Annotated Table of Contents: *Friends, Followers and the Future: How Social Media are Changing Politics, Threatening Big Brands, and Killing Traditional Media* (**City Lights, April 15th, 2012**)

Introduction: Word of Mouse

The Introduction examines how an ongoing digital information revolution is rapidly and radically transforming nearly every aspect of the way we live, work, play, vote, govern, communicate, and do business. Literally billions of people now use emerging media to spread what they deem important to "friends" and "followers" within their new online social networks. As networked technologies proliferate in a dawning age of media abundance, new methods of creating content and new channels to distribute it have become available to everyone and between everyone. As a result, growing networks of deeply disenfranchised "ordinary people" are exerting extraordinary influence on societies worldwide, using social media to bypass state censorship, outpace traditional news organizations, and compel corporations and governments alike to listen to and act on their demands. Their loud messages of dissatisfaction to the powers-that-be--Big Government, Big Business, and Big Media alike--are delivered by deeply disruptive new media tools that enable anyone to produce and distribute news and information inexpensively and efficiently, to attract large audiences, to affect the rise and fall of policies, politicians and governments, and even to revolutionize entire industries.

Chapter One: The Rise of Social Media

This chapter looks at our need for credible, reliable news and information and the growing lack of trust that the legacy media delivers it. As we face an unprecedented flood of content, it is more difficult than ever to separate fact from fiction and truth from spin in any form of media, and we desperately need a variety of new information filters to assist us in separating the signal from the noise and the trustworthy from the incredible. There is, however, little agreement as to what might be the best way to filter. Some believe algorithms, learning machines, and recommender systems will provide us with both news that we choose and news we can use; others look to informed and informative "tastemakers" and "influentials" to take on the roles of curators, editors and even fact checkers, as they evolve into "micro-brands" themselves. Corporate leaders like Google's Eric Schmidt offer brands as the answer "to the cesspool of misinformation" on the Internet; others look to social media and their friends and followers to find trustworthy content. Although the disruptive power of new social tools is now most apparent in the context of news media, its effect on that industry is merely a harbinger of what is soon to come in virtually every other arena of society. Along with such media-related industries as music, news, television, film, publishing, and advertising, other entire segments of the economy, including real estate, telecommunications, and finance, have already been radically disrupted; healthcare, education, energy, and many others are poised to be next.

Chapter Two: Brands, Cesspools and Credibility

In an age when everyone is said to be responsible for his or her own brand, what does the word "brand" mean? This chapter examines the impact the social media revolution is having on brands of all sorts, including within the dying legacy media, on new Internet titans like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, and on non-media brands in other industries.

Google's Eric Schmidt believes brands are essential in helping us to navigate the new information world. "Brands are the solution, not the problem," he says. "Brands are how you sort out the cesspool." Although many legacy media executives still share his faith in the fundamental power of their brands, others echo Mark Lukasiewicz of NBC, who says, "The brand that increasingly matters is the one called 'my friend.'" Even powerful new brands like Google, Facebook, and Twitter are not immune to the creeping forces of creative destruction. Such companies, which rose to their preeminent status by capitalizing on the shortcomings of their predecessors, may now be sowing the seeds of their own demise. And non-media brands must now begin to tell their own story and become content creators themselves, rather than relying on any intermediary.

Chapter Three: Can Brands Be Trusted?

Those seeking credible, trustworthy news and information look for shortcuts and filters to assist them. Many still rely on certain brands. But today's most trusted brands are not found among legacy media, since such traditional gatekeepers

no longer do much to evaluate material before it reaches audiences. Instead, users put their trust in the online equivalent: search engines, which have replaced more traditional intermediaries as a means of finding trusted content.

Although "search" has become an ubiquitous element in information-gathering, many people have little knowledge as to how brands such as Google actually operate in the information sphere. Google's branding is so powerful that many have come to use its brand name as a verb--but many remain unaware that the company performs no credibility verification of the information links it offers and features paid, sponsored links more prominently than others. This means that although users believe they can find trustworthy news and information through online search, that belief is often mistaken.

