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## CHAPTER 3

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# Digital and Social Media

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### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify and discuss communication and media theories that inform our understanding of social media and their use
- critique social media practices in the context of communication and media theories
- understand the opportunities as well as the risks and dysfunctions of social media
- know how to apply social media in public relations practice

### Structure

- Digitalisation and what it means
- The evolution of the Web – Web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

- Digital versus social
- The first and second media age
- PR practices in social media
- Managing risks

## The fourth media revolution?

The Internet and particularly social media have been described as the ‘fourth media revolution’, following the development of writing in various parts of the world between 4,000 and 3,000 BCE (before the common era<sup>1</sup>), invention of printing presses in China and Europe between the eleventh and fifteenth century, and development of broadcasting in the early twentieth century (Balnaves, Donald & Shoosmith, 2009: 12). Notwithstanding a number of criticisms of the Internet, which will be examined in this chapter along with its benefits, media scholar Robert McChesney acknowledges the ‘digital revolution’ and its primary site, the Internet, as ‘the most extraordinary and important development of the past half century’ (2013: xi).

Media are recognised as integral to human communication. While interpersonal face-to-face communication is central to human society, much if not most human communication is mediated. Beginning with the use of cave drawings, carved illustrations in wood and stone, smoke signals and drums to convey messages to others across time and space, through major inventions such as writing, paper, the printing press and the telegraph, to today’s ‘information age’ and global ‘network society’ (Castells, 2010), humans have found it necessary to use tools to communicate. Along with his famous aphorism ‘the medium is the message’, McLuhan (1964) described media as ‘extensions of man’ – or, in preferable non-gendered terms, extensions of humans. Modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) are characterised as makers and users of tools that extend the capabilities of their bodies – and communication media are among their most important tools.

In the early twenty-first century, human society is in the midst of another major transformation in communication media enabled by digitalisation, which has made possible the Internet, the World Wide Web, and particularly what is referred to as Web 2.0 and the nascent Web 3.0. PR

practitioners need to be fully familiar with these new forms of media and understand their uses and misuses, their functions and dysfunctions, their benefits and their risks.

## Web 1.0: The Information Age

While the Internet was developed in the late 1960s by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the US Department of Defense working with computer scientists at universities including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT),<sup>2</sup> the World Wide Web was established in the last decade of the twentieth century. Its creation is attributed primarily to Englishman Tim Berners-Lee who led a team of scientists at the Geneva-based *Conseil Europeen pour la Recherche Nucleaire* (European Organization for Nuclear Research), commonly known as CERN. Although work began in 1989, the first successful build of a Web server and a Web browser was completed on Christmas Day 1990 ('History of the World Wide Web', 2000). Two key elements that made the Web possible and popular were:

- Development of the **Hyper Text Mark-up Language (HTML)**, a programming language that allows text, graphics, photos, and even videos to be coded so that they can be viewed on any computer without the user needing to have the software in which the content was produced (unlike most text documents, graphics, spreadsheets, etc. that require the relevant application to be installed before they can be opened); and
- Development of **Web browsers** – desktop applications that enable Internet users to view HTML programmed pages hosted on Web servers. The first publicly available Web browser called WorldWideWeb was written by Berners-Lee and released in 1991. In 1992, the first widely used Web browser, Mosaic, was developed at the National Center for Supercomputing

Applications (NCSA) at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), led by Marc Andreessen. Today, Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Mozilla's Firefox are popular Web browser applications.

The Digital Revolution that enabled the rapid development and use of computers and the Internet was the catalyst for what is termed the Information Age (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998), just as the Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of the Industrial Age. The Information Age is predicted to create increased access to information for all, leading to new types of economies and business models, new ways of working, and increased social equity.

### ***One-way transmission and broadcasting***

Even though the founder of the Web, Tim Berners-Lee, said that that the Web was always intended to be about what he called intercreativity (2000:183), the Internet and early iterations of the Web continued to be part of what Poster (1995) calls the **First Media Age**. Poster describes the first media age as characterised by centralised content production and one-way distribution of information under the control of the State or large capitalist organisations that mainly represent elites and treat audiences as *consumers* of information (Poster, 1995). (See Table 3.1.)

What is retrospectively termed Web 1.0 (Vergeer, 2013) was made up of Web sites with static, centrally-controlled content – that is, no interactivity other than the facility to select from menus and links by mouse clicking. Content was controlled by 'Web masters' employed by the owners of Web sites. Visitors to Web pages could not post content or comment. Digital communication between users could only be conducted via e-mail, which was developed in 1972 – either via specialist e-mail applications or from embedded 'Contact us' e-mail apps in Web sites.

Thus, early Web communication followed the *Mathematical Theory of Communication* and the transmissional model developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) and various derivatives such as

the Sender, Message, Channel, Receiver (SMCR) model of Berlo (1960). It was one-way, predominantly top-down, and *broadcast* information to mass audiences.

Therefore, while digitalisation brought increased speed to communications and online access to documents, photos, graphics, and video via the Web, the technology to turn various forms of content into digital files able to be sent electronically did not of itself bring transformation to society as some predicted. Early Web sites were largely a continuation of the traditional approach of *mass media* communication.

### ***Traditional media go digital and online***

Furthermore, traditional media have taken advantage of digitalisation and the Internet. Newspapers rapidly developed online editions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Also, radio and TV progressively changed from analogue technology to digital, and today most programs can be accessed via the Internet as well as through broadcasting technology using sound waves, microwave, or satellite transmissions. Music recordings progressively evolved from impressions cut into vinyl records to magnetic tape (reel to reel and then cassettes) to CDs (compact discs) containing digital files of recordings, while images were transferred from film to magnetic video tape and then to digital video discs (DVDs). Today, of course, music, photographs, movies, and short videos are all easily accessible in digital form from Web sites.

Referring to media and communication as digital does not differentiate between traditional and new forms of media, as increasingly all media are digital. To understand media today, we need to look beyond digitalisation and the underlying technologies. Jenkins (2006) identified the trend of **convergence**, and one key example of convergence is that all media content today is digital, or capable of being digitalised.

## Web 2.0: The Social Web

The term Web 2.0 was reportedly first used by Darcy DiNucci in a 1999 article. However, DiNucci (1999) used the term in relation to design and aesthetics in her article targeted at Web designers. While she hinted at a second iteration of the Web, current use of the term Web 2.0 emanates from a conference organized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty in 2004 that discussed interactive Web applications (O'Reilly, 2005). They used the term Web 2.0 to refer to a second generation of Internet-based services and applications that are open for collaboration and high levels of interactivity. Understanding of the unique characteristics and affordances of Web 2.0 and the forms of communication that it enables can be gained from examining the statements of pioneering practitioners as well as media and communication researchers.

