

Why does social media matter?

 By Louise Marsland 6 Jun 2014

Last night I almost posted about poo on Facebook. Again. Really. Then I stopped myself. And decided to write a whole trends column about it instead.

There are days when it's that last poo nappy from your toddler that pushes you over the edge. The one in the clean nappy just after the bath in which she screamed the whole way through because "me don't like baths anymore" (only since last week); and just after the first carefully nutritionally balanced dinner you made that she refused to eat; and the second dinner of pasta and cheese (stuff the veggies this time) that she shared with the dog.

It's those days that you feel the need to share with the world. Even with those who are not parents and who couldn't care less. In fact most people couldn't care less, would prefer you didn't ('TMI!'), but will make a wry comment in sympathy, followed by their own carefully crafted anecdote, or just give you a 'Like' on Facebook or a "LOL".

The question is why? And seriously - how did we live without social media before? Before a global audience to experience and comment on the minutiae of our lives. What did we do with our time? How did we build self-esteem before?

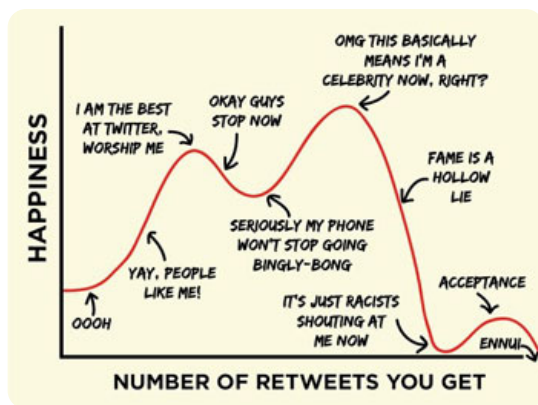


(Image courtesy Buzzfeed.com)

I read somewhere that each Facebook 'Like' or a retweet on Twitter is like a little hug, a pat on the back, or a "I'm with you sister!" moment.

Buzzfeed.com recently produced some really awesome 'charts' supposedly depicting the reality of the various social media platforms. It's tongue-in-cheek obviously and very funny, but actually quite true, I think.

But why does social media matter? And why should you care what I post? Well Google does. Facebook does. And every nappy manufacturer should care and I will probably be served numerous nappy ads after I've sent off this column via my Gmail account (for my sins of posting about poo in the first place)!



(Image courtesy Buzzfeed.com)

The point about social media is that it is a tool to know your customer like never before. To organise them around things they love, things they do, causes they feel passionate about - or feel they should.

Impact

The fact is that the average person has their smartphone with them 20 hours of the entire day and 80% of people reach for their phone first when they wake up, before even getting out of bed, according to SocialMediaWeek.org.

[PewResearch Internet Project](http://PewResearch.org) measured the social impact of social media and found that while social networking sites are used to keep up with close social ties and support their network, users are gregarious and engage more on issues; are more trusting; nurture close relationships; and over half either create new content (46%), or curate it by posting and sharing what they find online (41%).

This is great news for brands: give them great content and they will 'Like' you, really really 'Like' you.

[OnePoll creative market research](http://OnePoll.com) declared the following to be the top reasons that people use social media: social interaction; information seeking; passing time; entertainment; relaxation; expression of opinions; things to talk about; convenience; sharing information; and knowing about others.

Once marketers understand what their consumers are doing online, they can engage with them using the right platform, the right social media tools and craft a strategy that will integrate their brands in the lives of their connected consumers.

SocialMediaWeek.org declared 2014 to be the year of '[salaried social media jobs](http://SocialMediaWeek.org)'. Real ones, not just for interns. They report that while many companies don't really always understand how to use social media to their full advantage, 88% of marketers would like to know the most effective social media uses to connect with customers.

Heard of big data? This is why big data emerged as a massive trend in 2013/14 - because all the info on us consumers is out there, we're happily sharing it with our inappropriate posts about poo and our children and the other things we do, use, recommend, like, favourite, share, comment on, etc etc.

Companies are now facing the conundrum of how to analyse and convert that data into sales leads, spawning another whole industry of tech analysts and software businesses and pop-up digital marketing agencies.

Actually, social media is no longer a trend, it is integrated into our lives and part of our very social fabric - like brands are. It's inevitable that the two will seamlessly assimilate.

So, before you 'SMH', at least we can still 'LOL' when we share 'TMI' even if it is about 'FOMO' or just 'FAWC'.*

*For social media acronyms and slang translations go to Chatslang.com.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mix magazine; Editor: Progressive

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