Chapter Four: The Facebook Decade: F8=Fate?

With "social" now challenging "search" for Web supremacy, the leading social network, Facebook, has begun to challenge Google for web supremacy as well. By opening to outside developers and freely providing them with a platform and access to its 800 million members, Facebook succeeded in laying its lens of "people you know and trust" over anything and everything on the Internet. "If the 2000's was the Google decade, then the 2010's will be the Facebook decade," one leading analyst predicts. Although both Google and search will remain important for years to come, social networking and Facebook will further disrupt advertising, media, one-to-one and one-to-many communications as well as search in the foreseeable future.

Sidebar: Interview with Randi Zuckerberg

The sister to founder Mark Zuckerberg, a longtime marketing executive at Facebook, discusses issues of journalism, trust, and social networks. As she notes, "It is tremendously more powerful to get a piece of content--an article, a news clip, a video, etc--from a friend, and it makes you much more likely to watch, read, and engage with the content. People will always want to consume content from experts and they will always look to trusted news sources and journalists for important news and current events, but the market has become so over-saturated that it is now just as important to rely on one's friends to help filter the news."

Chapter Five: The Death of Privacy

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has often argued that we are living in a new era beyond privacy. But Zuckerberg has also repeatedly made sudden, ill conceived and poorly communicated policy changes that resulted in Facebook users' once-private personal information becoming publicly accessible. The company's growing stature and importance only magnified the concerns; the missteps raised fundamental questions about his firm's reliability and ultimate intent and were serious enough to threaten permanent damage to relationships with users. Are Zuckerberg and his now-powerful brand poised to stumble at the very brink of Web primacy? The central issues revolve around privacy and trust. Critics accused Facebook of unfair and deceptive trade practices that violate user expectations, diminish privacy, and contradict the company's own representations. Members asked, "Who the hell do these people think they are? 'Trust us?' Why? Why should we trust a company that spies on us without our knowledge and consent?" and noted "They've just leapt way past Google on the creepy meter." "Facebook isn't about respect," another complained. "It's a rogue company" that "got to be the world's platform for identity by promising you privacy and then later ripping it out from under you." If trust is indeed "the new black," as Web luminary Craig Newmark has noted, and "People use social networking tools to figure out who they can trust and rely on for decision making," trust is also essential for the success of any brand. Zuckerberg may feel the recent privacy flaps haven't affected his company much, but they actually represent a huge potential threat to what he has built. Even while it battles with Google and others for Web dominance, Facebook is simultaneously set to stumble over the centrality of trust and privacy. Unless altered, Mark Zuckerberg's blind ambition and inability to listen to his many friends and followers could yet lead not to dominance but to downfall. Facebook risks losing everything in the controversy over privacy--its credibility, the trust of its users, and ultimately its brand.

Sidebar: A Timeline of Facebook's Eroding Privacy Policy

In April 2010, senior staff attorney Kurt Opsahl of the Electronic Frontier Foundation published this commentary on the EFF's web site. Opsahl noted "the remarkable transformation" Facebook had undergone since its incorporation five years earlier: "When it started, it was a private space for communication with a group of your choice. Soon, it transformed into a platform where much of your information is public by default. Today, it has become a platform where you have no choice but to make certain information public, and this public information may be shared by Facebook with its partner websites and used to target ads."