O'Reilly emphasised that Web 2.0 is a new way of thinking more than technologies, even though technologies such as **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication) and **search engines** are important enablers of the Web services that we enjoy today. In a much-quoted essay titled 'What is Web 2.0', O'Reilly said that a central principle of Web 2.0 is harnessing 'collective intelligence' (2005: para. 25), a concept discussed extensively by sociologist Pierre Lévy (1997). While acknowledging the Web as a technological 'platform', O'Reilly described Web 2.0 as primarily a 'set of principles and practices' (2005: para. 7). Many other architects and developers of Web 2.0 have similarly discussed its significance in non-technological terms. For example, pioneering blogger Peter Merholz (1999), who created the abbreviation '**blog**' in 1999 from the term Weblog that was first coined in 1997 by John Barger (Wortham, 2007), refers to Web 2.0 in terms of a philosophy and practices. In his blog *Peterme.com* under a heading 'Web 2.0 – It's not about the technology', Merholz wrote: 'Web 2.0 is primarily interesting from a philosophical standpoint. It's about relinquishing control, it's about openness, trust and authenticity' (2005: para. 5).

In a section titled ‘What is Web 2.0’ on the ICT industry journal site *ZDNet*, Richard MacManus lists a number of definitions of Web 2.0 including describing it as a ‘an attitude not a technology’ and specifically as ‘the underlying philosophy of relinquishing control’ (2005: paras 2, 3, 5). In his treatise on convergence, Jenkins emphasises that convergence is about culture more than technology and, in particular, ‘participatory culture’ (2006: 243).

In academic research literature, Bucy (2004) notes that interactivity is the defining element of Web 2.0 communication. Similarly, in their review of Web 2.0, Harrison and Barthel say that ‘collaborative content creation is the *sine qua non* of Web 2.0 applications’ (2009: 163). They elaborate saying:

Web 2.0 is founded on a radical reconceptualisation of the user, from consumer of online products and information produced by companies to producer of online products and information that they share with others, including companies. (Harrison & Barthel, 2009: 160)

The media user who is a producer as well as consumer of content was labelled the *prosumer* by futurist Alvin Toffler (1970, 1980) and is also referred to as a *produser* (producer and user) by some media scholars (Bruns, 2008; Picone, 2007).

### **New media – what’s new, what’s not?**

This significant shift from a media that are controlled by a handful of large corporations or governments engaged in broadcasting centrally produced content to open publicly-accessible media in which anyone can produce and distribute content and engage with others interactively led to widespread description of these new forms and formats as ‘new media’ (Flew, 2014; Fuchs, 2014;

Jenkins, 2006; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009; Siapera, 2012).

However, the term ‘new media’ is problematic in several respects. First, the term itself is not new. Benjamin Peters notes that the Oxford English Dictionary attributes first use of the term ‘new media’ to Marshall McLuhan in 1960 and he argues that McLuhan used the term as early as 1953 in an article about eminent media scholar Harold Innis (Peters, 2009: 16). Second, some media that MIT media scholar Lisa Gitelman says are ‘familiarily and collectively referred to as “new media”’ (2008: 1) cannot be accurately described as new. For example, online chat and an early form of online social networks have existed since 1979 when Duke University graduate students Tom Trucott and Jim Ellis created **Newsgroups** on UseNet, a pre-Web text-only section of the Internet (Hauben & Hauben, 1998). The first online journal in a format later called a blog was published by Claudio Pinhanez in 1994 on the MIT Media Lab Web site. Pyra Labs released its online journaling software product called **Blogger** in 1999, which digital media researcher D. Travers Scott describes as blogging’s ‘big bang’ as it spread blogging beyond the digital elite (2008: 275). The first online social network in the modern form, **SixDegrees**, was established in 1997 and gained several million members before it closed in 2001 (boyd & Ellison, 2007). So, by the mid-twenty teens, online chat was almost 40 years old, blogs had existed for more than 20 years, and online social networks had been around in some form for almost 20 years. **Facebook** is well into its second decade and **YouTube** and **Twitter** were a decade old in 2015 and 2016 respectively. As the author of *New Media*, Terry Flew, has acknowledged:

Digital media technologies are now so pervasive in our work, our home lives, and the myriad everyday interactions we have with each other as well as with social institutions, that they are ceasing to be ‘new’ in any meaningful sense of the term. (2008: 2)



Third, as well as being inaccurate by most definitions of new, the term ‘new media’ is relative and time-bound. As Gitelman points out, ‘all media were once new’ (2008: 1). Calling particular technologies and practices new will become increasingly problematic as further developments occur. Describing media in this way is, at best, a temporary step and contributes little to understanding their distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, Carpentier and de Cleen have pointed to problems caused by the ‘discourse of novelty’ that accompanies much discussion of the Web and ‘new media’ (2008: 7) and leads to considerable hype and what Woolgar (2002) calls *cyberbole*.

### **Social media and social networks**

The terms *social media* and *social networks* are also widely used to describe a range of new communication applications enabled by Web 2.0. These are often conflated into the single collective term ‘social media’ and there is continuing debate about terminology in our changing media environment (Macnamara, 2014). However, social media is a more appropriate and useful term than most others because it encapsulates the fundamental difference between emergent forms of Web 2.0-based media and traditional media. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content’ (2010: 61). This definition usefully draws attention away from focus on the technological dimension of so-called new media, which leads to the pitfalls of *technological determinism* (Deibert, 1997; Lievrouw, 2002) and the ‘discourse of novelty’ (Carpentier & de Cleen, 2008: 7), to recognise the social, cultural, and political context of these media and the changing media practices of production and consumption (Couldry, 2004).

Social media are part of what Poster calls the **Second Media Age**. Poster sees the second media age as ‘characterised by a decentralised network of communications [that] makes senders receivers, producers consumers, rulers ruled, upsetting the logic of understanding of the first media age’ (Poster, 1995: 33). He further proposed that media in the second media age were beyond state control and democratising through their affordance of ‘two-way decentralised communication’ (2001: 63) and interactivity, which he argued are essential elements for individuals to construct themselves as subjects and for effective functioning of society (Poster, 2001: 82). In short, social media are so called because:

1. Access and content are open and largely controlled by society – not by government or elite organisations; and
2. They are used for social interaction (i.e., conversation, sharing, and collaboration) – not one-way transmission of information.

Table 3.1. Comparison of the First Media Age and Second Media Age (based on Poster, 1995).

<b>First Media Age</b>	<b>Second Media Age</b>
Centralised content production	Decentralised content production (e.g. user-generated content)
State control (or capitalist control in concert with the state)	Beyond state and capitalist control; democratising; open access
One-way distribution of information	Two-way interactive communication
Audiences conceived and treated as mass	Fragmentation of audiences
Elites dominate media content and reproduce existing social structures	Individuals use media to construct themselves as ‘subjects’, enabling social change

## **Eight key fundamentals of social media**

There are at least **eight** fundamental characteristics and affordances of social media that need to be understood to use them appropriately and effectively. Many of these are not new in the history of media, and certainly not in the history of human communication, as will be further explained in the following. But these characteristics and features are highlighted and gain new relevance in social media.

### ***One: The interactive turn***

The philosophy of relinquishing control (Merholz, 2005; MacManus, 2005) and adopting protocols, principles, and practices that enable and foster interactivity have already been identified in examining the shift in Web practices referred to as Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), and are recommended in social media research (e.g., Boler, 2008; Bucy, 2004). However, interactivity is understood in varying ways and needs clarification.

