all social media accounts and platforms and is known to outline the terms and uses (or rules) dictated by the parent company (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, etc.) for its platform. In each TOS agreement, the platform states clearly what a user (or business) can and cannot do on the respective social media site (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1** ■ Current Listings of the Main Platforms' Terms of Service (TOS)

| Platform  | Terms of Service | Link                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook  | 2015             | <a href="http://www.facebook.com/terms">www.facebook.com/terms</a>                                                                                    |
| Twitter/X | 2017             | <a href="https://x.com/en/tos/previous/version_13">https://x.com/en/tos/previous/version_13</a>                                                       |
| Instagram | 2013             | <a href="https://help.instagram.com/581066165581870/">https://help.instagram.com/581066165581870/</a>                                                 |
| Snapchat  | 2017             | <a href="https://snap.com/en-US/terms">https://snap.com/en-US/terms</a>                                                                               |
| LinkedIn  | 2017             | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/legal/user-agreement">https://www.linkedin.com/legal/user-agreement</a>                                             |
| Pinterest | 2016             | <a href="https://business.pinterest.com/business-terms-of-service/">https://business.pinterest.com/business-terms-of-service/</a>                     |
| Reddit    | 2005             | <a href="https://www.redditinc.com/policies/user-agreement-september-25-2023">https://www.redditinc.com/policies/user-agreement-september-25-2023</a> |
| YouTube   | 2010             | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/static?template=terms">https://www.youtube.com/static?template=terms</a>                                             |
| TikTok    | 2019             | <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/us/terms-of-service/en">https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/us/terms-of-service/en</a>                       |
| WhatsApp  | 2019             | <a href="https://www.whatsapp.com/legal/terms-of-service">https://www.whatsapp.com/legal/terms-of-service</a>                                         |
| Threads   | 2023             | <a href="https://help.instagram.com/769983657850450">https://help.instagram.com/769983657850450</a>                                                   |

To create an account or profile, the user has to agree to the terms of service. Some TOS agreements range from what users are able to own and create on the site to basic requirements (e.g., Instagram states you have to be thirteen years of age or older to use the site). In addition, some platforms (e.g., Instagram and Snapchat) state the content that is shared and created on these sites is technically owned by the platform, whereas others (e.g., LinkedIn) state that the users own the content they share and create on their platform. TOS listings can be viewed on the Digital.gov website ([www.digital.gov](http://www.digital.gov)) for other platforms as well as third-party applications frequently used on social media. Keep in mind, for all social media platforms, TOS agreements may evolve and expand as new cases, legal rulings, and situations arise online.

*Free speech on social media.* Of course, traditional legal terms need to be discussed not only in relation to social media but also in how they are translated for use on each platform. For example, tweeting a rumor about another person could result in a lawsuit (Gunkel, 2015). This is an ongoing topic of conversation when it comes to what employees share on social media related to their employers and job, what student athletes share relative to their athletic teams, and even what is shared during political campaigns. Whether or not people should share their opinions online in a public forum is one part of the equation, but the other is whether people's content should be censored or only allowed on certain social media platforms. Twitter/X, Facebook, and others are dealing with extreme cases of people abusing their platforms (trolling, cyberbullying, making online threats, etc.). Protection and respect for free speech is necessary in a free

democracy, yet while social media has become more mainstream and established as both a field and a communication channel, brands, companies, and individuals still face challenges in this particular area.

Freedom of speech on social media has been shoved into the spotlight in many ways. For example, free speech was brought to the forefront a few years ago when Twitter/X labeled President Donald Trump's tweets about mail-in voting as misleading in nature. In response, President Trump argued that the social media companies needed to be regulated and suggested revoking Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (Myers, 2020). According to Cayce Myers of Virginia Tech University, the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996 states, "The internet and other interactive computer services offer a forum for a true diversity of political discourse, unique opportunities for cultural development, and myriad avenues for intellectual activity" (Myers, 2020). Specifically, Section 230 of the CDA focuses on social media or online communication as an "interactive computer service" and states that a "website or a social media site is not a 'publisher or speaker' of content meaning that they are largely immune from liability for content posted by third parties" (Myers, 2020). In other words, Section 230 focuses on how no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider (47 U.S. Code § 230, n.d.).