Chapter Six: The YouTube Effect: 48 Hours Every Minute

In a decade that saw social media move rapidly from the fringes of the Internet to the mainstream of online activity, YouTube--and not Facebook, with its eight hundred million users--was the innovation that touched the most lives. In remarkably short order, the social video sharing platform became a driving force for change all over the world. YouTube ranks third in total traffic among all web sites, behind only Facebook and Google itself; it is by far the dominant provider of video on the Internet, serving 6.6 times more people than its leading competitor; and the site is still growing at an incredible rate, with users from all over the world now posting more than 48 hours of video on YouTube servers every minute--up from six hours per minute in 2007, fifteen hours by 2008, and twenty-four hours as of May 2010. With YouTube now the Web's second most-used search engine, trailing only the mighty Google, the question of how to filter and manage the flood of news and information found there looms larger than ever. It's especially pressing since, like its parent company Google, YouTube does nothing to verify what appears on its site; instead it offers an open platform for anyone to post anything they like, whether fraudulent or not. With content pouring onto the site, the question of how to make sense from the chaos and profusion is now supreme. What filters will bring trustworthy, high-quality information to the fore? How helpful can the "recommender systems" be--the machines that learn from your behavior and employ algorithms to intuit what you seek, based on clues drawn from location, history, personal interests and the like? How much of a role do other social networks like Facebook and Twitter play? Is there some way to move beyond social filters and to leverage curation to create, or empower tastemakers who have already gained reputations on Facebook and Twitter?

Chapter Seven: Twitter: News No Longer Breaks, It Tweets

Twitter, the "microblogging" platform launched in 2006, now regularly scoops the rest of the world's media in reporting breaking news. Once dismissed as an insignificant messaging service, Twitter has morphed into one of the most important mass communications systems in the world, at the edge of the blurry frontiers separating news and entertainment, professionals and amateurs, and, perhaps most importantly, opinion and fact, and simultaneously collaborating and competing with legacy media. As Twitter has grown to become the third most trafficked social networking site in the world--what the New York Times termed "one of the rare but fabled Web companies with a growth rate that resembles the shape of a hockey stick"--it has quickly become increasingly central to how people communicate and a key part of the new social architecture. Since both speed and accuracy are crucial in news reporting, separating truth from rumor and fact from fiction on the site remains essential for maintaining trust. New media such as Twitter offer their own forms of checks and balances, which although imperfect, still help reduce error and filter hearsay and speculation. Still, company executives say their biggest challenge remains how to separate signal from noise--and what filters can assist with that dilemma.

Sidebar: Interview with Twitter Co-Founder Biz Stone

Stone offers his thoughts on the rapid evolution of the service, as well as the topics of emerging media, trust, and journalism.

Chapter Eight: Google Loses Its Buzz

Founded near the turn of the century, Google rocketed from start-up to the world's most powerful and profitable Internet firm in just ten years, as its vaunted search engine revolutionized the way the world gathered information. Yet for all its success, by 2010 the company faced a host of problems, as competitors and regulators alike assailed it for a series of antitrust and privacy violations and began demanding remedies, and its Web supremacy came under attack by new competitors such as Facebook and Twitter. Google lagged behind in what was fast becoming the most engaging and potentially lucrative online phenomenon of all--social media. Social media threatened Google in many ways, including by mounting a full-frontal assault on search itself–the company's existential core. Its failure in the social arena wasn't the result of a lack of desire, however. The company tried numerous times to crack the "social" code, but stumbled over and over--sometimes because of the same privacy and trust issues that bedeviled its rival, Facebook. The missteps caused severe damage to the reputation of a company with the boastful corporate motto "Don't be evil," as competitors like Apple founder Steve Jobs seized the opportunity to attack and claim that Google's motto was just "a load of crap!" Will Google's latest attempt at going social--its Google+ network--be any more successful? Given its abysmal track record, the jury is still out. In any event, "social" is beginning to replace "search" as a primary means of finding credible news and information, and rather than use Google's "pull" model, which offers numerous links in response to a single query, social media mavens prefer its

more efficient "push" model, where friends and followers deliver fewer but more targeted and trusted answers. Clearly, social networks pose a threat to Google search--and by logical extension, to one of the world's most trusted corporate brands. Even as Google executives struggle to cope with the social media challenge, other threats await them. Consumer watchdogs consider the firm "an ideal target" and have urged antitrust agencies on both sides of the Atlantic to scrutinize its activities. With the company expanding into businesses beyond search and advertising, regulators have launched investigations aimed at ensuring that the search giant cannot act unfairly toward either consumers or competitors. Once again issues of privacy and power are at the fore, as concerns over an antisocial social network bang into questions about trust and antitrust.