McMillan identifies three levels of interactivity, which she describes as 'user-to-system', 'user-to-documents', and 'user-to-user' interactivity (2002: 166–72). In this typology, the first level relates to the **Human Computer Interface (HCI)** such as the use of graphical user interfaces (GUI) and basic interactions such as clicking on menus and icons to select content, which Carpentier refers to as 'person-to-machine' interactivity (2007: 221). McMillan emphasises the higher levels of 'user-to-documents' and particularly 'user-to-user' interactivity, as does Stromer-Galley in discussing 'human-interactive features' in political communication (2000: 111).

Sundar and colleagues identify two types of interactivity offered by Web sites: (1) *functional interactivity* that allows users to select content in different modalities (e.g., text, audio, video) and limited opportunities to comments such as in 'feedback' or 'contact us' boxes (Sundar, 2007); and (2) *contingent interactivity* which involves reciprocity in sending and receiving messages, so-named because such interactive exchanges are contingent on the content under discussion and

messages sent (Sundar, Kalyanaraman & Brown, 2003). Guillory and Sundar (2014) report from their research of organisation Web sites that the experiences and perceptions of users are enhanced by both functional interactivity, which is similar to what Carpentier calls ‘person-to-machine’ interactivity and McMillan calls ‘user-to-system’ and ‘user-to-documents’ interactivity, as well as contingent interactivity – ‘person-to-person’ or ‘user-to-user’ in Carpentier’s and McMillan’s terms. Nevertheless, there is general agreement among researchers that the higher levels of interactivity in which users can interact and engage in dialogue, collaboration and content creation (i.e., production), rather than selection and consumption of pre-determined content, are the key affordances that characterise social media and lead to engagement and participation.

### ***Two: Turbocharging two-way communication***

Excellent public relations is defined as two-way communication, as discussed in previous chapters (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). However, mass media have traditionally afforded little opportunity for two-way communication. Likewise, traditional Web 1.0 sites, printed corporate and organisational publications such as newsletters and annual reports, and even many events have offered limited potential for *two-way symmetrical* communication, or even *two-way asymmetrical* communication.

Through their interactive features and open access, social media enable and facilitate two-way communication. In theory, social media offer potential to significantly enhance public relations – although we will see later in this chapter that this potential is not yet being realised in many cases.

### ***Three: Monologue to dialogue***

Philosophers and communication theorists have long argued that true communication must involve dialogue – not monologue (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, 1981; Buber (1923/1958, 1947/2002;

Craig, 1999; Craig & Muller, 2007). Gadamer (1960/1989) argued that openness to the other is essential for communication and relationships – a cause taken up by many contemporary sociologists (e.g., Carey, 1989/2009; Dewey, 1926). In public relations, Kent and Taylor have applied these important principles of communication to create a *dialogic theory* of PR (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2015), which emphasises the importance of two-way interaction. By increasing the opportunities for two-way communication, social media are enablers of dialogic public relations.

#### ***Four: Consumers to 'prosumers' and 'producers'***

As noted previously, futurist Alvin Toffler forecast the rise of what he called the *prosumer* as early as 1970 in his book *Future Shock*. In the early twentieth century, with the increasing popularity of social media, Leadbeater and Miller (2004) described the profound shift in the mediascape as the “PRO-AM revolution” – a growing interaction between professional and amateur producers of media content. More recently, in his studies of what he calls the *producer*, Bruns (2008) has reported that much of the news and information and even music in circulation today is produced by people previously referred to as *consumers* and *audiences*. The rise of social media has turned notions of audiences as passive recipients of information on its head (Napoli, 2011; Ruddock, 2007). Social media offer opportunities for **collaboration**, particularly through specialist applications such as **wikis**. For instance, think of **Wikipedia**. In the past it was inconceivable that an encyclopaedia with more than 5 million articles in English and many more in other languages could be produced collaboratively by ordinary citizens and be available for free.

#### ***Five: Engagement***

Engagement has become a buzzword in marketing and in public relations. Often, low-level interactivity such as clickthroughs, views, ‘likes’ on Facebook, ‘follows’ on Twitter, retweets, ‘shares’ and downloads are seen as indicators of engagement (e.g., Marklein & Paine, 2012). However, social media offer much greater opportunities for engagement through their capacity for two-way communication leading to dialogue and collaboration. Some progressive organisations use social media to involve their employees, customers, and other stakeholders in planning projects and even producing content. This is an important use of social media because real engagement is not created by clicking a mouse or even following an organisation or person on Twitter. Engagement is more than thinking about someone or something (cognition). Engagement involves a level of passion, commitment and investment of discretionary effort (Erickson, 2008). Organisational psychologists identify three key components of engagement, all of which can be fostered through open interactive use of social media:

1. A psychological bond based on *affective commitment* (i.e., emotional attachment such as a sense of belonging, feeling valued, etc.) that goes beyond cognitive processing of information received and experiences;
2. *Positive affectivity*, a deeper level of positive emotional engagement which involves pride, passion and ‘absorption’, enthusiasm, energy and even excitement; and
3. Empowerment of those we are trying to engage, which psychologists and political scientists say is most effectively achieved through *participation* (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer & Smith, 2000: 320; Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001).

### **Six: Relationships**

As well as being theorised as two-way communication, public relations is ultimately aimed at building and maintaining relationships, according to a large body of literature already discussed in this text (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000). Through their interactive capabilities that enable two-way communication, dialogue, and engagement, social media can contribute to building and maintaining relationships. While online communication does not replace interpersonal communication, it extends communication temporally and spatially – i.e., people do not have to be co-located in time and space to interact online. Contact can be maintained across vast distances. Also, organisations and their stakeholders can interact online more frequently than physical meetings normally allow.

***Seven: Top-down to bottom-up and side-to-side (peer to peer)***

The facility for almost anyone to access social media and distribute information and advocate means that public communication no longer flows predominantly top-down from elites such as political leaders and management. With social media, communication flows bottom-up and side-to-side in society – referred to as **peer-to-peer (P2P)**. For example, travellers today regularly rely on reviews of hotels, resorts, and restaurants published by other travellers on TripAdvisor. It is argued that such reviews are more **authentic** than the Web sites of the organisations themselves, which are inevitably promotional. Also, social media potentially offer voice to groups that have been marginalised from traditional media and political representation.

***Eight: One-to-one, to one-to-many, to many-to-many***

One-to-one interpersonal communication has existed throughout 50,000 years of human history. Mass media created opportunities for one-to-many information dissemination – such as prime ministers, presidents, and office-bearers in government addressing citizens, and corporations

advertising their products and services to shareholders, and customers. The Second Media age has brought the opportunity for many to talk to many. Customers can share experiences of a product or service online. Citizens can make their feelings known and share views on political issues.

Activists can rally the way many did during **the Arab Spring** in Tunisia, Iran, and Egypt between 2009 and 2011.

### **Think about**

Based on evidence and historical records of how media have evolved over the past century, do you believe that the free access and openness for participation characteristic of the Second Media Age will continue? Or will free open social media be colonised by 'big business' and will Second Media Age companies such as Facebook and Google become the equivalent of News Corporation, CNN, and Time Warner in the twenty-first century?

