

Mainly, sociological theory has asked the question of what it means to be social. Answering it therefore requires engagement with sociological theory. Specifically, I will introduce Durkheim's, Weber's, Marx's and Tönnies's concepts of sociality and apply them to providing an explanation of the social media concept.

Section 2.1 discusses the question of what new social media are and provides some basic features and criticisms of the terms "web 2.0" and "social media". In section 2.2, you can read different definitions of social media. I point out that we need social theory to understand what is social about social media. For this task, some sociological theory concepts are introduced that allow us to better understand the sociality of social media. I introduce four concepts developed by social theorists. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was a French sociologist who developed the concept of social facts. Max Weber (1864–1920) was a German sociologist who worked out a theory of social action and social relations. Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a social theorist who established a critical theory of capitalism. Collaborative work is one of this theory's concepts. Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) was a German sociologist who is best known for his theory of community. Section 2.3 discusses how the concepts of these four thinkers can be used in constructing a model of social media. It also examines how one can empirically study the continuities and changes of the World Wide Web. Section 2.4 introduces a model of social media communication. Section 2.5 discusses the notion of big data and why it has become important.

2.1 WEB 2.0 AND SOCIAL MEDIA

WEB 2.0

The terms "social media" and "web 2.0" have in the past years become popular for describing types of World Wide Web (WWW) application, such as blogs, microblogs like Twitter, social networking sites, or video-/image-/file-sharing platforms or wikis. As the word "social" features prominently in the term "social media", the question arises: What is social about social media?

The term "web 2.0" was coined in 2005 by Tim O'Reilly (2005a, 2005b), the founder of the publishing house O'Reilly Media, which focuses on the area of computer technology. O'Reilly (2005a) lists the following as the main characteristics of web 2.0: radical decentralization, radical trust, participation instead of publishing, users as contributors, rich user experience, the long tail, the web as platform, control of one's own data, remixing data, collective intelligence, attitudes, better software by more users, play, undetermined user behaviour. He provides the following more formal definition:

Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation", and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences. (O'Reilly 2005b)

O'Reilly creates the impression that the WWW, featuring BitTorrent, blogs, Flickr, Google, tagging, Wikipedia and so on, was in 2005 radically new and different from the earlier web (1.0). O'Reilly (2005a) consequently spoke of web 2.0 as a "new platform" that features "new applications".

In 2000, a crisis of the Internet economy emerged. The inflow of financial capital had driven up the market values of many Internet companies, but profits could not hold up with the promises of high market values. The result was a financial bubble (the so-called dot-com bubble) that burst in 2000, resulting in many start-up Internet companies going bankrupt. They were mainly based on venture capital financial investments and the hope of delivering profits in the future, and this resulted in a gap between share values and accumulated profits. The talk about the novelty of "web 2.0" and social media fits well into the post-crisis situation, in which investors had to be convinced to invest in new Internet start-up companies, which was difficult after the 2000 crisis. The ideology that web 2.0 is something new and different and that it has new economic and democratic potentials helped to convince investors. Web 2.0 and social media were therefore born in the situation of capitalist crisis as ideologies aimed at overcoming the crisis and establishing new spheres and models of capital accumulation for the corporate Internet economy. The talk about novelty was aimed at attracting novel capital investments.

Although Tim O'Reilly surely thinks that "web 2.0" denotes actual changes, he says that the crucial fact about it is that users, as a collective intelligence, co-create the value of platforms like Google, Amazon, Wikipedia or Craigslist in a "community of connected users" (O'Reilly and Battelle 2009, 1). He admits that the term was mainly created for identifying the need of new economic strategies for Internet companies after the "dot-com" crisis, in which the bursting of financial bubbles caused the collapse of many Internet companies. So he states in a paper published five years after the invention of the term "web 2.0" that this nomenclature was "a statement about the second coming of the Web after the dotcom bust". He was speaking at a conference that was "designed to restore confidence in an industry that had lost its way after the dotcom bust" (ibid.).

CRITIQUES OF WEB 2.0 AND SOCIAL MEDIA OPTIMISM

Critiques of web 2.0/social media optimism have, for example, stressed the following points:

- *Digital labour*: Online advertising is a mechanism by which corporations exploit Internet users' digital labour. Users form an Internet prosumer/produser commodity and are part of a surplus-value generating class that produces the commons of society that are exploited by capital (Fuchs 2008a, 2010c). Web 2.0 is based on the exploitation of free labour (Terranova 2004).
- *The branding of the self*: Most Internet users are part of a creative precarious underclass that needs economic models that assist them in making a living from their work (Lovink 2008). Blogging is mainly a self-centred, nihilistic, cynical activity (Lovink 2008). Alice Marwick (2013) argues that social media foster status-seeking behaviour and thereby "promote the infiltration of marketing and advertising techniques into relationships and social behavior" (93). Social media "is predicated on the cultural logic of celebrity, according to which the highest value is given to mediation, visibility, and

attention" (Marwick 2013, 14). The neoliberal logic of competition and individualism is expressed by the fact that on certain social media platforms one accumulates likes, followers, friends or check-ins, and the more of it one has, the higher one's cultural online capital and social online capital. Social capital is, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 122), "a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability", whereas cultural capital has to do with reputation. Competitive social media foster the branding, quantification, marketization, commodification, capitalization of the self. Although we speak of "social" media, many contemporary "social" media platforms' logic is quite individualistic. They are called Facebook, YouTube or MySpace and not WeBook, OurTube or OurSpace because they are all about the self-presentation of the individual (networked) self. There is, however, also the potential to redesign social media away from the commodification of data and the self towards a collective "we"-logic, in which individuals encounter each other as partners, friends based on a logic of the commons, community and co-operation. So although dominant social media tend to foster the logic of individualization, as Marwick and Lovink stress, there are certainly alternative potentials.

