Chapter 27

It's Complicated:
Social Media's Impact on the Relationship Between Our Personal and Professional Lives

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an intricate part of daily life. Posting, tweeting, and chatting have become common practices since the birth of the social network. This technological revolution has altered the way we interact and communicate in fundamental ways. Consequently, a cultural shift has accompanied this change, with notions such as etiquette and personal boundaries undergoing dramatic transformation. In the virtual world, the lines that separate individuals' personal and professional lives often become blurred resulting in some confusion about what constitutes appropriate social media behavior. With that in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss key issues associated with the impact of social media has on individuals' professional lives. This task will employ a multipronged approach in describing the growth, use, and potential problems of social media in the workplace. In addition, policies and legal statutes regarding social media use by academic and human service professionals will be discussed at length.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of social media has rapidly increased over the past few years. Online behaviors such as tweeting, chatting, posting photos, statuses, etc., have become such common practices that many people in our society either cannot, or do not, want to remember what life was like before the birth of the social network. This technological revolution has changed our ability to communicate with one another in fundamental ways. Friends have been replaced with followers; conversations have been replaced with comments; and listening has been replaced with likes. Consequently, the popularity of social media has

skyrocketed over the past few years, as more and more people are reaping the benefits of being online in both their personal and professional lives. However, as the advantageous as the world of social media may appear, the rules of conversing, setting personal and professional boundaries, and collaborating are becoming far more complex. In a virtual world, the lines that separate individuals' personal and professional lives are no longer mutually exclusive; rather, they often become blurred. This is especially true for education and human services professionals. As a result, it can be rather difficult to determine what actions constitute appropriate social media behavior.

GROWTH OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become a ubiquitous component of daily life, but this growth and evolution has been in the works for several decades. The first online forums for communication were Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), which emerged in the late 1970s (Park, 2010). BBS operated over telephone lines, and while this communication system was functional, it was incredibly slow. The conversations on BBS remained mostly local because long-distance rates applied. Usenets and CompuServ communication systems, developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were similar to social networking sites today. Usenets was primarily used for news updates, while CompuServ was a business-oriented site that provided a forum for the sharing and dissemination of news and email correspondence. CompuServ provided consumers with a popular chat feature however, it was both slow and expensive ($6 per hour, plus long-distance telephone adding up to almost $30/hr). Despite the drawbacks, CompuServ was arguably the first large scale corporate attempt to bring an interactive, "social" online experience to the masses (Yusuf, Al-Banawi, & Al-Imam, 2013). During the 1980s and early 1990s, online services rose to popularity concurrently along with BBSes and catered to a more corporate and mainstream home-user by offering a safe environment for social networking.

The 1980s welcomed America Online (AOL), which revolutionized the Internet on home computers across the world. AOL gained critical mass with aggressive marketing strategies that included CD promotions and direct mail campaigns. AOL made the Internet more accessible and greatly increased its ease of use. Socially, it offered the ability to create member profiles and search for friends. AOL's marketing campaign also included one of the most epic product placements of all time in the film "You've Got Mail" – bringing "social" online culture and romance into the Hollywood mainstream (Kilbourne, 2012). The 1990s provided more platforms for Internet access, but was largely restricted to those with legitimate university/government/military connections. But between 1994 and 1995, private Internet service providers (ISPs) began to pop up, giving millions of home-users the ability to enjoy the online experience. Sites such as Classmates.com and Sixdegrees.com were founded which allowed users to locate former classmates online. While users of Classmates.com could not create their own profiles, Sixdegrees.com users could create a profile, join a group, invite friends, and read others' profiles. Both sites rose in popularity until newer modes of online communication such as AOL instant messenger, Blogger, and LiveJournal began to outpace them in terms of functionality (Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

The golden era of social media began in early 2000 with the introduction of Friendster, which arguably launched and paved the way for social media, as we know it. The site rose in popularity for both users and aggressive marketing investors who realized the potential to advertise to the masses. It uniquely displayed the connective web between friends and became the most popular social site since SixDegrees.com. The popularity of Friendster quickly dissolved with the introduction of MySpace,

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