Following Twitter/X's actions, Snapchat's CEO Evan Siegel decided to stop promoting President Trump's account on their platform (Wong, 2020). In contrast, Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg did not initially restrict or block President Trump's social media messages on their platform. Eventually, however, Facebook, Twitter/X, and other social media platforms banned President Trump. However, President Trump was reinstated to Twitter/X shortly after Musk purchased the platform, but Trump still uses his own Truth Social platform to communicate to his audience.

The U.S. Supreme Court is looking at cases involving social media moderation, specifically focusing on laws from Texas and Florida that restrict social media companies' ability to moderate content (Henshall, 2023). These laws argue that platforms censor conservative voices, while companies claim such laws violate their First Amendment rights to curate content (Henshall, 2023). These specific cases involve the question of whether social media companies have the right to moderate content or whether such actions constitute censorship, which brings forth implications regarding Section 230 (Henshall, 2023).

Another freedom of speech case that sparked a lot of interest and discussion surrounded *The Mandalorian* actress Gina Carano and her firing from Disney. Specifically, Carano was fired from the show after sharing her personal views on her social media accounts, which she said in her lawsuit against Disney were protected by the First Amendment (Shamsian, 2024). Carano also claims Disney fired her due to her views, and that other actors on the show and inside the company who shared different political views were not fired. Carano is asking fellow actor Pedro Pascal to testify in her case as evidence of the differing treatment in sharing political views on social media (Griffiths, 2024). The case is moving forward after Disney's motion to dismiss was denied (Shamsian, 2024).

*Disclosure of consent.* Facebook as a platform and company got into trouble in 2016 over the amount of data it was collecting on users, as well as an experiment it conducted that manipulated the information posted to each person's timeline. This experiment focused



on 689,000 users and whether people were feeling positive or negative about what they were viewing on their timeline (Booth, 2014). In essence, Facebook was able to manipulate and filter information, comments, pictures, and videos in users' networks to test whether or not seeing positive or negative items on their timeline had an effect on their overall state (Booth, 2014). The news of this case study sparked outrage in the public on both ethical and legal grounds because the social network did not disclose this practice or ask users if it could do this for their timelines. Universities and research firms go through the ethical process of disclosing the nature of the work (via institutional review boards, or IRBs) for all studies involving human subjects, and also require participants to fill out an informed consent form for the study, both of which Facebook did not do (Booth, 2014). Since then, Facebook has installed measures for highlighting certain content coming from various sources and flagged others from state-run media outlets that are shared on the platform (Bond, 2020a).

*Social media and mental health.* Some key legislation has been implemented in regard to protecting children and addressing social media concerns related to this audience (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2024):

- The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) to enhance more protections for children's privacy
- The Social Media Children Protection Act focusing on age verification and parental oversight
- Specific laws in states to protect minors from harmful content
- Time restrictions for children when on social media

There have also been some developments attempting to place social media in the same category as cigarettes. You may be asking, what is the connection? Social media could potentially have a warning from the U.S. surgeon general about the risks it causes, similar to what cigarettes have to display.

In 2024, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy made the announcement about the potential of adding warnings of the negative side effects and issues to social media platforms in regard to children (NPR, 2024). This was brought forth due to the growing concerns related to the negative effects of social media on children, specifically related to cyberbullying, anxiety, depression, and impostor syndrome (NPR, 2024). Many platforms and brands have expressed their concerns about this, but the purpose was to spark conversations about the negative aspects of social media. While social media does have some negative side effects and challenges, it also brings many opportunities to the table. Existing risks can be addressed through education and trainings as well as more parental involvement to discuss the risks and opportunities with their children (Hunter, 2024).