### **The social organisation and social business**

Business, industry, and government have embraced digital and social media. For instance, a 2013 McKinsey survey estimated that 83% of companies use at least one form of social media. McKinsey (2013) reported that companies mostly use online video conferencing (60%), social networks (53%), blogs (43%), video sharing (4%), wikis (26%), microblogging (25%) and podcasts (25%). Digital media such as the Web as well as social media have enabled what some refer to as 'Government 2.0' (Government 2.0 Taskforce, 2010), a combination of *e-government* that focusses on online delivery of services such as submission of tax forms and visa applications as well as *e-democracy*, which offers online forms of participation in politics and civic affairs such as online public consultation.

In 2011, IBM declared itself a '**social business**', stating that a 'tectonic shift in the marketplace occurred' in the previous decade and noted that 'instead of simply pushing messages



and offers out to the market, marketing is engaging customers through open dialogue integrated with rich media capabilities that cater to customers' preferences, buying patterns and personal networks' (IBM, 2011: 2, 5). The global business consulting firm Gartner has published a book titled *The Social Organisation: How to Use Social Media to Tap the Collective Genius of Your Customers and Employees* (Bradley & McDonald, 2011).

Many political and social leaders see social media as an opportunity to engage youth, who are increasingly disengaging from traditional politics, and to redress what is referred as the '**democratic deficit**' (Couldry, 2010: 49; Curran, 2011: 86) and revitalise **the public sphere** (Habermas, 1989, 2006). As Corner notes, many pin their hopes on the Internet, particularly Web 2.0 communication, 'bypassing ... the degraded central systems of mediation in favour of a more independent, varied and critical range of resources for political knowledge' (2007: 223). Siapera says social media are facilitating a '**democratization of media**' (2012: 55) leading to increased access to tools of public communication (i.e., inclusion) and increased social interaction and civic participation.

### **Functions vs. dysfunctions**

Discussion of many new technologies are characterised by considerable hype (Gartner, 2008), *cyberoptimism* sometimes to the point of utopianism (Zhao, 2014), or what Woolgar (2002) called *cyberbole*. On the other hand, there is also *cyberpessimism*, scepticism, and dystopian views expressed by critics who warn of risks and dangers in the changes described. Without wishing to dampen enthusiasm for the potential of social media to transform many aspects of our lives, it is important to balance discussion by noting warnings and to develop an integrated view of the uses and potential of social media. In a review of the rise of the **Occupy** activist movement (such as Occupy Wall Street, <http://occupywallst.org>), largely organised through social media, DeLuca,

Lawson and Sun noted that ‘discussion of social media is too often simplified into a debate between techno-utopians and techno-cynics’ (2012: 485) Noted media scholars Robin Mansell (2012) and Robert McChesney (2013) describe the two camps as the ‘celebrants’ and the ‘sceptics’. The following are some factors to think about in developing an understanding of and using social media.

### ***The ‘digital divide’***

Despite rapid growth of Internet users around the world to more than 3 billion in 2015 (Internet World Statistics, 2015), it has to be borne in mind that that world’s population was more than 7 billion at that time (World Population Clock, 2015). Thus, almost 60% of people in the world do not use the Internet. This lack of access to information and communication is referred to as the ‘**digital divide**’ (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Norris, 2001). Even as technological access expands rapidly through wireless networks and mobile devices, a number of researchers point out that there are socioeconomic and cultural forms of digital divide because many sectors of society such as the poor, the under-educated, Indigenous communities, and some ethnic groups have low levels of online participation (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). This needs to be borne in mind in planning communication activities.

### **Think about**

If you were employed to design a digital communication campaign using the Web and social media for an organisation in your local area, what groups could be potentially missed? How could you plan communication inclusively to ensure you reach different age groups, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and so on?

### ***‘Lurking’***

A second key factor is that many users of social media are ‘lurkers’ – that is, they observe and monitor but do not actively contribute to discussions or content. Co-founder of the Nielsen Norman research company, Jakob Nielsen (2006), estimates that up to 90% of Internet users are ‘lurkers’ – that is, only 10% are active participants in interactive environments. In a *Social Technographics* report, Forrester Research presents a six-rung Ladder of Participation on which it estimates that only 13% of adults online are creators, compared with 52% ‘inactives’ and 33% who are ‘spectators’ (Li, 2007).

In one sense, this questions the grand claims of social networks such as Facebook, which claimed 1.5 million active monthly users in late 2015 (Facebook, 2015). By ‘active’, Facebook means that those users logged in at some point during the month, but they may not have contributed any content or comment or even ‘liked’ or ‘followed’ anyone. However, others point out that even in reading and viewing content and following others’ posts, ‘lurkers’ are learning and becoming informed. Therefore, even ‘lurking’ can be seen to be a form of participation.

### ***The loss of media ‘gatekeepers’***

One of the most serious concerns raised in relation to social media is that content bypasses the ‘gatekeepers’ who operate in traditional media (White, 1950) – the editors, sub-editors, and fact checkers who verify sources and confirm the veracity of statements and claims made.

Notwithstanding concerns that traditional media gatekeepers often fail in their role, social media are open to anyone with Internet access and rely on what what Jenkins calls a ‘self-correcting adhocracy’ (2006: 255).<sup>3</sup> Author of *The Cult of the Amateur*, Andrew Keen warns:

The Web 2.0 revolution is depleting the ranks of our cultural gatekeepers, as professional critics, journalists, editors, musicians, moviemakers and other purveyors of expert information

are being replaced by amateur bloggers, hack reviewers, homespun moviemakers and attic recording artists. (2007: 27)

Keen disparagingly describes social media users, particularly ‘**citizen journalists**’, as a ‘pyjama army’ engaged in presenting opinion as fact, rumour as reportage, and innuendo as information. Web 2.0, according to Keen, is ‘the great seduction’ and he claims that a ‘chilling reality in this brave new digital epoch is the blurring, obfuscation and even disappearance of truth’ (2007: 27).

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### **Explore 3.1**

#### **Citizen journalism or misinformation?**

From your reading of social media, can you identify examples of citizens breaking news or exposing important information via social media? Similarly, can you identify examples of misinformation being distributed through social media in the form of opinion, rumours, and untruths?

Research current examples. Or, if you cannot find a good current example, search online discussion of the London riots of 2011 in which **Blackberry** text messages were blamed for stirring up the riots, but social media were also used by citizens to organise clean-ups and restore order (Vis, 2013).

How would you classify **WikiLeaks** – citizen media, a new form of media altogether, or not journalism at all?

#### **Feedback**

Consider the following in examining social media.

1. Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger (2007) point out that ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘citizen media’ are blanket terms for a range of publishing models and significant differences in approach, content, and uses need to be understood.

2. For example, building on Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger (2007) and other studies, Australian journalist Margaret Simons (2013) identifies nine types of blogs as (1) pamphleteering blogs, (2) digest blogs, (3) advocacy blogs, (4) popular mechanics blogs, (5) exhibition blogs (6) gatewatcher blogs, (7) diary blogs, (8) advertisements and (9) news blogs. This illustrates that social media are used for a wide range of purposes from distributing news and information to advocacy campaigns, personal diaries, and entertainment.

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Some studies such as those of Eysenbach (2008) indicate that, even though social media content is not controlled by **intermediaries** (where *inter* means standing in between producers and receivers), **apomediaries** (where *apo* means stand by or alongside, such as peers) are often effective in maintaining quality of content and credibility. Wikipedia is an example of *apomediaries* at work – peers who correct misinformation and maintain an encyclopaedia that is almost as accurate as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Giles, 2005).

