

# Social Media: A Glimpse into the Past



What once was a term that held no meaning, social media has now become the topic of many day-to-day conversations. Whether it's casual, personal use, or business marketing, the beast plays a large role in most of our lives. So, how did social media gain its footing? How did it develop into a multitude of networks that connect us globally? Well, I'm here as Stuller's resident social media authority, and I'd like to tell the story of how it came to be!

Read below for an in-depth look into the history of social media as we know it.

## The Beginning of Social Media

Some sources report that social media can be traced all the way back to the mid-1800s – but not exactly the way we think of now. Back in 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first ever telegraph from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, with the message “What hath God wrought?”. Perhaps an eerie foreshadowing of what was to come in the world of social media, this instance, however, is not the traditional means of social media that we know now – which can be better defined as “interactive internet-based applications”.

The first real social media website launched in 1997 (before I was even born!). The site, called Six Degrees, was a website where users would sign up with an email address, and had the ability to add friends to their network. The site was short-

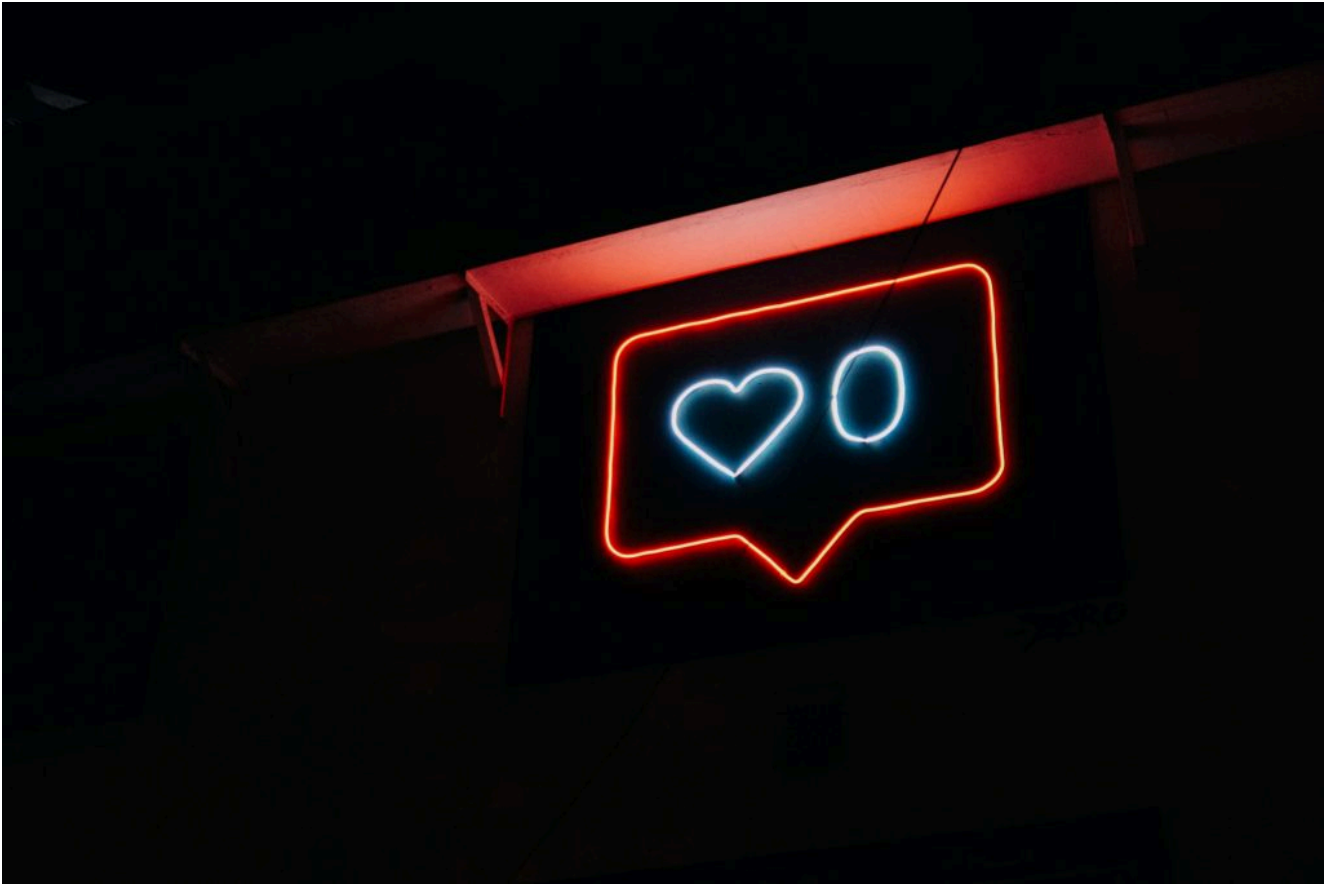
lived, though, and reached cessation in 2001 after being bought for \$125 million by YouthStream Media Networks. Six Degrees totaled a user base of about 3.5 million people.