## Employees and Personal Branding Mishaps

*Online threats and cyberbullying.* What you post online can become evidence in a court of law. Many cases have focused on issues of cyberbullying, using profile pictures to create fake accounts, and even posting content that could lead to termination from your job. The most common reason social media users get into legal trouble is for posting inappropriate,

insensitive, or egregious content. These posts can result in lawsuits, firings, and other long-term consequences. Public shaming for these kinds of posts has become one of the most negatively impactful events individuals experience today on social media.

However, one case has become an iconic example of the long-term consequences when employees post certain content on their channels. It only takes one snap, tweet, video, or comment to change your life dramatically, which this case will show.



The case involving Justine Sacco is a warning for all who believe social media privacy is still a thing. Sacco, a former public relations professional, used her Twitter/X account to share various personal opinions and views on all types of experiences, as well as exchanges she had with individuals.

It was not until December 2013, when she was boarding a plane from London to Cape Town (an eleven-hour flight), that her world turned upside down and she became the number-one trending topic on Twitter/X (Waterlow, 2015). As shown in the previous photo, Sacco posted an update that sparked outrage online and immediately went viral, and she got thousands of new followers and people reaching out to her about this. In fact, an organic hashtag, #HasJustineLandedYet, began trending (Waterlow, 2015). Even though Sacco deleted her account and tried to get rid of the evidence, her reputation was already ruined, and the professional damage was already done. What stands out about this case is the fact that Sacco is still experiencing the consequences of the incident and has not been able to escape it.

Public shaming is not just for the moment in which a tweet, video, or update is uncovered, but it also follows the unrelenting culture of an entire community of people searching online and sharing updates (even writing posts, articles, and books) about the incident. Jon Ronson, author of the best-selling book *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* (2015), met up with Sacco for an interview and noted the impact this experience had on her as well as those who felt it was their responsibility to take her down on social media.

These are the types of incidents that the internet (and society) does not allow people to forget. However, the need for an understanding of what we can learn from this experience and when it is time to move on as a society must be addressed. The consequences of these public incidents on someone's personal and professional life are significant. We need to have a better approach to educating others about these risks before they fall into a similar situation.

In many other cases, people have been fired due to insensitive or controversial tweets and social media updates shared on their personal accounts. For example, film director James Gunn was removed from *Guardians of the Galaxy* when people saw racist comments on his Twitter/X account, although he was reinstated years later (Fleming, 2019). Other celebrities such as country music stars Morgan Wallen and Jason Aldean, actors Johnny Depp and Will Smith, and author J.K. Rowling have faced many attempts of being taken down, but have survived. This is an example of the trend of “being canceled.”

Cancel culture attempts to stop giving support to [the person who posted the insensitive content]. The act of canceling could entail boycotting an actor’s movies or no longer reading or promoting a writer’s works. The reason for cancellation can vary, but it usually is due to the person in question having expressed an objectionable opinion, or having conducted themselves in a way that is unacceptable, so that continuing to patronize that person’s work leaves a bitter taste. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Other cases in which celebrities and brands have been canceled or nearly canceled include the following:

- Anthony Constantino, co-founder of Sticker Mule, posted their support for former President Trump after an assassination attempt in July 2024.
- TikTok influencer Hayley Kalil went viral after her 2024 Met Gala TikTok duet with the sound “Let them Eat Cake” dressed as Marie Antoinette. It led fans and audience members to call for canceling Kalil and all celebrities in general, via a movement called Blockout 2024, advocating for the public to stop supporting their products, movies, businesses, and more.
- Rapper and signer Lizzo, who rose to prominence and gained a large following due to her body positivity messages, was accused by former dancers and team members about hostile work environments and body shaming.
- Singer Justin Timberlake faced backlash after singer Britney Spears came out with her memoir *The Woman in Me* in 2023, painting Timberlake in not the most positive light during their relationship in the early 2000s.
- Google’s Paris 2024 Olympics commercial about a father and daughter writing a fan letter received negative attention because it focused on Gemini and using AI instead of engaging in conversation.
- Brands Tractor Supply and John Deere discontinued their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and roles within the company after concerns from conservative activists came to light on social media.
- Bud Light faced backlash and calls of boycotts on and offline for partnering with influencer and TikTok creator Dylan Mulvaney in 2023.