- *Corporate imperialism*: Corporate media chains dominate the Internet economy (Staney 2009). Web 2.0 is contradictory and therefore also serves dominative interests (Cammaerts 2008). Web 2.0 optimism is uncritical and an ideology that serves corporate interests (Fuchs 2008a; van Dijck and Nieborg 2009). Corporations appropriate blogs and web 2.0 in the form of corporate blogs, advertising blogs, spam blogs and fake blogs (Deuze 2008).
- *Marketing and sharing ideology*: Web 2.0 and social media constitute a marketing ideology (Scholz 2008) that aims at attracting investors by trying to convince them that the Internet is constantly renewing itself and thereby bringing about new business opportunities. Both concepts have been arising in the aftermath of Internet economy's crisis in 2000 and have aimed to restore investors' confidence (Hinton and Hjorth 2013, Chapter 2). Facebook and other corporate social media use the notion of sharing for mystifying the logic of profit, advertising and commerce that is at the heart of their operation (John 2013).
- *The ideology of activity and creativity*: Web 2.0 users are more passive users than active creators (van Dijck 2009).
- *Simplistic notion of participation*: Web 2.0 discourse advances a minimalist notion of participation (Carpentier and De Cleen 2008).
- *Depoliticization*: Web 2.0 discourse is technological fetishism that advances post-politics and depoliticization in communicative capitalism (Dean 2005, 2010).
- *Techno-determinism*: Social media optimism is based on the techno-deterministic ideologies of cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism (Morozov 2011) that only postulate advantages for businesses and society without taking into account the realities of exploitation and the contradictions of capitalism (Freedman 2012; Fuchs 2011b, Chapter 7).
- *Engineered, instrumental sociality*: José van Dijck (2013, 11) argues that social media automate the social by engineering and manipulating social connections. It would make "sociality technical" (van Dijck 2013, 12). Douglas Rushkoff (2010, 158) says that as a result "we are optimizing humans for machinery". "These days the social is a feature. It is no longer a problem (as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the Social Problem predominated) or a sector in society provided for deviant, sick, and elderly people. Until recently, employing an amoral definition of the social was unthinkable" (Lovink 2011, 6).

HOW NEW ARE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Matthew Allen (2012) and Trebor Scholz (2008) argue that social media applications are not new and that their origins can be traced back to years earlier than 2005. Blogs were already around at the end of the 1990s, the wiki technology was suggested by Ward Cunningham in 1994 and first released in 1995, social networking sites already existed in 1995 (Classmates) and in 1997 (Sixdegrees), Google was founded in 1999. The discourse of ever newer versions would allow "products to claim to be new" (Allen 2012, 264), but at the same time also sustain "continuity and promise an easy transition from what came before" (ibid.). Versions would be ways of encouraging consumption. When talking about novelty, one has to be clear as to whether one talks about the novelty of technology, usage patterns or power relations.

Allen and Scholz argue that the technologies that constitute "social media"/"web 2.0" are not new. However, on the level of usage, these technologies were not popular in the 1990s and have become popular rather recently. On the level of the power relations of the Internet, it is just as unlikely that nothing changes at all as it is unlikely that there is radical change, because at a certain level of its organization capitalism requires change and novelty in order to stay the same (system of surplus value exploitation and capital accumulation) and continue to exist.

Tom Standage (2013), in his book *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – The First 2,000 Years*, takes a long-term perspective and argues that at the time of the Romans, social communication took on the form of "letters and other documents which were copied, commented on, and shared with others in the form of papyrus rolls" (1–2). Social media would therefore be at least 2,000 years old.

The Romans did with with papyrus rolls and messengers; today hundreds of millions of people do the same things rather more quickly and easily using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other Internet tools. The technologies involved are very different, but these two forms of social media, separated by two millennia, share many of the same underlying structures and dynamics: they are two-way, conversational environments in which information passes horizontally from one person to another along social networks, rather than being delivered vertically from an impersonal central source. (3)

2.2 THE NEED OF SOCIAL THEORY FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

DEFINITIONS OF WEB 2.0 AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Michael Mandiberg argues that the notion of "social media" has been associated with multiple concepts: "the corporate media favorite 'user-generated content', Henry Jenkins' media-industries-focused 'convergence culture', Jay Rosen's 'the people formerly known as the audience', the politically infused 'participatory media', Yochai Benkler's process-oriented 'peer-production', and Tim O'Reilly's computer-programming-oriented 'Web 2.0'" (Mandiberg 2012, 2).