

Social Media Portals as a Modern Form of Social Communication: An Exemplification of Polish Mediasphere

Jaroslav Kinal, PhD

Michal Skora, M.A.

University of Rzeszow, Poland

Abstract

Today, internet plays an indisputable role as a means of communication, information flow, and as a point of meeting the needs of a growing number of people. The authors noted more and more important role that mass communication plays in social media. This article presents various definitions of the phenomenon and the proposed typology, and threats which entails using either incompetent social media today. This article is intended to facilitate the communication process for researchers, sociologists, media experts, and people interested in the study of the phenomenon of online communication.

Keywords: Social media, social communication, e-communication, social media portals

Introduction

Today, internet plays an indisputable role as a means of communication, information flow, and as a point of meeting the needs of a growing number of people. Consequently, the proportion of internet users is constantly growing around the world (Stachura, 2008). K. Krzysztofek suggests to assume the Internet as a social institution is non-linear in nature. This results in the need to go beyond the current discourse and reflection on mediów. Sieć facilitates the development processes interaktywizacji and personalization. As a result, this leads to the breakdown of traditional hierarchies (Krzysztofek, 2006).

Virtual communities have many features that exist in reality. They are characterized by interaction, sense of identity, and belonging. In addition, they have their proper rites, rituals, forms of expression, the existence of a common purpose, standards, and rules (MacQuail, 2007).

I.

Social networking comes from the English term “social network.” The social network is a variety of online communities which are grouped in a specific website, and its users satisfy their need for communication with other people through the rotation of information, interests, and experiences. A characteristic feature of social networking sites is a complex interaction between users (Frankowski & Juneja, 2009). Therefore, the features common to most of these sites are the following functions:

- (1) Create your profile (user adds pictures and basic information);
- (2) About yourself;
- (3) Search for friends on the specific qualities;
- (4) Create a list of friends;
- (5) Private messaging;
- (6) Formation of linking groups of people according to different interests;
- (7) Adding a new group of users;
- (8) A place to discuss such as discussion forums, chats, blogs etc.;
- (9) Possibility of posting links, photos, videos, and music (Stachura, 2008).

The number of interactions between the members of social networking gives the portals dynamic character. Many social networking sites offers the option of geolocation; an information which determines the place of residence or domicile of the user (Kinal, 2015). Thus, social networking sites are used for maintaining and strengthening the existing relationships that are most often associated with offline (Stachura, 2008).

Social networking sites began at the end of the twentieth century when the first social networking sites was created in the United States. In 1979, UseNet- system newsgroups was found. This system, however, initiated the exchange of information between users on a mass scale. Another important system is the history portal that was created in 1995. This was Classmates.com, and their aim is to maintain contacts with former colleagues and classmates (Frankowski & Juneja, 2009). However, the official beginning of the new forms of communication in the network is considered to rise. SixDegrees.com service, which operated in 1997-2000, makes contact with family and friends possible. These portals provide an opportunity to build your profile, locate members who share similar interests with you, and send messages to people who are on your friends list (Gruber et al., 2012). The popularity of social networking sites began to grow in 2002, thanks to the appearance of the portal Friendster.com. This portal was oriented primarily for maintaining social contacts, as well as Tribe.net and

LinkedIn, which is regarded as the largest business social network (Stachura, 2008).

Relationship between users of different services was developed. Member's portals initiated the formation of new groups which combines common interests and friends. These relationships have evolved in a more virtual manner. Gradually, social networks have been increasingly controlled by the users themselves. The members began to create content and service issues, as well as making comments on other publication. Contacts between users have developed into a multi-dimensional relation. Also, the exchange of information has replaced conversations conducted live via instant messaging. Everyday life is involving the exchange of files, editing them, as well as their participation in many groups (Malecki Malecka, 2011). As a breakthrough, researchers recognized the social networking site MySpace.com which was launched in 2003. However, within a short time, it became a huge success and has gained recognition among million of users. It offers its users the opportunity to show the personal "I," as well as present their own artistic creation. In 2004, the *Facebook.com* site was found. Originally, facebook was focused on students of secondary schools and universities in the United States. Thus, within a short time, it has become so popular as *MySpace.com*. Currently, the only competitor of *Facebook* may be Google, which brings together social services available on *Google Profiles* and *Google Buzz*, and provides new features such as video meetings or circles of friends (Stachura, 2008).

