

# The SMAC of the Decade

//// Preeti Jasnani,  
Principal Learning Designer



**TATA INTERACTIVE SYSTEMS**

Social Media, Mobility, Analytics, and Cloud Computing – popularly termed SMAC have ushered in the next generation of technological trends. Even in terms of scale, complexity, and impact on business houses across the world, the digital age has redefined employee productivity, customer satisfaction, and organizational success. Undoubtedly then, Social and Cloud-based learning environments powered by Analytics and Mobile First design are also characterizing and influencing the way learners learn today.

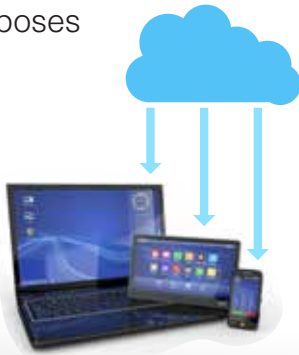
The current decade has started to witness a fast changing landscape in technological innovations, some of which have brought about sweeping changes in our everyday activities. Today, a typical day in the life of tech-savvy individuals (either college-going students or working professionals) requires them to manage multiple aspects involving various new gadgets one couldn't imagine a few years ago. The most fascinating of all these possibilities is to see people around you move about with a computer chip in their eyeglasses or wrist watches. Even fitness fanatics, these days, work out with all sorts of fancy wearable gadgets and keep checking in their progress on Facebook!

To take stock of the changes—small and big—that have stealthily crept in and comfortably fitted into our everyday life, meet Susan, a sales executive from a multinational corporation.

So, what does a typical day in her life look like? Here's a sneak peek ...

## 12.30 to 5 p.m.

- » Works on her laptop in office
- » Simultaneously accesses social sites on her tab
- » Checks her son's schedule on his School Website via her tab
- » Connects with clients, friends, families via Whatsapp
- » Accesses cloud applications for various purposes



## 9.45 to 11.30 a.m.

- » Uses Google Maps to drive to her client office
- » Makes the presentation using her tablet
- » Accesses Internet and other resources via a Google Search on her tablet
- » At the end of the meeting, logs on to a cloud-based CRM system to log details of her meeting.

## 6.30 – 7.00 a.m.

- » Wakes up with an alarm set on her smartphone
- » Exchanges greetings with friends/family on Whatsapp groups
- » Checks email and social networks on her smartphone over a cuppa



## 7.00 to 7.45 a.m.

- » Goes for a run wearing a fitness wristband
- » Checks in her end-of-run status on Facebook using the gadget

## 8.00 to 9.30 a.m.

- » Has breakfast and responds to emails using her tablet
- » Updates her calendar and planner on her tab
- » Skypes with her husband who is out of town for work
- » Transfers her presentation for a client meeting from her laptop to her tab
- » Checks her presentation on the tab to ensure it runs fine
- » Packs off her son to school and gets ready to take on the day



*A Day in the Life of Susan*

Looks familiar, doesn't it? Like any other digitally savvy individual, Susan's daily routine is strongly influenced by elements of the social and mobile worlds. Why then should her learning environment be any different? Why can't Susan's learning use these very elements and mimic her real life?

Picture this ...

- » Reviews Likes and other Stats of all learning materials
- » Shares and curates content in the learning environment



- » Receives communication about her course on her smartphone
- » Connects with her course peers on Whatsapp



- » Accesses some parts of her learning environment via wearable gadgets
- » Checks in the learning game-play stats on Facebook



- » Uses Google Maps and Google Search to research, reflect, and connect the dots of her learnings



- » Accesses her course from a cloud via tablets and other devices
- » Engages in discussions over social networks as part of an assignment

### *Merging of Personal and Learning Spaces*

Wouldn't the merging of her personal and learning spaces then result in an enhanced experience?

## The SMAC

The 21st century modern learners are clearly very different. Their life is largely influenced by the Social, Cloud, and Mobile worlds. Add “Analytics” to this list and what one gets is a popular and fairly impactful acronym—SMAC—in the IT services world.

SMAC is influencing this digital generation so much that they now have shorter attention spans and, therefore, end up demanding information in smaller bites, albeit very fast and preferably on the go. When these new-age learners look for learning, they go to Google, YouTube, TED talks, Khan Academy, and, for the last couple of years, MOOCs! Increasingly, these learners want their learning experiences to match the pace and style of their life.

Let’s take a closer look at the impact each of these modern day paradigms—Social, Mobile, Analytics, and Cloud—constituting the SMAC have in the learning space.