Cancel culture for brands, individuals, and organizations has continued to grow, but this phenomenon has raised some concerns related to the ramifications for someone’s future and livelihood. As some have said, cancel culture has become aligned with censorship, limiting the ability to have free speech (Goldstein, 2020).

Here are some things to note about cases of being canceled (Lewis, 2019):

- Be aware of all that is being said. Have an open mind and know that the cancel culture movement on social media happens rapidly, sometimes at light speed.
- Identify the root of what started the cancel culture. Exploring who (individuals, groups, or influencers) sparked the conversation on the cancel culture movement is crucial.
- Listen, monitor, and evaluate what is being shared, said, and discussed. Being present is important to make sure you are able to control the narrative and to determine how to respond.
- Know that the canceled moment is just a moment, and that it does not define a person. Humans make mistakes, and how they respond to these mistakes is more important than ever. How brands and individuals respond can help shape the movement and intensity of the emotions to shift gears from one side of the spectrum to the other.
- Learn from the experience. Understand the takeaways from the experience, and think about what to do in any similar future events.

Social media managers can get into trouble as well, sometimes for posting on an official account instead of a personal one. Consider the case of social media professional from the Missouri Attorney General's Office. One of their employees was fired after writing a controversial social media post about Kansas City Chiefs kicker Harrison Butler, on the public account for the office on Twitter/X. As a response to this situation, the office stated "The message was clearly inappropriate for a public account. The City has correctly apologized for the error, will review account access, and ensure nothing like it is shared in the future from public channel" (KAKE, 2024). This shows the implications and consequences one update and post has on future employment and brand management for the employer.

In each of these different cases, posting on social media resulted in a firing. Each individual involved experienced a different outcome, and while it is important to note that not all social media posting fails are equal, they all share the experience of a negative impact on a reputation or personal brand, as well as a professional brand.

*Privacy.* Privacy is a big issue in the social media community—where your data are stored, who has access, and whether or not platforms are following the laws related to privacy issues. Several agencies and regulatory bodies are actively involved in privacy related to social media, including the FTC. The FTC oversees a variety of elements, but when it comes to social media and privacy, it looks at whether or not the sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) publish how they work and what they do in terms of privacy and collecting information about individual users (Claypoole, 2014).

Two big new privacy regulations were recently approved. The first, the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, was launched in 2018 in the European Union. This regulation makes organizations aware of the privacy needs of their users, while also empowering users to control their own personal data and what they are willing to share with brands and organizations (European Union, n.d.).

The second, the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)**, focuses on "certain requirements on operators of websites or online services directed to children

under 13 years of age, and on operators of other websites or online services that have actual knowledge that they are collecting personal information online from a child under 13 years of age” (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). This regulation affects certain platforms that have been gaining younger users, such as YouTube and TikTok. TikTok, a platform that originated in China, has been in the news for privacy violations, especially when it comes to children’s data (O’Donnell, 2020). Various states also have kid influencer laws, including

- Illinois: Illinois was the first U.S. state to pass a child influencer law, which took effect in July 2024. It requires parents to set aside earnings in a trust for minors under age sixteen who appear in at least 30 percent of monetized content, and gives children the right to sue for unpaid wages once they turn eighteen (Latifi, 2024).
- California: This law states that least 15 percent of a child’s earnings be placed in a trust and applies to those appearing in 30 percent or more of monetized content, with added requirements for tracking screen time and earnings (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2024).
- Minnesota: This law bans children under age fourteen from appearing in monetized content altogether. It also requires that 100 percent of a child’s earnings be placed into a trust and allows teens aged thirteen and older to request removal of content featuring them (Minnesota House of Representatives, 2024).
- Utah: This law was added to protect kid creators and influencers after the Ruby Franke child abuse case, and requires parents to aside portions of the earnings for the children (Schoenbaum, 2025).