Social networking sites in Poland began to appear later in the United States. However, the most important sites of social character include Grono.net and *Epuls*. These portals are aimed at maintaining professional relationships which include *GoldenLine*. In 2001, *Fotka.pl* service was created and modeled on *HotOrNot.com*. Over time, it gained its functionality because it gave opportunity to the publication of user's photos, their evaluation, as well as commenting. At the same time, it brings together the largest number of users of social network in Poland *Grono.net* which was established in 2004. The best known service is our - Class, which gives you the opportunity to find friends from childhood and youth. However, the group of friend's portal users invites friends not only with same classes and schools, but also all the people known to him. In 2007, the portal began to gain popularity and as a result became the most popular Polish service. Another service is *Blox.pl*, which allows free blogging. Here, members can publish their memories, photos, reviews, and make references to interesting articles and pages (Gruber et al., 2012).

Social networking sites have gained worldwide recognition because of the evolution of the Internet and the transformation of communication. Part of the services has gained attention in some countries or regions. Portal

Hi5 won recognition in Latin America and South America, as well as in Thailand. In turn, *Orkut*, created a month earlier than *Facebook*, is common in Brazil and India. The fact about creating new portals that offers their users a new hitherto unknown possibilities and functions should be noted, while contributing to a distortion of the existing hierarchy of popularity of social networking sites (Stachura, 2008; Frankowski & Juneja, 2009).

Basically, social networking can be divided due to its availability:

- (1) External, that is public and accessible to all Internet users;
- (2) Internal, or closed community, which consists of a group of one company, associations, and those which can be reached via an invitation from a friend.

Social networking can be divided by the type of main body:

- (1) Oriented user;
- (2) Oriented to the group.

Portals share due to availability:

- (1) A fully free;
- (2) Providing part of the function after paying a subscription.

Social networking sites can also be classified due to their nature:

- (1) Professional;
- (2) Personals.

Subsequently, services are divided because of the interactions in which the user enters the system:

- (1) A high degree of interaction with the user;
- (2) A medium degree of interaction with the user;
- (3) A small degree of interaction with the user.

Portals can be divided because of the way in which they obtain income.

These ways include:

- (1) Deriving income from advertising;
- (2) With a subscription;
- (3) Non-profit services that do not contain ads (Frankowski & Juneja, 2009).

In Poland, social networks that have been successful can be divided into three groups:

- (1) World giants such as MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook;
- (2) Native counterparts foreign services e.g. Nasza-klasa.pl, Fotka.pl;
- (3) New ideas such as copyright format. 28dni.pl (Stachura, 2008).

Figure 1. Main abroad social media portals in Poland in chronological order

Name	Year of founding	Description
Myspace	2003	This service gave the opportunity to establish contact with other users without having to enter a real name. Portal gathers mostly people who are interested in musical works. Young performers thanks to service could show up in the industry by publishing works on the Internet.
Linkedin	2003	Portal supports career development, user profiles include a curriculum vitae. Internet users using this service can search for a job, ask for advice or recommendations
Facebook	2004	It is one of the most popular sites of this type. It is global. The service can be used for retrieval of old friends, family members, and people who share the same passions. It also allows self-presentation, to share information about themselves, the publication of their achievements, as well as the acquisition of interesting proposals
YouTube	2005	The key role played by movies. Users can post, watch, and comment on videos.
Twitter	2006	The biggest advantage of this service is a microblog. Here, users can post short texts containing a maximum of 140 characters, which are available to all persons tracking the profile. Portal is valued because Internet users can use it to comment on everything that is going on around her. The service is also used by politicians, sports stars, and television.
Vkontakte	2006	This is a russian and ukrainian language community portal. It is commonly known as a russian facebook. The main aim of the site is in gathering and connecting diasporas from east europe.

Source: <http://freeisoft.pl/2015/11/ranking-polskich-portali-spolecznosciowych-na-rok-2015/>, <http://interaktywnie.com/biznes/artykuly/biznes/grono-net-juz-nie-jest-serwisem-spolecznosciowym-teraz-jest-23771>

Figure 2. Main native-polish social media sites

Name	Year of founding	Description
Fotka.pl	2001	Portal allows you to post photos and comment on them. It also has a forum, chat, "forum event", which allows the organization of meetings and "clans" among a group of people with similar views and interests. It is possible to purchase additional features, such as the award nickname opportunity to create clans, the ability to add an unlimited number of comments.
Grono.net	2004	The basic principle of the website is to create your own profile with a photo and information about yourself. Service users

		accumulate on the thematic clusters converse on topics of interest. In 2012, the portal has ceased to function. As at that time, everyone could become a member of this site.
Nasza-klasa.pl (nk.pl)	2006	Primary role was to enable the searching of friends from school days; but soon, its role changed. Portal gives you the opportunity to return to the old knowledge, as well as establish new knowledge, add photos and videos, send and receive messages, chat and discussion forums.