Our next social media network pioneer is one that I find people are more familiar with. In 2002, Friendster emerged into the social space to compete with what Six Degrees had. Along with creating a profile and networking with other users, Friendster gave folks the ability to share photos and status updates. A few competitors tried to do the same thing, but never really came close in popularity.

## **Social Media – The Modern Age**

Come 2003, we see a few of our bigger social media sites emerge, two of the more notable ones being LinkedIn and MySpace. LinkedIn is credited to being the first social media site in history, meaning its sole purpose was to connect people for networking purposes, which is still why it exists today. Currently, LinkedIn has more than 575 million users!

MySpace, however, was probably one of the most influential platforms of its time. During the early 2000s, it was the largest social media site in the world, connecting users internationally. After a few years of asserting its superiority, News Corp., run by Rupert Murdoch, acquired the site for \$580 million. Its peak was short-lived, and in 2008, Facebook would replace MySpace for top visited site.



## Facebook, It's Quick and Easy!

2004 was a big year for social media. On top of Gmail being created in the year, Facebook as we know it was also launched. But Facebook wasn't always "Facebook".

Mark Zuckerberg, while attending Harvard for psychology, created and published a site called Facemash, which was a site that allowed Harvard students to judge the attractiveness of students by comparing side-by-side photos of them from Harvard's yearbook. Obviously, this site was shut down soon after, but Zuckerberg understood the talent he held, and utilized it to its maximum potential.

In February 2004, Zuckerberg launched Thefacebook, a social media platform intended for Harvard students to connect with each other. Only a month after launch, the site accumulated 50% of Harvard's student population as users. Big tech and investors caught on to the site's popularity and began

throwing investments at Zuckerberg. He was eventually able to purchase “facebook.com” for \$200,000 – thus Facebook was born! According to Hootsuite’s [Digital 2021 Global Overview](#), Facebook remains the dominant social media platform with about 2.7 billion users worldwide.

## **YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Beyond**

YouTube launched in 2005, a platform dedicated to video sharing. YouTube is one of the platforms that remained pretty consistent with its original mission when it first launched. The first video to hit 1 million views also came in 2005 – a Nike advertisement featuring Brazilian football player Ronaldinho de Assis Moreira. The first video to hit 1 billion views would come in 2012, and it would be Korean recording artist Psy’s music video for his song Gangnam Style.

In 2006, Twitter was introduced into the world, which really solidified the fact that people react well to short, easy-to-digest information that is seemingly here today, gone tomorrow. What set Twitter apart was its 140 character limit, which would later be doubled (in every language except Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) because, let’s face it, how much can you *really* say in 140 characters? In 2009, China launched a similar social media platform called Weibo, which still has a large user base to this day, just not as prominent in America.

Later in 2006, Instagram emerged, finding its place in the social media realm by becoming a smartphone-only app that focused exclusively on photo and video sharing. Instagram hit the ground running and was acquired by Facebook in 2012 for a whopping \$1 billion in cash and stock! Instagram remains a major player in the art of social media marketing, weighing in at 1.2 billion users globally, and continues to grow.

Worth mentioning is WhatsApp, which first launched in 2009. WhatsApp soon became the world's largest messaging app, as many countries in the world rely on the app to conduct business and communicate with friends and family. Mark Zuckerberg purchased the app in 2014, and it currently hosts 2 billion users worldwide. However, the app seems to be more popular in countries outside of the US.

## What's Next?

TikTok was created in 2016 by Chinese tech mogul ByteDance in order to fill the gap of the video sharing social media platform, since Facebook and Instagram are banned in the country. Its rise to popularity can be accredited to its acquisition of Musical.ly, a platform where users could lip-sync to songs and other trending audio clips. Currently, TikTok boasts about 689 million users, but has been recently gaining traction in the marketing world for its discoverability and engagement abilities.

Additionally, in recent years, we have seen a lot of platforms make national headlines, but then slowly fizzle out. With the rise of things like fake news and censorship, people seek to find a platform where they feel as though they can voice their opinions freely. While I don't see any of these newer platforms like Clubhouse or Caffeine taking off, software updates to existing networks like Twitter and Instagram always help the giants stay on top of their game. Enhancements like Snapchat News, Instagram Reels, and LinkedIn stories help these channels stay relevant.

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Whew! That was a long write-up on the history of social media. I could write a book about this really, as so much more goes into the timeline than the aforementioned, but I think having a solid understanding of social media trends can help you

better incorporate social media into your marketing plan.

Which platforms are you active on? Let me know below!

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