



DAVID KIRKPATRICK

Author of *The Facebook Effect*

What is behind the rise of Facebook?

For author David Kirkpatrick, who spoke at the 2011 Brandworks University, the essence of Facebook and most social media can be summed up in one word: empowerment. It is crucial when trying to understand the media landscape today. For those young enough to remember the “Power to the People” ideal of the ‘60s, Kirkpatrick sees the same need for resonance in values and purpose for companies engaging in social media.

The political power of social media was already evident in downtown Bogota, Columbia in February 2008. Politics and Facebook merged when Oscar Muralis created a Facebook group in an effort to stand up to the politically oppressive group FARC. People were terrified to stand up to FARC, but Oscar’s initial action of creating a Facebook group and inviting his 100 friends turned into a group that gathered 75,000+ people together to stand up for their rights and lives. It is this banding together of people who previously would have remained silent that social media is enabling in political movements.

Platform for the people

Facebook’s growth globally has been phenomenal and while the U.S. has the most users, Indonesia is number two. Facebook is a global entity that continues to grow in spite of obstacles. The communist party legally banned Facebook in China, but in Vietnam, where it is also banned, many users have found a way around it and there actually is a Facebook office located in the country.

Facebook is now the dominant available platform for the empowerment and democratization of personal broadcasting. We used to have a small elite of broadcasters (e.g. Walter Cronkite), but now everyone is a broadcaster, and if your message is resonant it will get rebroadcast many times over.

The reason behind the speed of change is something called Moore’s Law. Moore’s Law asserts that the underlying components of technology improve at an exponential rate.

The question then becomes, what makes Facebook fundamentally different in the history of broadcast platforms? Kirkpatrick’s response is that Facebook has become the automation of algorithmic communication.

The impact of Facebook’s appeal to advertisers

Facebook, along with the entire media landscape, is changing so quickly that it is important to understand where these technologies are leading us. For Kirkpatrick, this means remembering that Mark Zuckerberg has always had the goal of giving everyone tools for broadcasting to promote transparency and sharing. Zuckerberg’s insistence that advertising provides only highly relevant information to users is one such example.

With over 750 million users, Facebook creates a fundamental mismatch between the power of the people and the entitlement companies feel. To call an individual a “consumer” is fundamentally misleading as it suggests passivity and a disproportionate power relationship between those who provide and those who consume. Instead, companies need to think about consumers as co-creators. Only through inviting customers into the process of co-creation can you promote your company and find future success in these new media spaces.

Facebook is endlessly adaptable and its social graph is flexible enough to reach the entire web, but it is so young that we have no idea what it all means. One thing is for sure, companies that are not learning by doing in this space will not be prepared for how empowered consumers are changing the rules of business.



David is the former senior editor for Internet and technology for Fortune magazine. He now organizes and runs the Techonomy conference and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, appearing frequently on CNN as a technology expert.