


Social Media to Social Media Analytics: Ethical Challenges

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ABSTRACT

With the amplification of social media platforms, the importance of social media analytics has exponentially increased for many brands and organizations across the world. Tracking and analyzing the social media data has been contributing as a success parameter for such organizations, however, the data is being poorly harnessed. Therefore, the ethical implications of social media analytics need to be identified and explored for both the organizations and targeted users of social media data. The present work is an exploratory study to identify the various techno-ethical concerns of social media engagement, as well as social media analytics. The impact of these concerns on the individuals, organizations, and society as a whole are discussed. Ethical engagement for the most common social media platforms has been outlined with a number of specific examples to understand the prominent techno-ethical concerns. Both the individual and organizational perspectives have been taken into account to identify the implications of social media analytics.

KEYWORDS

Data Analytics, Ethical Issues, Social Media, Social Media Analytics

1. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction through technology and internet-based tools have collectively given birth to the term “Social Media”. Wide reach and fast speed of communication are some of the important characteristics that make social media very different from other forms of communication (Kumar and Nanda, 2019). Interactivity is another important characteristic of social media, by which participants can freely send, receive, and process content for use by others. Services offered by the social media include: social networking, content production, video and photo sharing, chats and communities etc. People communicate on social media through social networking, which involves the use of websites or applications in order to interact with other people using the social networking sites (Osterrieder, 2013). These people may have same interests or may know each other through other groups or communities. There are plenty of features being offered by social networking sites, which include making profile, finding people with mutual interests, sharing with groups, interacting with people in groups and getting the information shared by other people. As cyberspace has vastly expanded, the part of our life that can be monitored and searched has also largely increased. This has led to a number of negative experiences by the individuals. As per 2017 statistics (Statista, 2017), adults in

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the age group of 18-29 years in United States, who are active on the social media, have experienced the following:

- 75% adults have been offended by the posts, comments or pictures they have seen on social media.
- 56% people's links, comments or posts were seen by unintended people.
- 21% got into trouble with school or work because of pictures posted online.
- 20% lost a potential job opportunity because of the pictures posted online.
- 48% bought something or spent money online, which they did not intend to.

Millions of people are using social media, sharing content and offering their opinions online. It is of no surprise that these tools have begun to pave their way into the professional working environment as well. Globalization, mobility and virtualization have become common trends, whereas the collaborating to make business decisions is on top priority for many companies. Social media is not just a marketing tool, but it has also given a new way for running a business effectively (Kumar and Pradhan, 2016). As an emerging phenomenon, social media provides a platform to disseminate information about the products and services offered by organizations (Kumar and Mittal, 2012). It also provides a platform for conversations and attending to the customer expectations or views. Organizations could utilize the potential of social media and connect through a common social media platform, where consumers and stakeholders can collaborate and make productive decisions (Naik, 2015). However, these social media platforms are highly crowded and very competitive. That is why, it becomes essential for organizations to test and track results in order to identify the most effective strategies based on social media.

The interactive nature of social media provides companies with the ability to engage with customers more directly than the other forms of media. However, this engagement poses many ethical challenges. It has become common practice for companies to create profiles on social networking sites to advertise their goods and services. In addition, the decisions made by the organizations are also influenced by activities on their social media profiles. A business can earn significant long-term benefits with ethical behavior and corporate social responsibility. However, sometimes the organizations may get involved with the alternative routes leading to faster, short-term profits. For example, a firm may unethically attract customers to the firm's products, boost sales and profits, attract more employees, and reduce recruitment costs by just falsifying the information on social media. Companies can also create different analytics on the social media engagement of their customers and use them in business strategies with a motive of earning profit. However, this may lead to many ethical concerns and may destroy the reputation of the company in long run. Such ethical aspects of the technology have given birth to a new interdisciplinary research area known as Technoethics (Fan et al., 2018). On the other hand, companies always focus on their strategies and decision-making process to build and manage their reputation (Kumar & Pradhan, 2016) as the customers are always comfortable buying products or services from a company working in ethical and responsible way. Hence, it becomes very much important to identify the most important technoethics for effectively using the social media as well as the social media analytics.

2. ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Nowadays, social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn have massive number of followers and users. They actively publish and share information in social media almost in fraction of a second. Benefits of these new technologies include the greater transparency and increased public participation cannot definitely overlook the potential drawbacks about validity of information, authenticity of the posted information, source and prolonged existence of inaccurate information. Due to lack of awareness about the danger of social networking, the active users are

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