

## The Good, the Bad and the Likes

By Rachel Loveday

Logging into Facebook to check whether friends have *liked* witty status updates, retweeting a favourite celebrity's 140-character insight into the world or where they experienced their most recent shopping spree and viewing "cute animal" videos on YouTube has now become as much of a part of an Australian woman's daily routine as buying a morning coffee and cooking dinner.

Everyone has their own reasons for using social media; whether it's to remain close to friends and loved ones or to clarify that everyone's perfect celebrities *actually* are human beings and some people just love to watch a Labrador trying to get their beloved tennis ball out of a pool, after a long day. Social media has both advantages and disadvantages, like everything else in life. But what does social media really provide? Is there really more to it than funny posts and what Ashton Kutcher had for breakfast?

### THE SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

Social media has taken over the world so much that it is now its own world. There are over eleven million Facebook users, over 1.8 million Twitter users and YouTube is the number one video site—and that's just in Australia alone, the social media world is so large, that not having a Facebook account is almost unheard of. These statistics also state that the age groups that use social media the most are older than social media itself. Users aged 25-34 use Facebook more than any other age group whereas users aged 45-54 use Twitter more than any other age group.

Despite the fact that the social media world has only established itself within the last decade, the need for information and human connectivity has always been present—albeit through a different medium as Dr. Theodor Mitew, Convenor of Digital Media and Communications at the University of Wollongong explains.

"The thing with (social) media is that it just another channel of communication. If you go to the smaller towns of say Italy or Greece, where there is a small or poor internet connection, what you discover is people sitting outside and chatting and the standard reaction from people discovering that is, 'oh this is a nice community'. What these people are doing is gossiping and exchanging information. Now we are doing it online, at another level."

So does adding another level to communication make socialising easier?

According to Dr. Mitew, one way that social media makes life easier is that it niche communities can form within it.

"If someone was collecting the back issues of Batman comics, they would have no one to talk to. But come the internet, they now have 100,000 other like people and now they form a community. This would be impossible without the internet."

### TOO MUCH FREEDOM?

Now that niche communities are forming and familial relationships and friendships are becoming closer with the availability of social media and the internet that does mean that there is too much freedom online?

The fact that once you post something on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and any other form of social media, it belongs to them and not you is common knowledge, however that still doesn't stop the mistakes happening and issues arising. Olympians; Nick D'Arcy and Kenrick Monk had a social media ban enforced upon them during the Olympics after photos of them posing with guns at a California shooting range went viral after they posted them on their own Facebook profiles, the Australian Olympic Committee also had the swimmers leave after they competed in their events. These mistakes not only occur on a personal level but also on a professional level. A Vodafone employee was dismissed from his job after tweeting and posting negative comments about customers on Facebook, after this employee was dismissed, Vodafone was forced to state that his opinion was not the opinion of the company.

These mistakes and issues happen on a daily basis and are not going to go away any time soon, if ever and despite the different types of context with each user's individual post, whether they go viral or not, Dr Mitew believes that there is no such thing as "too much freedom."

"I don't think there is such a thing as too much freedom. There should be a place for any or all sorts of content. This is the essence of what the internet is all about an uninterrupted form of information, for example, someone might post something and I might disagree with what they are saying, but I will defend to the end, their right to say it."

## **FREE MARKETING**

Social media isn't just about socialising anymore. Businesses and companies are reaping the benefits of social media by setting up their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts in order to connect with their customers and improve their businesses overall.

Ane Glahn-Bertelsen, founder of Sifters; an events and marketing business, uses social media to promote not only the work of Sifters but two other businesses; *Ka~fe* in Wollongong and Point Hicks Lighthouse in Victoria. Ms Glahn-Bertelsen believes the benefits that businesses experience by using social media is direct contact with their customers as well as what she calls 'free marketing.'

"It's good for businesses to connect with their customer base as they can get direct feedback, there's a huge online world out there and if you're not connecting with your customer base and not giving them that direct connectivity, they won't use your business. It's basically free marketing because it doesn't cost anything, it gets your name out there and gets people talking about you."

Ms Glahn-Bertelsen described her job as providing her clients' businesses with an identity.

“I try to present a voice for the business, make it funny, try to find new and creative ways to interact with the customer base through social media.”

“I’ve found with Ka~Fe, the regular customers have become involved with Ka~Fe’s Facebook page. They’ll comment on the page and upload a few pictures from events. That’s really good. With that small following you grow, people become more interested in the business and I’ve found it builds an online community.”

Even though Ms Glahn-Bertelsen can easily talk about the benefits of social media to promote businesses, she does sometimes feel overwhelmed by all the different medias available.

“Now I’m on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. I wake up in the morning and check them all, I am really connected, although sometimes I worry there’s too much information, that it’s all a bit too much.”

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE FUTURE**

So when there are so many issues, advantages, disadvantages with this wonderful, scary, exciting, innovative world that is social media. How can everyone that uses it live their live both in the social media world and the real world?

Ms Glahn-Bertelsen believes it’s all about moderation between the two worlds.

“I think if you use it in moderation and maintain your personal relationships and use it as a tool to connect on a physical level, then I think social media is a good thing, however if you’re using it too much and it’s the basis for everything you do, then it’s not such a good thing.”

Dr Mitew summarises the issues in one line.

“The potential we have for all sorts of issues is endless, this is the future of social media.”

Yes it is.