Chapter Nine: The New Breed of Media Researchers

A new wave of research into emerging media, information delivery, and web credibility, spurred by a new breed of academics, is upending the previously accepted conventional wisdom that online social networks tend less to persuasion and more to polarization and reinforcement of prior beliefs. Their conclusions fly in the face of many previously accepted notions about social networks, the Internet and how they fit together. Until recently, the consensus position in academia held that the Internet mostly serves as an echo chamber that reinforces already-held beliefs and only further polarizes an already partisan nation. Instead, new research shows that emerging social media possess certain unique characteristics that enable them to play a powerful role not only in distributing news and information, but also in filtering it for trust and credibility. "It works like this," explains one researcher. "If someone I like--a trusted friend--sends it, I will tend to trust the information."

Chapter Ten: Public Displays of Connection

The game changing power of online social networks comes in large part because they make it easy to form groups and stay in touch with more people with disparate points of view. Social networking technologies provide us a low cost (in terms of time and effort) way of making and keeping social connections, so we can have huge numbers of diverse, but not very close, acquaintances. As a result, our social circles come to consist of many more, but weaker, ties. These weak ties with casual acquaintances and colleagues provide a wider range of perspectives and information. Access to information is now a key element of status and power. New communication technology provides us with access to new knowledge. Trading our previous, offline privacy for shared online "public displays of connections" enables others to determine our credibility--and by extension, that of the news and information we share. As society becomes increasingly dynamic, access to information will play a growing role, and having many diverse connections will be key. By greatly decreasing what academic researchers call the "transactional cost of creating bridging social capital," the tools and technology offered by emerging media help us to find and to share credible news and information through trusted friends and followers.

Chapter Eleven: Politics 2.0

The rise of social media has had a huge impact on longstanding media and political brands alike. Their political importance was most apparent domestically then in the successful 2008 presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, whose online campaign revolutionized American political campaigning in ways that are still coming into focus. No previous candidate or campaign had ever adopted technology and the Internet as the heart of its operation or used it on such a scale--particularly to communicate directly and interactively with supporters. Many voters also used emerging media, its powerful tools and looser, more extensive social networks to communicate directly with their peers, and media platforms that hadn't even existed in the previous election cycle began to play crucial roles in campaigns and the delivery of information about them. After Obama's victory, Republican politicians soon came to understand the power of online communications and seized new tools like Facebook and Twitter. By 2012, social media had become "absolutely central to all political campaigns," as one top Republican strategist put it. "The low barrier to entry gets you buzz, name recognition and effective money raising, all at a low, low cost. "Social networking is now the very foundation of your campaign, it supports everything you do," she adds. "It can't be compared to other media and you just can't run old media campaigns like in the past."

Chapter Twelve: The Daily Me vs. The Daily We

Rather than presenting an unbiased array of useful, trustworthy information and different, unexpected viewpoints, do the Internet and interactive social media instead cause us to become more close-minded? Do they merely reinforce what we already think we know, and create an ideologically exclusive "The Daily Me," an online mediascape where

each of us is our own editor and gatekeeper? Does the problem of having too much information lead to a nightmare of limitless options, to which we respond by filtering out opposing or alternative viewpoints while gravitating toward media that reinforce our views? Although some experts and executives claim this is so, many leading researchers believe the connections forged and maintained in online social networks actually expand exposure to conflicting ideas and may result in changed opinions and attitudes. Fears of such a self-induced personalization of the news may pale, however, when compared to a newer phenomenon: the unseen, machine-created personalization now happening automatically on many web sites. As corporations fine-tune their ability to use our online history as a filter to narrow down what they present to us, we risk the creation of a new, updated "Daily Me," in which machines and algorithms--not family, friends and followers--determine what we see, read, and hear online. But the personalization offered by machines might also be positive, and one day lead instead to a "Daily We," where you'll be shown first and foremost content on topics that you have expressed an interest in already, deemed valid by people you trust. Such an approach could result not in polarization but instead in a newfound ability to examine specialized news and analysis on the topics that are most important to you, making them easier to discover and offering a new level of sophistication, detail, and efficiency to a wide variety of people. Will algorithmic personalization lead to a Daily Me or a Daily We? The jury is still out, but now is a good time to consider these questions, since many major news brands are already moving rapidly to create personalized information engines that will tailor search results to ones which users are likely to like or agree with, as the era of all the news the algorithm calculates you'll like approaches.

