

Does Social Media Even Exist Anymore?

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One of the (many) remarkable things about the growth of social media over the past decade is that what had initially seemed like a fad, and then was reborn as a business model, has now simply transitioned into being the landscape itself. As a lawyer who deals with such things, I've been fascinated to watch the number of "social media" questions I get each week steadily shrink. Instead of "please help me with this Facebook issue!" or "Twitter is driving me crazy!" I'm getting more questions that just presume a social media component. The fact that a media campaign, or a branding effort, or a promotion, or a creative work of any kind, is going to be shared, featured or used on social media is standard operating procedure, not a special feature. This has become so much the case that it makes you wonder if social media is even worth talking about as an independent phenomena anymore. Once everything is social media, why bother to act like its different from the entire world.

I'll be honest: most of my speeches and articles and blog posts and tweets over the years have centered on the basic fact that social media is different from what came before. It is the opposite of broadcast models. It requires you to get into conversations. It requires you to view your IP rights and your customers and your competitors as participants in your marketing practices rather than a mere audience. But at this point, that's all a given. If you do virtually anything in the world — as an individual, a company, a government, a charity, you name it — there is a social media angle. Looking at Google News, I cannot find a single thing that happened this week that wasn't somehow affected by social media, and in many instances was platformed on social media itself. Isolation from the social web and the mobile web and whatever else you want to call it is now a pipe dream for everyone who engages in moderen commerce, political activism, government service, artistic expression, or even tries to get a date.

So maybe we need to reorient ourselves. When Neal Stephenson goes to work on a new business that promises to bring the world of Snow Crash (and, cough cough, The Secret Root) into being, where we won't simply talk to each other on social media but will live our lives inside electronic networks that mimic our physical reality, perhaps we should consider ourselves near the end of the "social media era." When something is so pervasive that the world cannot be separated from the phenomena anymore, and the law is finally beginning to adjust to the new reality (although we'll have more to say about that soon), and the next things can already be seen on the horizon, that's the moment when the paradigm has completed its shift. But that's also the moment where we should buckle our seatbelts. Everything is about to change. Again.

National Law Review, Volume IV, Number 358

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