The Rise of Social Media

How this cultural phenomenon is the future for security

MSA SECURITY

As new computer technologies have developed over the past decade they have ushered in the cultural phenomenon known as social media networking. These technological advances have allowed people to communicate and share information in ways never seen before, with unprecedented growth and popularity. In more recent years, both public and private sectors have begun to understand the potential of Social Media Monitoring online activity in regards to threatening and dangerous behavior. This trend is in part due to an increase of social media outreach before or during an event from protesters, active shooters, drug dealers, and well-developed terrorist organizations.

Social
Media

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, social media can be defined as: *the forms of electronic communication, specifically in the realms of social networking and microblogging, through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos).*

Over the past decade countless social media portals have been created, each with their own strong following of participants. The most popular forms of social media include Facebook, in which users can create a profile where he or she can post personal information, pictures, and thoughts onto a news-feed; and Twitter, where users can, like Facebook, post his or her thoughts onto a news-feed in 140 characters or less (also known as a "tweet"). Other commonly used social websites include Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Google +.
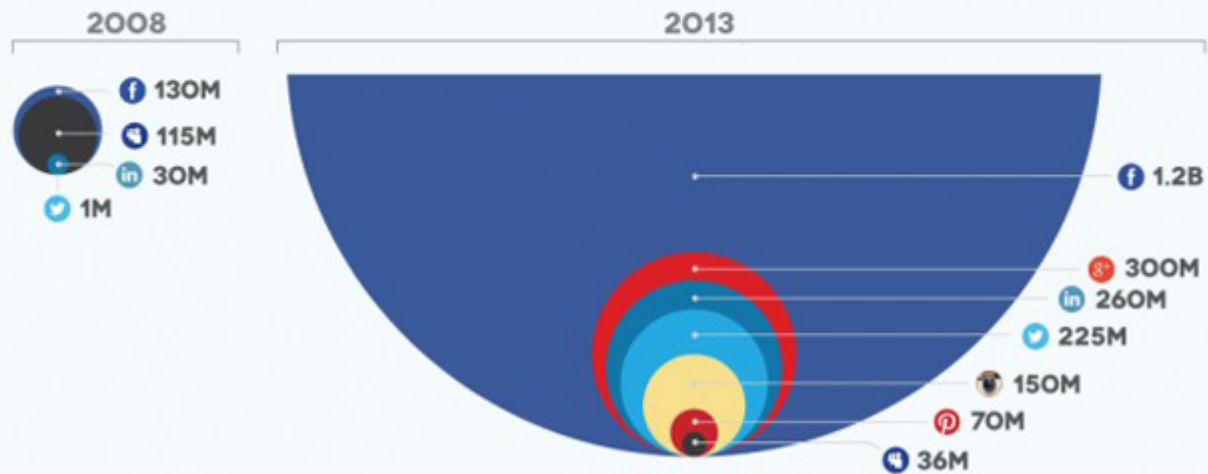
NUMBER OF ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

1,730,000,000

active users worldwide.

1/4 of the World's population uses social media.

NUMBER OF ACTIVE USERS PER SOCIAL NETWORK

2008
- f 130M
- 115M
- in 30M
- 1M

2013
- f 1.2B
- g+ 300M
- in 260M
- 225M
- 150M
- 70M
- 36M

The graph above demonstrates the growth of social media and its users between 2008 and 2013.
Image Credit: Scout Digital Marketing

Since the origins of Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006, there has been a rapid increase in the number of social media users worldwide. The approximate number of active social media users is near 2 billion, which is about a quarter of the world's population[1]. Over the course of the past five years, the number of Facebook users has increased from 130 million users to 1.2 billion users[2]. Twitter has seen even more of an increase in active users, with its number of participants increasing to 225 million in this short window of time[3]. Additionally, the amount of content added to such sites is tremendous; **for every minute, 342,000 tweets are sent, over 276,480 search queries are processed by Google, and 120 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube[4].**

Growth of
Social Media

The use of social media will continue to rise as advancements, such as smartphone apps continue to become readily available to use, and as the emerging markets of the world, namely the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and African markets are introduced to social media.

According to the *Worldwide Social Network Users: 2013 Forecast and Comparative Estimate,* the fastest social media gains in terms of usage will be from these areas[5], resulting in some 2.55 billion social media users by the year 2017[6].