*Copyright infringement.* Copyright infringement may involve the author of a work, a photographer, a videographer, a musician who created the music used in a video, TV footage, the creator of artwork, or a visual content creator. This has become a big issue related to content that is shared, created, and accessed online.

Artists have brought their concerns to both Instagram and Pinterest, ranging from their copyrighted work being shared without attribution to other media outlets creating new content based on original content without permission. However, with the age of AI, voice and likeness being used for social media content is rampant, and is a growing concern for audiences and celebrities. Some accounts have gained viral fame due to deepfakes of celebrities (e.g., Deepfake Tom Cruise), while others are combating accounts to protect their brand and likeness. Celebrities like Taylor Swift and Scarlett Johansson have experienced deepfakes and AI-generated content about them shared on social media, sparking discussions on ownership of voice and presence in the social media community. Other concerns related to the rise of AI and social media include rapid content creation, engagement amplified artificially and not authentically, growth of misinformation, and data protection concerns (Sarkhedi, 2024).

There are, of course, various things to keep in mind regarding copyright and intellectual property when you are signing up to join a social media platform. It is important to know the terms you are signing onto, how much control you have over the content you create, and if any changes are made to these terms. All social media platforms have their own terms of service (as outlined in Table 2.1), but each platform has experienced trouble due to

rising concerns about who “owns” the content being shared—and perhaps used for profitable means. Snapchat, for example, updated its services and advised users that while individual users have “ownership rights,” Snapchat still has power to use their content since it is on the platform:

You grant Snapchat a worldwide, perpetual, royalty-free, sublicensable, and transferable license to host, store, use, display, reproduce, modify, adapt, edit, publish, create derivative works from, publicly perform, broadcast, distribute, syndicate, promote, exhibit, and publicly display that content in any form and in any and all media or distribution methods (now known or later developed).

We will use this license for the limited purpose of operating, developing, providing, promoting, and improving the Services; researching and developing new ones; and making content submitted through the Services available to our business partners for syndication, broadcast, distribution, or publication outside the Services. (Quoted in Williams, 2015)

*Endorsements (bloggers, creators, and influencers).* Whether or not bloggers or **influencers** (individuals who are able to persuade audiences to take action) are getting paid for their content, images, or experiences by a brand is one of the rising legal concerns about social media. The FTC has taken actions to address this concern with bloggers, but more recently has moved on to social media celebrities and influencers. The FTC has updated their expectations, regulations, and policies on influencers and endorsements each year to make sure everything is transparent and not misleading for audiences on social media (Zialcita, 2019). As a result, all influencers have to note when they are getting paid to promote or create content on social with #ad, #sponsored, or acknowledge it publicly to let their community know this is paid content.

The Texas Ethics Commission requires social media influencers to disclose when they are paid for endorsements (Downen, 2024). The purpose is to educate followers about paid promotions and how influencers are being compensated, creating more transparency surrounding the issue of paid endorsement and sponsorships (Downen, 2024). Brands also have to be aware of when endorsements not only not happen, but go wrong. In some cases, influencers actively promote against a particular brand or product they endorsed previously, which is called “de-influencing” on social media (Scott, 2024). Many influencers practice this trend to combat the rise of overconsumption and materialism, but it also negatively impacts the brand’s reputation and influencer/brand relationship (Scott, 2024).

Some influencers and celebrities fail at endorsement mentions in a big way. Scott



Screenshot of post by Scott Disick

Instagram/Scott Disick (@letthelordbewithyou)



Disick learned this lesson when he copied and pasted a note from a brand without putting it into his own words (Beale, 2016). This example shows the implications that companies need to be aware of when targeting influencers and celebrities to promote their brands. Consumers today are very aware of the true nature of an influencer's promotion, and they want these recommendations and insights to be authentic, not paid. In addition, while number of followers and size of community are important indicators to consider, they are not everything. Communities come and go, and if followers detect any misleading or fake actions by an influencer, they will leave and the influencer will no longer be prominent.