### ***Misinformation, privacy, and cyberattacks***

Despite the self-correcting adhocacy of social media through the work of vigilant peers, major concerns are expressed in relation to:

- The spread of **misinformation**;
- Breaches of **privacy** and **security**;
- Attacks by **trolls** and **hactivists**; and
- **Cyberbullying**.

These concerns are deservedly a focus of attention by governments, organisation management, and social leaders. They are not easily resolved, as they are part of a long-running debate over **media regulation versus self-regulation**. In all media, rights to freedom of speech and freedom of media need to be balanced against the rights of individuals to privacy, security, and freedom from bullying and harassment.

In all use of social media it needs to be borne in mind and communicated throughout an organisation that everything posted in social media is **public**. Even if content is removed from live pages, many servers and computers connected to the Internet will have cached that content and will continue to distribute it. There is a salutary saying: ‘What happens on the Internet stays on the Internet forever’.

### ***Colonisation by commercial interests***

Another concern is that social media will be colonised by commercial and other vested interests and be blatantly exploited for marketing and propaganda. Political parties and candidates in many countries have flocked to social media to garner support for their various policies and causes (Gibson, Williamson, & Ward, 2010; Macnamara, 2014). **Monetisation** is a buzzword in the online world as the owners of sites and applications try to find ways to generate income from their products and services. In free enterprise societies, commercial activities comprise a legitimate use of the Internet and social media. But practitioners need to bear in mind the essential differences between commercial media advertising and social media, as noted earlier in this chapter. Excessive commercialisation of social media can lead to a backlash. And, in the age of Web 2.0, voters, customers, employees, and other stakeholders have channels available to disseminate and amplify their voice.

## Think about

If media organisations, corporations, and individual online publishers do not make money from their digital communication investments to at least recover costs, if not make a profit, some may stagnate or be forced to close down. However, seeking to make money in social media can ‘turn off’ visitors. How and when is it appropriate to use social media for commercial purposes – and when is it not appropriate?

Table 3.2. Positive and negative impacts of digital and social media, based on DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman and Robinson (2001) as updated in Macnamara (2014).

Internet Impact	Positive	Negative
1. Inequality	New access to information based on computer use and availability (digital opportunity)	Patterns of access, availability and use of ICTs reflect other social inequalities (digital divide)
2. Community	New forms of social interaction and community formation through ‘virtual communities’ that are not space-bound	Online activities become an obstacle to ‘real-life’ interactions; declining commitment to locality-based social capital formation
3. Politics	New opportunities for online political engagement (e-democracy), information exchange and deliberation; a ‘virtual public sphere’	Isolation from others in politically ineffective geographic locales; management of participation by political and economic elites
4. Organisations	Flexible organisations; networked interaction among those within and outside of the organization; more ‘horizontal’ channels of online communication	New forms of internal surveillance; online communication remains hierarchal; online as a low-trust communications environment
5. Culture	‘Demassification’ of access to and use of media content; new opportunities for users to become media producers (‘producers’) (Bruns, 2008, Picone, 2007)	Hyper-segmentation and ‘I media’ as a barrier to communication with others; fragmentation and dilution of a ‘common culture’

## Who owns social in organisations?

Social media communication is managed through various functions in organisations including marketing, PR/corporate communication, and sometimes even IT. Clearly IT support is required to provide access to platforms – a challenge in itself sometimes, as some organisations still ban social media at work and some governments have IT policies that preclude the viewing of videos or use of news services such as **BuzzFeed**.

Clear **social media policies and guidelines** should be in place in all organisations specifying who can comment on work-related matters in social media as well as outlining protocols and standards to follow, and nominating who is responsible for social media monitoring and reporting (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012; Zerfass, Fink, & Linke, 2011). Because many social media accept advertising, management of social media follows the tradition of advertising in many organisations and falls under marketing. However, posting news and statements by management on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, monitoring social media, and responding to online comments when required, is more typically a PR or corporate communication responsibility. Leaving all social media engagement to marketing can be dangerous. In a 2015 study of public communication by major corporate and government organisations, one very experienced social media specialist observed that ‘marketing staff cannot help giving in to the urge to sell’ (Macnamara, 2016: 170).

It is important to not be ‘salesy’ or overly promotional in using social media except when using these platforms for paid advertising. Blatant selling or promotion is seen as inauthentic and contrary to the philosophy, principles, and practices of social media, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Organisations that engage in *news jacking* and *meme-jacking* – practices of jumping on to news stories or issues simply to promote products – can find that these tactics backfire and lead to criticism or even cyberattacks on the organisation.

## **How practitioners are using social media**



Public relations researchers and practitioners have greeted new forms of digital and social media with great enthusiasm. For example, Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode, and Keenan claim that public relations is ‘undergoing a revolution’ because of social media (2008: 91). In the foreword to *PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences* (Breakenridge, 2008), social media advocate Brian Solis effuses: ‘Welcome to what just may be the greatest evolution in the history of PR’ (Solis, 2008: xvii). Solis claims that with the shift to social media ‘monologue has given way to dialogue’ (xviii). In the title of another book, Solis and Breakenridge (2009) claim that Web 2.0 is ‘putting the public back in public relations’. Similarly, in *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, Cornelissen (2011) states that social media ‘create new ways of reaching and engaging with stakeholders’. He adds that the development of new media ‘provides an organisation with the opportunity to engage in conversations and to tell and elaborate its story or key message to stakeholders or the general public in an interactive way’ (2011: 154). Similarly, Duhé and Wright (2013) claim that social media provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage in discussions on participative platforms that open up new opportunities for dialogue, and in an analysis of the ‘new media ecology’ and social media use by PR practitioners in the US and Europe, Swerling Thorson, and Zerfass claim that ‘it is now generally recognised that we are undergoing a major transformation to a new era for communication, one in which transparency and actual dialogue with stakeholders play key roles’ (2014: 4).

However, despite a body of research emphasising the importance of openness and interactivity for dialogue, participation and engagement, there are signs that social media are not living up to the transformist promises proffered by optimists. For example, despite much being made of social media use in the Obama 2008 and 2012 US presidential election campaigns, a Pew Research Center report was sub-titled ‘Obama leads but neither candidate engages in much dialogue with voters’ (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012) and commented that ‘rarely did either candidate reply to, comment

on, or ‘retweet’ something from a citizen – or anyone else outside the campaign’ (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2012: 3). Crawford has reported that during the times of heaviest use of digital technologies, the Obama Online Operation ‘did not reply to followers, or indicate that direct messages were being heard’ (2009: 530). Similarly, studies of the much-vaunted use of social media for citizen engagement in UK election campaigns (e.g., Gibson et al., 2010; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2011) and Australian federal elections (e.g., Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Macnamara & Kenning, 2014) have not produced evidence of any substantial dialogue or increased citizen engagement through social media. Rather, numerous research studies have reported use of social media for one-way transmission of political and organisational messages. A recent review by Vergeer concluded that the conduct of election campaigns ‘has not changed drastically’ (2013: 10).

