

Voice of Social Media: 1999-2015

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- Content:** History of Social Media
- a) Topic of Conflict, Freedom of Communication
 - b) Area, Worldwide
 - c) Timeline, 1999-2015
 - d) Involved Parties, Internet Users, Terrorist Groups, World Leaders
 - e) Pre-Conflict / Main Conflict / Post-Conflict Scenarios, Fear of terrorists vs. Free Comment on terrorism
 - f) Summary, With social media, it's possible to expose the truth regarding terrorist activities
 - g) Conclusion. Peace workers need to find ways to use social media to counter world fear of terrorist leaders

Declaration: I hereby declare that I am the intellectual property owner of this article and I further confirm that the article may be uploaded to the website: www.worldmediation.org, for the benefit of mankind.

In the 1900's, readers in any country witnessed the arrival of electronic communication. Programs on radio began to compete with newspaper reports and then television came along, resulting in an even greater mix of choices.

Throughout these formative years the main concept was to broadcast news and entertainment into homes from a central place. News editors served as gatekeepers, automatically limiting news content. Their news stories were received in homes and, as long as the number of networks was limited, viewers, readers and listeners could discuss the shows with friends and family the next day.

The big question was – who was allowed to originate news content? No question, the average person could never hope to be “on the show”. In fact, it was clear that only the media managers, producers, and directors could decide. If they said your news wasn’t important, it wasn’t important! While many people had a desire to be “on the air” to share their ideas, this was impossible for almost everyone. Access for the average person was denied.

Naturally many aspiring writers have tried to get access to a public audience via radio or television, and a limited number have succeeded. However, as with those wanting to publish a novel today, unpublished writers can’t even expect a publisher or agent to read their manuscript.

When the Internet arrived unpublished writers hoped to gain access there. In reality, it was difficult and expensive to start a website that would ever attract a large public audience like that of radio and television broadcasting. And, quite naturally, those websites with many visitors simply basked in their monopoly status and continued limiting access to the Internet in the same way radio and television always do.

In 1999 without being aware that social media would arrive, I was privileged to join a new trend which eventually became the social media we know today. I started a small website called Author-me.com. You can still see my original website on the Internet Archiveⁱ. It explained the purpose this way:

We nurture new writers who pursue a dream of publishing their work. We offer a chance to protect each manuscript, web-publish it, and receive private comments on it via your e-mail address. Here's a bit of encouragement during the tough process of refining your writing skills and submitting manuscripts for publication.ⁱⁱ

Up until 2004, my Internet website Author-me.com and another called Writing.com allowed writers to publish on the Internet with limited readers and minimal chances for readers to comment. Writing.com charged for this service and author-me.com did not.

In the early years of my website, 2002, we encouraged writers to comment on each other's postings, for example in a "critique exchange."ⁱⁱⁱ We were surprised to learn that writers wanted to read comments on their own writings, but not do the work of reading and critiquing other writers. My September 2002 newsletter explained: "Until now, we have implemented reader comment links and a survey system. We have attempted to launch a critique exchange, but sadly it [has been] little used."^{iv}

By 2006 websites like aboutface.com and myspace.com permitted the average person to access the Internet. Soon these same websites converted to a new concept. Free Internet participation was available to anyone, and the Social media bubble burst! Today this new form of communication has invaded the lives of many. It includes Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and many other websites.

This radical development began with very little fanfare. At first they simply offered commercial database services.

Facebook was established by Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University. At about the same time, alternative social media websites MySpace (founded by Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson) gave access, along with Odeo's Twitter.

By 2006 Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Evan Williams and Biz Stone were discussing the idea of using text messaging to share “statuses”, etc., which form the basis of today’s postings.^v

Today’s social media routinely include various categories of content: social, professional, informational, educational, multi-media, academic, and linking to many sources.

Unlike journalism, the social media phenomenon permits a vast number of inputs to communication. Any user can post a profile or “status,” and any interested viewer can comment back in public or private messages. Many users can employ instantaneous reporting of a new thought, issue, or an incident, and in many cases an eyewitness account as well.

Due to the personal origin of these messages, and because any individual can post messages, social media have earned a higher level of credibility. The message reflects ideas of individuals, and the communication is less vulnerable to the political and economic pressures which drive news on the broadcast media.

In cases where government censorship blocks legitimate news, as has been the case in Iran, social media can provide an eyewitness account. This undermines censorship by repressive governments, and helps to inhibit false propaganda. Since the reports are immediate, there's much less chance of bias in reporting. In cases when such reporting is extreme, it's possible for other witnesses to contest and correct the original posting. This is the self-correcting feature of social media.

Erik Qualman's book *Socialnomics* (2013) makes this comment:

The good news is that in this new world order, once you have determined your initial messaging strategy, you have the ability to tweak it for relevancy based on feedback....vi

Extreme viewpoints can be damaging to productive dialogue, but on social media it's typical for extremist views to be followed by contrary comments, leading to more useful conclusions.

The most popular postings are called "memes," and they are said to "go viral" because thousands or millions of communicators choose to "share" them with their friends and contacts.

This can facilitate dissemination of a new piece of knowledge, a new issue, or a new peace initiative. For these reasons, social media offers untapped potential to build harmony into international communication.

While it's important for peacemakers to continue to negotiated solutions, develop research reports and theories, and create artistic and educational expressions, it's important to give new attention to social media, for this new medium may well represent the most effective venue for building peace in today's troubled world.

As I survey social media, I find a general opinion that terrorist leaders have used social media to support their goals, and therefore social media is a negative force.

However, thinking of the power available in this medium, I feel an urgency for us to overcome our fear of retribution by terrorists. We can begin using social media to expose the negative and shameful acts and ideas of terrorists groups.

Occasional news stories cover these atrocities, but social media can offer so much more and help shift world opinion from fear to action. And, for perhaps the first time in world history, communication – not weapons – will turn the tide toward the peace and harmony we all seek.

ⁱ (Internet Archive. Retried June 17, 2015 from <https://archive.org/web/>).

ⁱⁱ Author-me.com home page, October 4, 1999. Retried June 17 from <https://web.archive.org/web/19991004131810/http://author-me.com/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://web.archive.org/web/20021208103346/http://www.slushpile.biz/forum/>

^{iv} <http://www.author-me.com/newsletters/NewsSeptember2002.htm>

^{vi} Erik Qualman, *Socialnomics* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 102.