Image Credit: Social Media Today

Threats On
Social Media

As the rising popularity of social media continues to be documented in most recent years, it has become a medium for security threats.
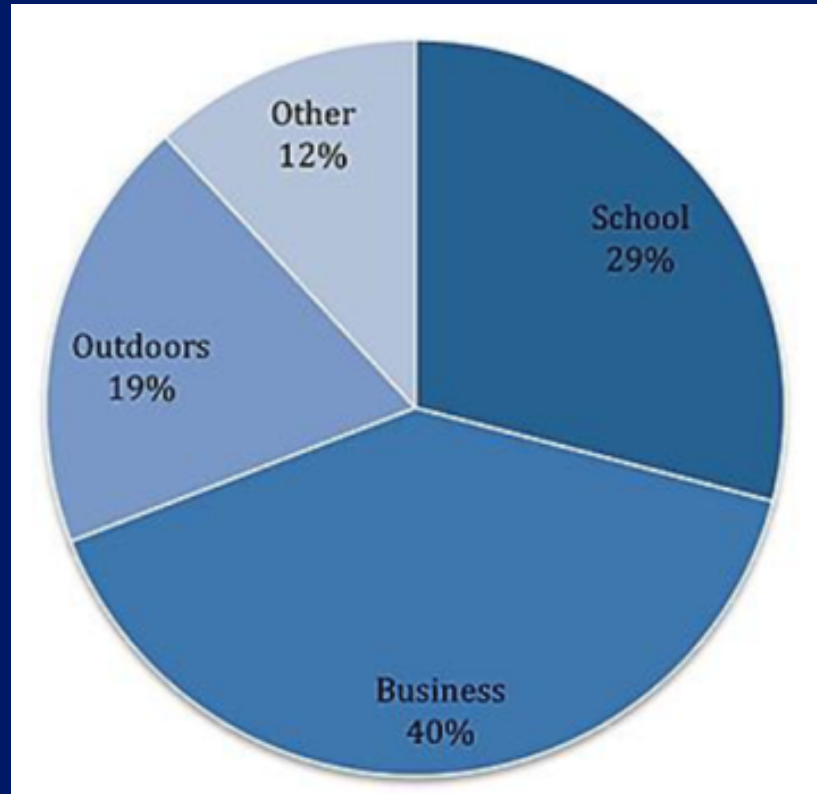

Location of active shooter attacks, 2000-2012
Image credit: FBI

As previously stated, protest activity, civil disturbances, terrorism, significant events, and active shooters have demonstrated how an organized event could potentially be dangerous on social media platforms before and/or during an event. On several accounts the incriminating threats have been posted prior to the occurring event.

The real-time nature of the communication through social media improves the effectiveness of those communicating; which can be both positive and negative. Communication through Facebook or Twitter about a protest or civil disturbance, for example, may increase the likelihood of the event, as well as aid in a larger turnout. This in turn can have a negative effect and disrupt business; or even worse, the protest may turn violent. Yet, this real-time communication may also help officials to catch those participating before or during the action(s).
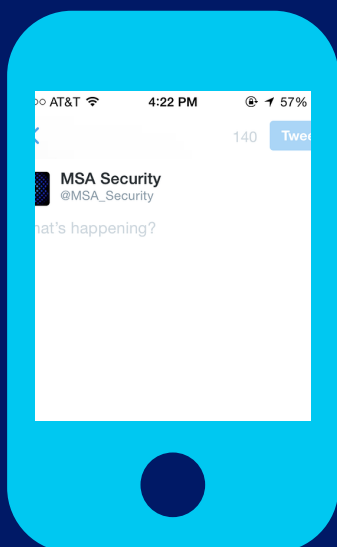
Social Media Monitoring
in an Analytical Toolbox

Social Media Monitoring may prove essential in threat awareness, emergency response and mitigation, and post-incidence response. In doing so, such monitoring tactics can be preventative of potential threats if caught early enough, and can be used during or after an event to provide communication for a more efficient response; or to prevent any worsening of the situation. Social media monitoring therefore can be utilized for the following reasons and circumstances:

1 Offers insight into personal backgrounds to analyze connections and past locations

2 Provides visibility on escalating threat patterns and trends

3 Indicates potential negative behavior and activities captures real-time exchanges and impromptu actions

4 Coordinates both internal and external communications

Data Collection
and its Benefits

Data collection on a mass scale can be beneficial for various reasons; from thousands of source materials trends can be identified from a single key word (such as the word bomb for example), and various social media sites can be sifted through to determine the likelihood of a threat. This is exactly what the monitoring of such sites can accomplish, using the help of various search engines like Google Trends, Synthesio, Curata, JSTOR, or other similar engines.

Data Collection
and its Relation to Social Media Monitoring

A key aspect in social media monitoring is the type of data that is collected. As this is a new practice, there is much "grey area" yet to be determined in the field of social media monitoring. Social media monitoring can only be used on open source (public material), as it would be illegal to hack into private accounts. However, some rules have already been established to help determine what "public" information is and what "private" information is. Accounts on many social networking sites, say for example Twitter, have privacy account settings, in which the user can set his or her account to private so only certain people can see the account. information cannot be used because it is not entirely open to the public[7].

Social Media Monitoring
Public & Private Sector Benefits

Though Social Media Monitoring is most commonly associated with more public institutions such as the government and police forces, there is a benefit in the private sector partaking in this practice as well. The use of specific data collection and monitoring designated for a particular private company can help eliminate potential threats for that company. Additionally, general Social Media Monitoring of actions both domestic and international may provide valuable insight to trends that may also be a threat to a company's business. Private companies can then take the necessary actions to ensure the safety of its business and employees.

References

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