Despite claims of a shift to ‘social businesses’ and ‘social organisations’ allegedly interacting, engaging, and collaborating with stakeholders, studies show that the reality is mostly a case of ‘business as usual’. A review of 10 years of discussion of use of the Internet for dialogic communication by McAllister-Spooner reported that ‘organisations do not seem to be fully utilising the interactive potential of the Internet to build and maintain organisation-public relationships’ (2009: 320). A longitudinal study of organisational social media use over six years from 2006 to 2012 by Wright and Hinson noted a focus on one-way dissemination of messages (2012: 1). A 2012 qualitative study of social media use by PR practitioners in Australia reported:

All participants understood the rules and ideals around social media (authenticity, interactivity, two-way communication, etc.) but they are not necessarily adopting them in their practice. The interviewees primarily used social media platforms, or believed they are best for, one-way communication and message dissemination. (Robson & James, 2013: 6).

In the US, Kent has concluded: ‘If we look at the use of social media by most large corporations, we see that the communication tools that were invented for “sociality” are typically used in a one-way fashion to push messages out to publics’ (2013: 342).

Research indicates that there are major opportunities for PR practitioners to develop practices that take advantage of the unique characteristics and affordances of social media, as well as digital communication generally. In the concluding sections of this chapter, some of the practical PR applications of digital and social media are noted with tips for how to take advantage of these channels and generate benefits for both organisations and their stakeholders and publics.

## **PR practices in digital and social media**

The following are some of typical applications of digital and social media in public relations.

### ***E-newsletters and digital publications***

Print publications are often expensive to produce, particularly when colour printing on quality paper is involved. Also, printing takes time, often adding several weeks to production schedules. In contrast, high impact digital publications can be produced more quickly at much less cost. For example, e-newsletters are now a common form of communication with employees, members of organisations, communities, customers, and other stakeholders. Similarly, reports, brochures, and information sheets can be designed and distributed as digital documents (e.g., as PDFs). Updating can be done in minutes, without expensive corrections to printing plates or film and reprinting.

### ***Web sites***

Almost every organisation has a Web site today – although that does not mean that organisation Web sites are always informative and easy to use. Some organisations see Web sites

as an IT responsibility. While building the ‘back end’ of Web sites is an IT responsibility – e.g., creating databases to hold information and HTML or XML programming – content should be user-focused. Wherever possible, PR and communication practitioners should seek to be involved in planning and creating **content** for organisation Web sites to ensure it is customised to stakeholders and publics and written in an accessible, user-friendly way.

Content should be more than text. Increasingly, successful Web sites feature videos, photographs, sound files (e.g., speeches), graphics, and even animations to capture attention. See further discussion on ‘rich media content’ in the following section.

### ***Intranets and extranets***

Special Web sites can be created with password restricted access to provide specialised information to internal stakeholders such as employees (referred to as intranets) and external stakeholders such as ‘channel partners’ – i.e., distributors and retailers (called extranets). If you feel that your organisation and its key internal or external stakeholders could benefit from having an intranet or extranet, you should discuss this with your IT staff. But bear in mind that IT can only provide the technical infrastructure. Content that is relevant and interesting to the target audience will need to be created and regularly updated.

### ***Social media monitoring and analysis***

A good ‘rule of thumb’ in social media is to start by listening. Listening in social media can be done by individually ‘following’, subscribing to, or visiting various sites, or by using a specialist social media monitoring application or service. Applications commonly used for social media monitoring include **Google Alerts** as well as more specialised tools such as **Hootsuite**, **Sprout Social**, **Social Mention**, **Netvibes**, **Tableau**, and **Trackur**. Alternatively, organisations can

subscribe to a service provider such as **Gorkana**, which will monitor social media based on key words and provide relevant content.

Beyond simply monitoring social media, practitioners can gain insights from social media analysis – a form of **media content analysis** applied specifically to social media. Major companies offering specialised social media analysis including **Radian6**, **Brandwatch**, and **Nielsen BuzzMetrics**. Also, some traditional media analysis companies such as **Gorkana**, **Kantar Media**, **Prime Research**, **BurrellesLuce** in the US, **Cision** (which owned **Cymfony** and **Visible Technologies** at the time of publication), and **iSentia** in Asia, Australia, and New Zealand offer social media analysis (see Figure 3.3).<sup>4</sup>

### ***The social media release***

In 2006 former *Financial Times* journalist Tom Foremski declared in a widely-quoted blog post: ‘Die! Press release! Die! Die! Die!’ Foremski (2006) called for a new format for information supplied to media. In response, a number of PR practitioners have argued that media releases are not dead, but that a new kind of media release is required in the era of digital and social media. One who has led this debate online is social media expert and author of the blog *PR-Squared*, Todd Defren, who has published a template for a social media release (Defren, 2008). Version 1 of the template shown in Figure 3.1 identifies the types of content recommended for inclusion in a social media release. Social media releases are much more than media releases sent to new types of social media. Defren recommends that all information provided to media should be a social media release. The key features proposed by Defren are:

- There is no long text. Instead, a social media release leads with a **catchy headline** and a series of **bullet points** highlighting the main news and information;


- Multimedia content should be included, either embedded or linked, including **MP3 sound files** such as speeches by organisation executives, short **videos**, **photos**, and **graphics** (e.g., infographics);
- **Hyperlinks** should be provided for **RSS feeds** (e.g., to receive updates) and to link to the organisation's blog, Facebook page, Twitter account, YouTube channel, and other social media;
- Contact details should include **Skype** and **Instant Message (IM)** addresses as well as e-mail and phone numbers.



**SHIFT**  
communications

**SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE, VERSION 1.5**

<http://www.company.com/socialmedianewsroom/todaysnews>

<b>CONTACT INFORMATION:</b>	Client Contact Phone #/skype Email Blog Website	Spokesperson Phone #/skype Email Blog	Agency Contact Phone #/skype Email
-----------------------------	---	--	--






**NEWS RELEASE HEADLINE**   
Subhead  
**CORE NEWS FACTS**  
• Bullet-points or narrative


**LINK & RSS FEED TO PURPOSE-BUILT DEL.ICIO.US PAGE**  
 The del.icio.us page offers hyperlinks (and annotation in "Notes" field) to relevant content sources, providing context and on-going updates. 


**PRE-APPROVED QUOTES FROM CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, ANALYSTS, CUSTOMERS AND/OR PARTNERS**  
Recommendation: up to 2 quotes per contact. Be prepared to offer additional quotes to content publishers who desire exclusive info.


**"3 LINKS THAT MATTER" (OPTIONAL)**  
Provide more info without overwhelming the reader. Links should highlight relevant data that add context to the news (e.g., blog posts, white papers). A URL "snipping" service like TinyURL is recommended.