## Ethical and Legal Best Practices in Social Media

Social media offers many opportunities and resources for users to share, create, report, and communicate with each other. With each opportunity comes a unique challenge that constantly must be addressed in addition to forecasting future ethical and legal incidents that may impact social media practices. A strong ethical and legal best practice to have in social media is a social media policy, which is a document that outlines guidelines, expectations, and actions that are expected to be followed for online engagement on social media. Many corporations, businesses, news organizations, and professionals have their own respective social media policies that help guide them through their online correspondence to promote a strong brand image and community, as well as serve as a guide to prevent behaviors or actions that could spark a crisis.

One case that really put this front and center involved Domino's Pizza in 2009. In April of that year, two Domino's employees went rogue and decided to film themselves being inappropriate with the food being served. This video caught the attention of a blogger, who then went to Twitter/X to voice his concern. As a result, Domino's responded (actually creating a Twitter/X account because it didn't have one before) to reassure its customers and others about the situation (Clifford, 2009).

Social media policies are one way to set forth guidelines for behavior to be followed in the workplace. Many brands have incorporated these policies over the years and have tailored them to their own values and perspectives on social media. For example, National Public Radio (NPR) has a comprehensive social media policy outlining its expectations from employers and media outlets. Accuracy is one of the most important elements highlighted in the policy since NPR is dedicated to making sure the information presented to its media outlets is correct and verified (NPR, 2017).

While most organizations, corporations, and businesses have a social media policy, it is important that they share certain points of information with their employees directly but also with their audiences publicly. Having a social media policy will help educate and inform your audiences about what to expect from you online. Here are some must-haves for your social media policy:

- **Introduction to the overall purpose of your AI and social media policy.** Outline not only why it is important to have a social media policy but also why it is important to the organization, business, media outlet, or agency you represent. Your rationale for the use of these guidelines and practices for your internal and external audience is crucial to state in this section. Make sure to personalize and frame it for the organization in question. Yet also make sure to include a statement that discusses the requirements. Education on your social media policy and guidelines needs to happen as frequently as they need to be

updated. New legal and ethical scenarios that could possibly face your brand need to be addressed and added to the guidelines for your social media policy (e.g., AI deepfakes, fake information and news, generative AI content, etc.); holding workshops, online sessions, and educational meetings on the changes and revisions for the social media policy are ways to accomplish this.

- **Employee conduct and personal identity section.** Employees are on the front lines of social media and are essentially brand ambassadors for their company, brand, or business. An employee conduct and personal identity code outlines what employees' roles are and how they are expected to present themselves professionally on social media. For example, you do not want to advocate for a client's work without disclosing you are actually working on that campaign. That's why you often see the hashtag #client being shared. The same goes for representing your role at an agency, media outlet, or business.
- **Added section for representing the brand and following the law.** Make sure your employees and everyone on board knows what they can share that helps represent the brand professionally and also what they need to be aware of from a legal standpoint. Terms of service, sharing of copyright content, disclosure of confidential information, privacy, respect for others, and obeying the laws online are just some of the things that need to be included here.
- **Overall tone on social media.** Being respectful and professional, and not engaging in a flame war or going rogue, should also be advised. Outlining what to do to combat hacking, fix errors, address crises or threats, report fake accounts, or handle another challenge in a systematic way can help improve the situation further. Also, this provides consistent action steps that employees can take in order to identify, discuss, and handle specific situations in a timely manner.
- **Diversity, inclusion, and representation policies.** Be inclusive for all audiences, perspectives, gender roles, and communities on social media. This is where the diversity and inclusion statements and policies from the organization, brand, or agency can be addressed and integrated into social media practices. (This is discussed more in Chapter 4.)
- **Protocols for early warning signs or crises.** Have a clear line of communication for social media activities that are positive, but also have a plan in place in case something happens that brings forth challenges for the company, agency, or brand. Identifying policies for crisis communication is a good step toward creating awareness and expectations of these practices for all employees. How to handle crises is a skill that all employees need to learn.
- **Responsibility for what you create, write, and share.** Be aware that what you share is for public viewing. Sometimes you will see a lot of discussion that is positive toward your client, the business you represent, or even yourself. However, sometimes you will get negative or even hateful comments directed toward you and your brand. Noting and reporting what each comment means for the brand and for yourself is important. Talking with your team or with close confidants about your situation is best. You always want to take action to make sure everyone on your team is aware of what is happening, and brainstorm solutions and

responses that fall in line with your core values and principles in a timely manner. You should never be alone in handling these types of situations. Contacting your legal team with the necessary documents and evidence (screen shots, links, messages, etc.) will help in this situation as well.