### Social

Social networks and social networking have been an area of debate and most corporates or academic administrators are skeptical about encouraging social networking in the learning space, mostly for reasons of security. Apprehensions about using social networking at the workplace also arise because of what the word “social” connotes—employees whiling away their time on Facebook and Twitter, posting status updates on the walk they took with their dogs or the cereal they had for breakfast.

The trends, however, are now shifting as more and more netizens have started using the social networks as tools for personal knowledge management and collaborative learning. More importantly, learners of the SMAC decade are turning to social media to learn at the point of need for their own professional development. The informal environment of social media provides immense flexibility and yet gives control to individuals over the information being shared and the format in which the information is being shared. Furthermore, the information shared via social media does not expire and can be built upon in unique ways at any given point in time. Social networks allow for forming connections—between individuals and between an individual and a piece of information.

## Mobile

“According to IDC, the number of PCs will fall from 28.7% of the device market in 2013 to 13% in 2017. Tablets will increase from 11.8% in 2013 to 16.5% by 2017, and smartphones will increase from 59.5% to 70.5%.” – Docebo, (March 2014), E-Learning Market Trends & Forecast 2014-2016. Retrieved <http://www.docebo.com/landing/contactform/elearning-market-trends-and-forecast-2014-2016-docebo-report.pdf>

Not surprisingly, mobile devices are a medium of preference for the 21st century learners. These individuals are also increasingly contributing to the BYOD–Bring Your Own Device–culture at the workplace, where they use their personal (usually mobile) devices to perform work related activities, including formal and informal trainings. The new age workers believe they don’t need to always be in office to be productive and demand device freedom and greater flexibility. The mobile world and changing workplace together provide a great opportunity to transform workplace learning, thereby supporting continuous and informal learning.

## Analytics

Personalization of learning and learning analytics are hot topics in the learning space today. Although as a topic, analytics has been in existence for several decades in education theory and practices, analytics in a learning environment is now looked upon to provide technological, social, and pedagogical adaptations in the journey of the learner.

At its most basic level, analytics helps track usage of the learning environment and instructional components to gauge learner engagement and identify potential “at-risk” students. At more advanced levels, analytics can help learners chalk out their own learning paths and realize their learning preferences. Consequently, a training that facilitates personalized learning does not have a linear design. Often, it constitutes a lattice of assets featuring connections with each other in a learning space, fostering a learning path that is neither linear, exactly prescriptive, nor guaranteed in one form or combination. So, learners research and find their own way through this range of assets and arenas, make connections according to their own learning preferences, and then reflect upon their learning to bridge their learning experience to a change in performance in their workplace.



### *Individualized Learning Path*

#### Cloud

Not surprisingly, the cloud plays an important role in the life of SMAC learners, given their demand for fast and easy access to information and their learning. The demand does not end here as these learners also want to be in control of their learning. And the cloud offers access to all of the data, all of the time with the flexibility to interact, share, and collaborate with anyone in real time. For a corporate, cloud-based learning accelerates learning, cuts costs, reduces overheads, eliminates wait time for their learners, and personalizes the learning.

#### //// So, SMAC it!

Undoubtedly, the Social and Cloud-based learning environments powered by Analytics and Mobile First design are characterizing and influencing the way learners learn today. These individuals increasingly want to merge their personal and learning spaces, so that their learning experiences mimic their everyday life. Most importantly, these learners foster a culture of continuous and continual learning by:

- » Learning from a constant stream of knowledge and information
- » Collaborating to share knowledge, experiences, ideas, and resources as part of their everyday life
- » Extracting learning from their everyday activities both at work and in their personal life

And how best can learning design address the needs of the SMAC learner?

At the least, there should be an attempt to change, swing around, and shift elements in design thinking. More importantly, there needs to be a shift from a focused “design a training” approach to thinking holistically in terms of “providing an integrated learning ecosystem” that should, at the least, provide for the following:

- » Unique learning experience
  - › Self-driven and personalized paths
  - › Micro (bite-sized) and pervasive learning
  - › Peer to peer collaboration
  - › Integration of social media and/or social media-like elements
  - › Curation and dynamic building of content
  - › Live projects and practical application
- » Scalability and cost effectiveness
  - › Should cost less to develop (by integrating open resources)
  - › Longer shelf life and sustainability of training materials
  - › Option for an Instructor-less delivery
  - › Cloud-based deployment
  - › Flexible and easy access via mobile devices

Simply put, let's SMAC it!



**TATA INTERACTIVE SYSTEMS**

[www.tatainteractive.com](http://www.tatainteractive.com)