Chapter Thirteen: The State of the Media & the Death of Brands

If online social networks in general, and Facebook in particular, are the Big New Channel, what does that portend for the Big Old Channels--the legacy brands that once dominated our media attention? As the link economy of both search and social drives two-thirds of all visitors to legacy media sites, control of their highly concentrated and centralized distribution networks is slipping away. This abrupt change in news-and-information distribution patterns is having a severe impact on media brands. With revenue, valuation, staffing, ratings, circulation and other key metrics all down in almost every sector, the economic future for virtually all legacy media looks dismal--and the news industry in particular is in a race against the clock for survival, in the face of continued cutbacks, buyouts, layoffs and losses of tens of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars.

The bottom line: legacy media brands, while still quite powerful, are busy dying; they can no longer expect consumers/viewers/readers/users to come to them but remain incapable of anticipating audience needs by listening to their signals. As we no longer trust brands, we will instead discover more and more content through people and networks we trust.

Chapter Fourteen: Politics 3.0

In 2011, the "Arab Spring" and "Occupy Wall Street" protests--and literally hundreds of similar ones around the globe--seized world attention and transformed international politics. Although "cyber-utopians" and more skeptical "cyber-realists argued over whether and to what extent the movements were driven by social networks and were Twitter or Facebook-inspired, many observers agreed that social media at least played a significant role in shaping debate and creating events and have now become a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom.

The role and uses of social media is more nuanced than either of the dueling cyber-camps is willing to admit, however, as this chapter's close examination of the protests in Tunisia and later in Egypt, as well as the various "Occupy" demonstrations that followed in other parts of the world, demonstrates. The Arab Spring actions, for example, were neither "Twitter" or "Facebook" online revolutions, but instead the outcome of decades of real world resistance. At the same time, the revolts were clearly facilitated, and to some extent accelerated, by the decentralized organizing power of the new social technologies. Social media is neither a panacea for the world's problems nor a substitute for activism. There should be little doubt, however, that they are at the very least important tools favoring those who did not have access to the means of media production and distribution, or that they help to change the balance of power somewhat. At the same time, it's easy to exaggerate their effect. Ultimately, it's people who make the difference--and not technology.

Conclusion: The Feed Is Your Friend

The trends detailed in this book, particularly those affecting media, commerce and politics, are only accelerating. Social media play an ever-growing role in our lives. At the same time legacy media remain in decline, as measured by both audience reach and advertising revenue, and the sweeping technological shifts and the unprecedented rupture in the long partnership of news and advertising brands continues unabated, with the disruption still most notable in print media such as newspapers and magazines. Meanwhile the media brand Americans spend the most time with is Facebook, the Internet's most ambitious, technologically sophisticated, and fastest-moving company. Its 800 million users--one in every nine people on Earth--spend an average of fifteen and a half hours a month on the site. On the political front, elections are breaking

out all over the world as we head into another year of historic change. Here in America, 2012 will be the first where both major parties understand the potential of social media technology to affect the results of the election. Social media will be the difference maker this time. Finally, the single most important new trend within the digital information revolution--the ever-increasing amount of unvetted and unverified information now washing over us--continues to flash flood forward at a frightening pace. It's harder than ever to tell which waves might carry relevant and trustworthy news and information. Leading communications researchers remain optimistic, however, particularly about the still-developing roles of both social media and algorithms and learning machines to help tell us the difference between what is credible, relevant, and trustworthy and what is not. Media doesn't just come from the media anymore. We are all the media now, and unwilling to rely on unreliable legacy brands to access content or reach an audience. Clay Shirky's slogan "Here comes everything" is shifting to "Here comes everyone." There's no longer any need to imagine a media world where you create, aggregate, and share freely--and find credible, relevant news and information by using recommendations from peers you trust--because that world is already here. The future really is your friends and followers!