- **Authenticity and values presented online.** Your values for your organization offline need to be present and nurtured online as well. The trouble comes when there is a disconnect between how people see you online versus offline. Be true to yourself for a personal brand, but also note the impact being authentic has for your employer. Apply common sense to understanding the overall culture inside both your organization and the community with which you interact. Take time to see what others are saying, and put your best foot forward each and every time you interact with someone online. Be the better person because each conversation, interaction, and piece of content shared online contributes to your overall reputation and brand.

## Chapter Summary

The legal and ethical landscape will continue to change and evolve for social media. We will be faced with new cases, legal suits, ethical challenges, and situations. Knowing the foundations of professional ethical conduct while also being aware of what the law says is more important than ever for social media professionals. You do not want to wait and ask for permission for certain tasks—that is too risky for the social media landscape today. Educating not only yourself, but your team, about some of these rising issues and situations on both professional and personal levels is key for success in the industry. In addition, we must understand that ethical and legal behavior comes not only from the top down but also from the bottom up. Ethical and legal practices from company leadership are expected since they contribute to the overall environment of the company and its future placement in the industry. If no standards are set, or value is not attributed to ethical or legal practices for social media at the organization, media outlet, or agency you belong to, move along to a place that does have these values. It only takes one misstep to wreak havoc on your personal brand for years to come.

## Thought Questions

1. Based on the reading, what is the current legal landscape in social media? What are some of the main issues to be aware of? How have you seen some of these issues play out for influencers or brands you follow?
2. Define *ethics*. What are some of the key principles in your code of ethics for using social media?
3. Identify current legal challenges and risks on social media. How would you address them?
4. What are your thoughts on having warning labels for social media? Are they necessary in today's society, or not? Provide your rationale.
5. From a legal and ethical standpoint, what are some benefits and challenges of using influencers and social media personalities on social media?

6. What is cancel culture? What are the ramifications and trends we need to know about cancel culture for social media practices? Identify two strategies that brands and individuals can use to navigate the social media waters if they are “canceled.”
7. Identify the key elements of a social media policy. What is mandatory to include, and what three areas would you add or expand for your social media policy?

## Exercises

1. Write an ethical code of conduct for your own social media practices. What are some of the main concepts you feel are necessary to adhere to for your own personal conduct online? What concepts or behaviors do you feel strongly against and want to make sure to avoid on social media?
2. Influencer marketing and creator relations and engaging with a large audience online has become quite the trend for businesses and brands. You have been asked to engage with influencers as part of the PGA Tour. What would you advise the board of directors for the PGA Tour to keep in mind when it comes to working with influencers based on FTC regulations? Write a few of these points down, and for each point, discuss how you would address it proactively and some of the risks to avoid.
3. You have been asked to create a social media policy for a local nonprofit. The company has never had such a policy but wants to make sure its employees are aware of what they can and cannot do online. Design a one-page social media policy for the local nonprofit based on what you feel they need to have in place for their employees on social media.
4. You have been asked to create a workshop presentation outlining the pros and cons related to social media for parents to share with their children. Identify the main risks and challenges facing children in regard to social media, and highlight solutions to address each point with resources and best practices.
5. You have obtained an internship with a well-known TikTok creator, but they have caused quite the scandal and they are now trending as being canceled on social media. Identify steps you will recommend to your boss for handling the situation.

## Key Terms

Alternative accounts

Bots

Canceled

Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act  
(COPPA)

Ethics

Flame war

General Data Protection Regulation  
(GDPR)

Going rogue

Influencers

Trendjacking