**BOILERPLATE STATEMENTS**

 RSS Feed to Corporate News Releases	 <b>"SHARE THIS"</b> Universal bookmark widget	 <b>TECHNORATI TAGS</b>
 OPML Feed to Corporate Blogs	 <b>"SPHERE IT"</b> Context related web search	

**PHOTO**  
e.g., product picture, executive headshot, etc.  
Embed: <object w  
URL: http://www.m 

**MP3 FILE OR PODCAST LINK**  
e.g., sound bytes by various stakeholders  
Embed: <object w  
URL: http://www.m 

**GRAPHIC**  
e.g., product schematics; market size graphs; logos  
Embed: <object w  
URL: http://www.m 

**VIDEO**  
e.g., CEO's view of the news, brief product demo  
Embed: <object w  
URL: http://www.m 

**MODERATED COMMENTS**  
Offer RSS and email update options  
Type your comment here...

**TRACKBACKS/ BLOGS THAT LINK TO THIS NEWS**

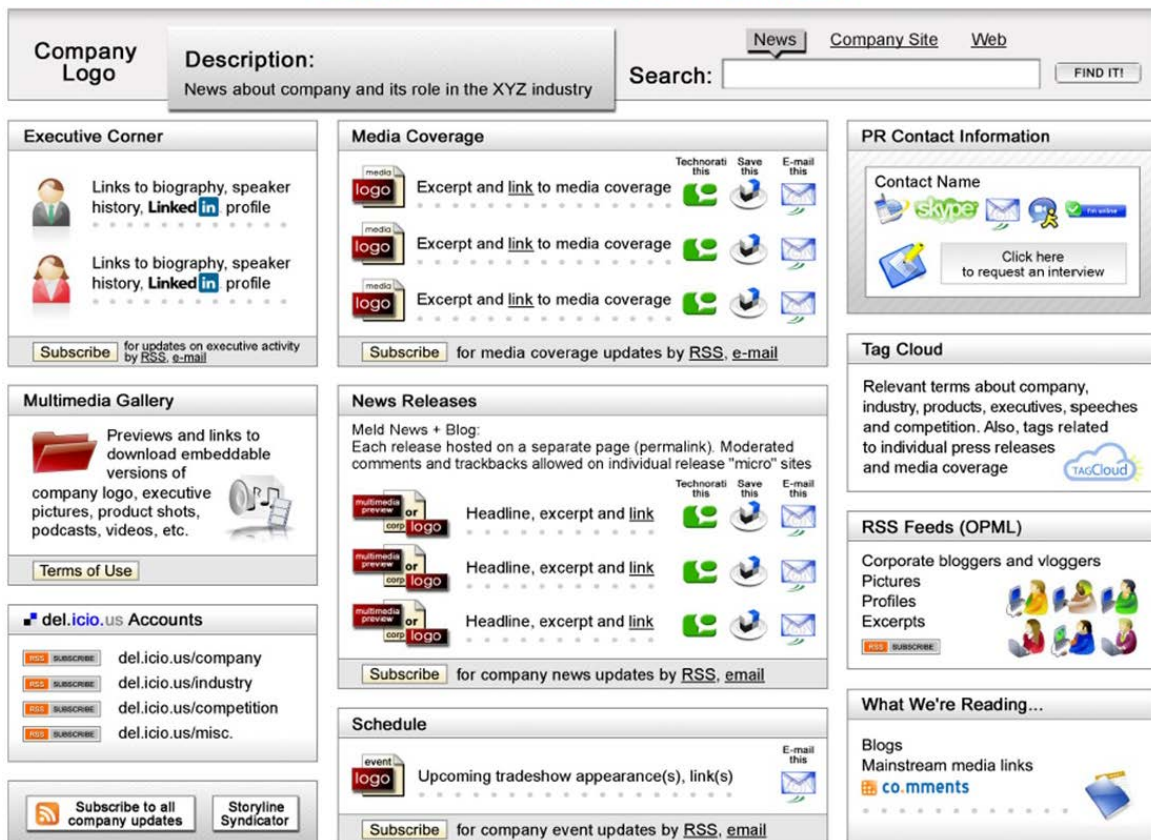
**Figure 3.1. A social media release template produced as an open source guide for PR practitioners by Todd Defren of Shift Communications (Source: <http://www.shiftcomm.com>; Defren, 2008).**

Defren (2012) has updated his social media release template with Version 2.0 that is available online with additional tips and advice. A sample of a UK government social media release is available at <http://pressitt.com/smnr/Building-Britains-Digital-Future-Government-Unveils-Action-Plan-for-the-Digital-Economy/124>.

### ***The social media newsroom***

In addition to developing new formats of media releases, progressive PR practitioners are also developing purpose-built social media newsrooms (Zerfass & Schramm, 2013). Todd Defren (2007) released a template for a social media newsroom on his blog *PR-Squared* in 2007. (See Figure 3.2.)

## Social Media Newsroom Template



**Company Logo**

**Description:**  
News about company and its role in the XYZ industry

News | Company Site | Web

Search:

**Executive Corner**

Links to biography, speaker history, [LinkedIn](#) profile

Links to biography, speaker history, [LinkedIn](#) profile

for updates on executive activity by [RSS](#), [e-mail](#)

**Media Coverage**

Excerpt and [link](#) to media coverage

Excerpt and [link](#) to media coverage

Excerpt and [link](#) to media coverage

for media coverage updates by [RSS](#), [e-mail](#)

**PR Contact Information**

Contact Name

Click here to request an interview

**Tag Cloud**

Relevant terms about company, industry, products, executives, speeches and competition. Also, tags related to individual press releases and media coverage

**RSS Feeds (OPML)**

Corporate bloggers and vloggers

Pictures

Profiles

Excerpts

**What We're Reading...**

Blogs

Mainstream media links

[co mments](#)

**News Releases**

Meld News + Blog:  
Each release hosted on a separate page (permalink). Moderated comments and trackbacks allowed on individual release "micro" sites

Headline, excerpt and [link](#)

Headline, excerpt and [link](#)

Headline, excerpt and [link](#)

for company news updates by [RSS](#), [email](#)

**Schedule**

Upcoming tradeshow appearance(s), link(s)

for company event updates by [RSS](#), [email](#)

**Multimedia Gallery**

Previews and links to download embeddable versions of company logo, executive pictures, product shots, podcasts, videos, etc.

**del.icio.us Accounts**

del.icio.us/company

del.icio.us/industry

del.icio.us/competition

del.icio.us/misc.

Figure 3.2. A social media newsroom template produced as an open source guide for PR practitioners by Todd Defren of Shift Communications (Source: <http://www.shiftcomm.com>; Defren, 2007).

### Writing for and in social media

All of the principles of good writing apply in digital and social media, particularly the key fundamentals outlined in this and numerous specialist texts for media and PR writing. These include:

- Know your **subject** to be accurate and clear;



- Keep it **simple** (the KISS formula), avoiding jargon and technical ‘mumbo-jumbo’;
- Write for your **audience** – i.e., in a tone, voice, and style that is appropriate to them and focussing on issues of interest to them;
- Be **brief** as possible;
- Provide all relevant information – in particular answer the ‘golden rule’ of journalists by explaining **who, what, where, when, why, and how** (Bivins, 2011; Macnamara, 2012: 353–355; Treadwell & Treadwell, 2005).

In addition, social media require some additional skills and adaptations in style. Because social media are interactive, they require a personal and engaging style of writing – not a didactic, authoritative approach. Large organisations often struggle with this characteristic of the genre. The tone of social media writing, particularly in micro-blogging, is informal and conversational.

