**What Is Social Media?**

Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is Internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Users engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications.

While social media is ubiquitous in America and Europe, Asian countries like Indonesia lead the list of social media usage. More than 3.8 billion people use social media.

**Understanding Social Media**

Social media originated as a way to interact with friends and family but was later adopted by businesses that wanted to take advantage of a popular new communication method to reach out to customers. The power of social media is the ability to connect and share information with anyone on Earth, or with many people simultaneously.

Globally, there are more than 3.8 billion social media users. Social media is an ever-changing and ever-evolving field, with new apps such as TikTok and Clubhouse coming out seemingly every year, joining the ranks of established social networks like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. By 2023, the number of social media users in the United States is forecast to increase to approximately 257 million.

According to the Pew Research Center, social media users tend to be younger. Nearly 90 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 29 used at least one form of social media. Further, these users tend to be better educated and relatively wealthy, or earning over $75,000 per year.

**Types of Social Media**

Social media may take the form of a variety of tech-enabled activities. These activities include photo sharing, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, reviews, and much more. Even governments and politicians utilize social media to engage with constituents and voters.

For individuals, social media is used to keep in touch with friends and extended family. Some people will use various social media applications to network career opportunities, find people across the globe with like-minded interests, and share their thoughts, feelings, insights, and emotions. Those who engage in these activities are part of a virtual social network.

For businesses, social media is an indispensable tool. Companies use the platform to find and engage with customers, drive sales through advertising and promotion, gauge consumer trends, and offering customer service or support.

Social media's role in helping businesses is significant. It facilitates communication with customers, enabling the melding of social interactions on e-commerce sites. Its ability to collect information helps focus on marketing efforts and market research. It helps in promoting products and services, as it enables the distribution of targeted, timely, and exclusive sales and coupons to would-be customers. Further, social media can help in building customer relationships through loyalty programs linked to social media.

**Examples of Social Media**

While social media has its positive side, many point to the platform and call out negative features, likening its overuse to an addiction. Some contest it contributes to inattentiveness, stress, and jealousy. The National Center for Biotechnology Information links heavy social media use to depression. Also, many times, social media may be a conduit for misleading information and falsehoods.

The 2016 American presidential election has well-documented accounts of the impact of the ability to spread false information through the platform. Such a phenomenon leverages the power of social media, allowing anyone to reach an audience of millions with content that lacks oversight or fact-checking.

Facebook is the largest social media platform in the world, with a clear advantage over other social media, though it has similar audiences to others like Twitter and Instagram.

**Benefits of Social Media**

Social media has changed the way that we all interact with each other online. It's given us the ability to discover what's happening in the world in real-time, to connect with each other and stay in touch with long-distance friends, and in order to have access to endless amounts of information at your fingertips. In many senses, social media has helped many individuals find common ground with others online, making the world seem more approachable.

According to a survey by Pew Research Center, the use of social media is correlated with having more friends and more diverse personal networks, especially within emerging economies. For many teenagers, friendships can start virtually, with 57% of teens having met a friend online.

Businesses are also using social media marketing to target their consumers right on their phones and computers, building a following in order to build a loyal fan base, and create a culture behind their own brand. Some companies, such as Denny's, have created entire personas on Twitter in order to market to younger consumers using their own language and personas.

**What Is the Use of Social Media?**

Social media allows individuals to keep in touch with friends and extended family. Some people will use various social media applications to network and find career opportunities, connect with people across the globe with like-minded interests, and share their own thoughts, feelings, and insights online.