Source: <http://freeisoft.pl/2015/11/ranking-polskich-portali-spolecznosciowych-na-rok-2015/>, <http://interaktywnie.com/biznes/artykuly/biznes/grono-net-juz-nie-jest-serwisem-spolecznosciowym-teraz-jest-23771>

Internet as a source of information and means of communication has a wide interest. Its users are primarily young people who live in the "electronic caves." In the virtual space, they can meet a lot of pitfalls and dangers which they are often not aware of. These threats are dimensional. Abuse of a computer and the Internet may be the reason for a severe change in personality and a psychosocial functioning of users. It can also be the cause of many social pathologies (Andrzejewska, 2014).

Furthermore, the most popular distractions in online communications are as follows:

1. Addiction to the internet: This involves being forced online. In literature, we could find several types of this dysfunction:

- Information overload, involving the forced extraction of information.
- Internet network, which consists of addiction from online social contacts; addicts establish contact only via the network.
- Internet pornography involves viewing pornographic materials or participation in chats of a sexual nature (Andrzejewska, 2014).

2. Cyber Friends: In the literature, this term referred to those studied in discussion forums, chatrooms, instant messaging, and social networks. Such persons know to the extent that they allow themselves to get to know. Threats making friends on the Internet spends more and more time on their computer. They think that the knowledge of the network were better than those in the real world. Thus, they are isolating themselves from the world, living in a virtual world (Andrzejewska, 2014).

3. Cyberbullying also called cyberbullying or cyberagresja: This term refers to the use of violence with the use of information and communication technologies. The basic forms of this phenomenon include "harassment; threats; blackmails using the network; publish or distribute libelous, compromising information, photos, videos and impersonating a network at someone against his will." Cyberbullying has a significant effect more on the

psyche of young people than in the real world. The most common forms of cyberbullying include: publishing incorrect data, intimidation, impersonating another person, placing the network insults, threats formulation, recording the wrong photos or videos, send ridiculing materials using phone, and hacking into e-mail accounts (Wojtasik, 2007).

4. Grooming, or cybersex and pedophilia on the network: The main purpose of pornography is sexual arousal of network user. Human dignity is compromised, thereby causing violence. Its consumption stimulates sexual desire and leads to a search for thrills, which leads to sexual promiscuity. A derivative of Internet pornography is sexting which consists of sending multimedia messages with an erotic example (nude photos). Exposing children to pornography beyond their adaptive capacity may lead to assimilation and spotted sprymityzowanej vision of sexuality. Content removal that are available on the Internet shows the deceitful image of femininity and masculinity. They depict sexuality in the category instinctive processes. Primarily, the so-called hard pornography can lead young people to the unconscious conditioning and combining pleasure of brutality and aggression. This shows the objectification of women, which is presented as provocative sexual activity, worse than the venurability of the man. This is illustrated as a "macho" sexual record. This can lead to increased acceptance of violence in interpersonal relations, frigidity and hostile attitudes towards women, unconscious acquiescence to violence, and rape against a female. Nowadays, the main center of ads prostytucyjnych has become the internet. The Internet provides many opportunities for the development of juvenile prostitution. Young people increasingly involve themselves in these acts as a source of income. With the current state, the legal advertising of prostituted persons is completely allowed (Krawulska-Ptaszyńska, 2003)

5. Stalking is defined as abusing victims on the Internet.

6. Internet gambling is a kind of gambling conducted via the Internet. Players are playing here for the money, both virtual and real. An important element of e-gambling is its anonymity. Anonymity is combined with the lack of control over who enters the game. It means that online gambling can be used by anyone without restriction, even children and youth (Andrzejewska, 2014).

Conclusion

Today, the mass media play an important role in society - shaping public opinion. For this reason, they are called the fourth power, and are also regarded as the first priority by some. The role the media should play is to inform consumers about what happened in the culture and politics both in the country and the world.

Specific functions of the media have been identified according to the study of Bogusława Dobek - Ostrowska and Robert Wiszniewski (2007):

1) The Information Function - Inform users about current events at home and abroad.

2) The Educational Function - Interpretation of the meaning and importance of events and explaining and analyzing them.

3) The Function of a Platform for Public Debate - To facilitate the formation of public opinion, and to stimulate the expression of different views.

Nowadays, the role of typical media (such as television, radio, and newspapers) is being taken over by social media. Social media, like twitter and facebook, are beginning to serve as a serious information hub.

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