

25 Years After Social Media: A Reality Check

**Significance
Systems**

It's 25 years — a generation — since the founders of Significance Systems, John Ricketts and Darrell Berry, invented and named Social Media*.

Now, the Internet so pervades society that it constitutes a fabric that enables the instrumentation of our social world.

Enough of everything that happens in society, has sufficient online footprint, that study of the global online social graph's structure and content reaps valuable rewards: meaningful descriptive and predictive insight into the drivers of individual and collective engagement, consensus and behaviour.

In 1994, we considered 'social' as a proof-of-concept experiment which demonstrated novel value implicit in the nascent WWW.

Our original experiment in social media — a platform we named Matisse — was soon joined by others' experiments on the social fabric: those in Search, Sharing and Shopping being amongst the earliest-blooming and most successful.

The 'experiments' of online Social, Sharing, Search, and Shopping were first conducted very early on in the growth of the Web.

In the context of culture, a generation is sufficiently long for the first blush of novelty to fade, the patina of uniqueness to tarnish, and the longer-term significance of developments to manifest.

Key points:

- The pervasive social fabric of the Internet offers a unique 'instrumentation of society'.
- Our online experience in 2019 is still dominated by the success of experiments 20+ years old.
- There are, clearly, emergent issues with the business models of these first-generation giants.
- There remains vast potential for novel value to be generated from the online social fabric.
- Significance Systems has developed Significance, an application which delivers sustainable value from the social fabric.

What to do:

If you want to escape your media bubble, and you are a journalist or student, sign up & contact us for free access.

Set up an account: [sign up](#)

Email: contact@significancesystems.com

<http://www.significancesystems.com>

* See *Forbes*: <https://bit.ly/2R7lkpC>

Soon, these early experiments in Social, Sharing, Search, and Shopping became vastly lucrative businesses, without substantive change to their original forms. Their subsequent scale has come not from radical disruption to their early models, but through iterative growth as internet coverage has increased, and the effects of “winner takes all” network economics.

Consequently, we now live in a world dominated by services first conceptualised 20+ years ago, which have since changed little in their essence.

It's as if in 1980, popular music was still predominately 1955-style Rock'n'Roll.

Rock and a Hard Place: 2019

It's clear that the interminable rockabilly of these first-generation internet giants has led to major (often unexpected, but nevertheless damaging) social consequences.

The success of first-generation online business models frequently relies on their constant pressure on society to deform for their commercial gains.

These entities profit (tacitly or explicitly) by the shaping of society to better fit the models they have built and need to monetise. We now live with 'weaponised' content created at industrial scale by nation states and 'bad actors', 'bot' influencers, fake news, the residential hearts of cities clogged with tourists and discarded rental bikes; and the looming death of the high street.

All whilst we ghettoise into ever more polarising media bubbles, which take us further from each other, and from the world as it is, but which ensure our behaviour and beliefs are ever more monetisable.

Business processes optimised to maximise growth, in these cases, steer society in favour of ever more drastic deformations, with little negative feedback to ensure any utilitarian greater good. Such systems don't just read reality, to deliver their services: they write it also: they deform our experience for commercial gain. 'You are the product', indeed.

The cost of serving online advertising more efficiently should not be dystopia.

Where To Go From Here?

We're a generation into the experience of having our social reality instrumented. It's time not only think and act to reform the first-generation online business experiments of Social, Sharing, Search and Shopping, but to learn from those experiments as we design what comes next.

Clearly, we need to reconsider our acceptance of 'being the product'. **New models need to be sustainable without the tacit requirement for social deformation.** They need to provide genuine utility for their users. Assuming they also need to be commercially viable, they also need to generate revenue to support investment in their research, development and maintenance.

Significance: Sustainable Value From The Online Social Fabric

At Significance Systems, we've long conducted our own experiments and designed our own services which run on the social fabric. We've developed models that generate and extract value from that fabric, without the need to contrive mass behavioural change for revenue growth. Our systems read reality to provide a clear view of it. We are not in the business of rewriting it for commercial gain.

As we did a generation ago with Social Media, we're pioneering a new class of service built on the social graph. We call this Significance — an AI-based process which describes and predicts collective engagement, consensus and price formation.

Such determination of value is by definition a social process. Daily, our platform models the dynamics of social engagement, consensus and price discovery, based on the structure and content of petabytes of open data from the global social fabric. This empowers us with signals on future price movements and mass behaviour — in capital markets, competitive product categories, in politics, marketing and issues management.

How does Significance stack up against the legacy social-graph services — Search, Social, Shopping and Sharing?

Rather than profiting from the deformation or destruction of the environment in which it operates, Significance offers sustainability. If we understand the dynamics of consensus and pricing in a market, we can invest ahead of the herd and reap the benefits. If we are respectful of the other market actors, we don't distort the market.

Rather than treating members of society (you and me!) as product, Significance provides utility. Understanding what the market values, and why it does so, helps our customers reduce waste effort and resource. Decisions are no longer shots in the dark, they're informed by the voice of society itself.

Rather than distorting reality for gain, Significance delivers clarity on the authentic drivers of behaviour. As such, it enables us to design products which can help cut through media bubbles and make clear those drivers, in a simple and effective manner. **We deliver a new objectivity into a world of industrial-scale fabrication. We connect the world to itself.**

We have grown organically. This leaves us free of many of the pressures typically imposed by institutional investors. **We don't need (or want) to grow at the expense of the greater good.** We offer commercial services. We also wish to be useful to those working to understand and fix the problems created and amplified by the first generation online businesses and their ecosystems.

How We Can Help You, Today?

If you're a journalist or student, we can offer you free access to our platform, with which you can explore the true drivers of Significance. It's not an unlimited access offer, but we're doing what we can.

Please sign up & contact us for more details.

Set up an account: [sign up](#)

Email: contact@significancesystems.com