

# : *What is social media?*

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How we communicate, obtain and process information for personal and work decisions is changing. The transformation toward using more socially based information is due to developments with Web 2.0 (cf., Power, 2007) that have improved social media. In general, social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to enhance human communication and create dynamic, interactive dialogues. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." This definition is very general and people continue to disagree about the scope and hence the meaning of the term social media.

At one time in the recent past, the Wikipedia article on social media stated "Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words and pictures. This interaction, and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and 'building' of shared meaning, as people share their stories, and understandings." Content can change rapidly with social media.

When checking the Wikipedia definition recently (April 2011) it was simplified as "Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue."

Blogger Joe Thornley argues "Social media are online communications in which individuals shift fluidly and flexibly between the role of audience and author. To do this, they use social software that enables anyone without knowledge of coding, to post, comment on, share or mash up content and to form communities around shared interests (<http://propr.ca/2008/what-is-social-media/>).

Social media refers to online technology tools that help people use the internet to communicate with friends and to share information and resources with their network of contacts.

Various online sources categorize the types of social media. At FredCavazza.net, the Social Media Landscape is divided into 10 categories: 1. publish (wikia), 2. share (YouTube), 3. discuss phpbb, skype), 4. social networks (facebook, LinkedIn), 5. microblog (twitter), 6. lifestream (friendfeed), 7. livecast (justin.tv), 8. virtual worlds (Second Life, HABBO), 9. social games (pogo, doof), and 10.

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massively multiplayer online games (World of Warcraft, Happy Farm).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs and microblogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds.

Social networking sites link individuals together by a shared interest. An effective social networking site creates a dynamic, expanding community of shared interests. Individuals can belong to multiple social networks and multiple communities in cyberspace. Some people consider social networking as synonymous with social media. TechTarget (<http://whatis.techtarget.com>) defines social networking as "the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals. While social networking has gone on almost as long as societies themselves have existed, the unparalleled potential of the Internet to promote such connections is only now being fully recognized and exploited, through Web-based groups established for that purpose."

For our purposes, an online social network is a service, platform, or web site that supports creating, building and supporting social relationships among people who share interests and/or activities. The network allows users to generate and publish content related to shared ideas, activities, events, and/or interests.

Information technology based communications media have changed with Web 2.0 technologies. These newer technologies support user generated content that is easily distributed and shared. Also, technology let's people combine, edit and archive content easily. Publication of content is not reviewed, censored or evaluated for quality. See a blog discussion on this topic started February 16, 2007 at <http://scobleizer.com/2007/02/16/what-is-social-media/>.

In conclusion, social media is increasing its penetration in our lives. We have trouble defining social media, but most of us are sure we know a social media application when we see it and use it. So far anecdotal evidence suggests that in some situations the impact on personal and managerial decision making can be extensive. To study the impact of social media on decision making it is necessary to use a specific social media application like facebook. We also would determine if a specific application is a useful decision support tool or if it harms decision making. Based on a number of studies using varied social media applications it may be possible to develop some generalizations.

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