As well as writing posts in blogs, Facebook pages, and other sites, social media users need to be prepared to write **responses**. First and foremost, these must be timely, as social media operate **24/7**. Responding to a question or inquiry a week or even several days after it was submitted is generally not acceptable in social media. Some government departments and agencies that have policies of responding to correspondence within 14 or even 21 days struggle with expected response times in social media and are being forced to revise their policies and work practices. Some companies and government organisations are rostering communication staff to monitor social media on weekends with authority to respond or at least post an initial response (e.g., acknowledgement) even when time is required to prepare a detailed answer or comment. Second, responses should be respectful of others’ comments, even when disagreeing with them. Organisations need to remember that there are no ‘gatekeepers’ to intervene and no control mechanisms to remove or stop others posting their comments and opinions unedited. If you are seen

as rude, aggressive, or arrogant, the organisation can be on the receiving end of ‘flaming’ – an outburst of angry sentiment expressed online (see also chapter 18, Crisis Communication). On the other hand, positive, friendly participation can result in organisations joining in online conversations to have their views known, communicate their point of view, and build networks of trust and influence.

### ***Interactive and ‘rich’ media content***

As discussed in a number of the previous sections, a major affordance of digital media including social media is the capability to include interactive features and what is termed ‘rich’ media content. This refers to content other than text – in particular, semantically sophisticated content such as infographics, video, animations, and sound.

### ***The shift to video***

With the previously high cost of movie films and video reducing dramatically through digitalisation, and a widely recognised privileging of the visual in modern societies, video is one of the fastest growing forms of communication media content. For instance, YouTube has more than one billion users who watch ‘hundreds of millions of hours’ of video each month. The number of video viewers on YouTube increased by 40% between 2014 and 2015 (YouTube, 2015). In late 2015 Facebook expanded its video capabilities with new video services allowing users to find, view and share videos live and on mobile devices (Cathcart, 2015). In addition to 70 local YouTube sites operating in 76 languages (YouTube, 2015) and 4 billion videos viewed each day on Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2015), countries such as China have their own major online video sites with hundreds of millions of user such as **Youku Tudou**. See Mini case study 3.1 for an example of how video is changing the face of PR.

### **Curating social media – Crowdsourcing, collaboration, co-production**

An important practical consideration in managing social media sites that is informed by understanding of the interactive and collaborative approach of Web 2.0 and the rise of *prosumers* or *producers* is that PR practitioners do not need to be the producers of all content. Many organisations are discovering and taking advantage of the collaborative culture of social media and crowdsourcing content and even work that traditionally has been done by paid employees.

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#### **Explore 3.2**

##### **The ‘wisdom of the crowd’**

Can you identify an example of a project successfully carried out using crowdsourcing to access information, expertise, or even money? In researching crowdsourcing, you might want to check out the following.

##### **Feedback**

1. In the early 2000s, NASA invited amateur astronomers to help it identify and categorise craters on Mars from thousands of photographs taken by the Viking orbiters in what became known as the **Mars Clickworkers project**. More than 80,000 people identified around two million craters for scientific measurement and study and classified the relative age of another 300,000 – a task that would have taken scientists years, if not decades, to complete. Furthermore, *American Scientist* reported that this collaborative public effort was almost as accurate as work done by expert planetary geologists (Szipir, 2002).
2. More recently, in 2013 two collaborative projects resulted in the release of **Google maps of North Korea** – a country renowned for its secrecy. Google Map Maker Jayanth

Mysore reported in his blog that “a community of citizen cartographers ... came together in Google Map Maker to make their contributions such as adding road names and points of interest” (Mysore, 2013, para. 2). Simultaneously, PhD student Curtis Melvin and a team of researchers working on a project called North Korea Uncovered and, most recently, with a project of the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies called 38 North ([www.38north.org](http://www.38north.org)) produced the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] Digital Atlas. Based on analysis of Google Earth photos, eye witness accounts, news reports, books, and other information sources, this provides comprehensive information on North Korean economic, cultural, political, and military infrastructures (see <http://38northdigitalatlas.org>).

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Instead of being the producer of all content, communication professionals can adopt the role of **curator**, bringing together ideas, **user-generated content**, and knowledge contributions from many sources and integrating them. See Mini case study 3.1 for an example of co-production of content and curation of user-generated content.

### Mini case study 3.1

#### A Fortune 50 internal communication revolution

One of the world’s largest corporations with 250,000 employees and consolidated revenue of more than US\$100 billion faced a challenge in its internal communication in 2014, as it had a relatively small communication staff of just nine, a requirement to implement budget cuts, and evidence that many employees were not reading the company’s expensive glossy employee magazine and various internal newsletters. The

Vice President, Corporate Communication and the head of internal communication took a bold step with the support of the company's CEO.

They discontinued the expensive printed employee magazine and several printed newsletters, thereby reducing costs considerably. In their place, they launched a series of four video programs produced twice-weekly: one specifically focussed on staff matters; one covering international news; one for business partners; and one for employees to engage external audiences as advocates for the company. This decision was based on research, which found that employees preferred video to textual information.

The question that arose, however, was how could effective video programs be produced at less cost than printed communications? The answer was found in the characteristics of social media outlined in this chapter and in overlooked capabilities that existed 'under their noses', so to speak.

A substantial proportion of the content of the video programs was user-generated by employees. Engineers, customer service staff, field workers, service technicians, and administrative staff used camera phones, small video cameras, and GoPros to record events and interview colleagues on issues of interest.

Many interviews and reports from the field were presented in low resolution video with signs of being shot on a hand-held camera. But, rather than being detrimental, this gave the reports authenticity, as they contained clear visual clues that they were not staged and that they were recorded by eye witnesses rather than professional camera crews.

Further cost efficiencies were gained by producing the programs in-house. The VP, Corporate Communication explained:

'We had quotes from \$30,000 up to \$100,000 per program. But we looked around internally and found we had people with experience in TV or stage work who were willing to give it a go at being anchor. One of our staff had worked at a TV studio previously. The other anchor was a former beauty queen who we trained up.'

The result is that the programs are presented with anchors introducing segments on a professional-looking set similar to TV news and talks shows. The VP explained further how this was done at low cost:

'We go up to a little studio on the 24th floor of headquarters. The backdrop looks like some big fancy thing, but it's just a screen that flips. We write the script – it's usually a team effort. We put these programs out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's usually shot in the studios at about 7 am. Then the file gets digitally sent back to the employee communication video team in Connecticut. They add in all the B-roll stuff and come up with the final thing. Then they send it back and we post it online. It's typically posted around 2 pm or 3 pm.'

(personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The result is a series of video programs that contain highly credible content that is relevant to audiences edited and curated to a high standard. And evaluation has shown a major improvement in internal communication.

Employee surveys are conducted twice a year and in late 2014 an online survey was sent to 40,000 employees from among 138,000 who had watched at least one episode of the international news video program. The survey received 5,570 responses (a 14% response rate), of which 93% said the program was interesting and worth watching. The survey also asks employees what types of information they prefer and this informs ongoing program planning. Focus groups are also conducted regularly to gain further qualitative insights. This testing and feedback has resulted in the video program segments being 2 – 3 minutes in length. “That’s the attention span for an internal video,” the VP corporate communication said (personal communication, January 14, 2015).

### ***Real time research – listening as well as talking***

A major use of social media that is widely overlooked is that they provide real time information about what people are interested in, concerned about, what they want to know, and what they would like to see happen. Social media can provide real-time research. While this is not obtained from a probability sample, listening through social media can provide valuable insights to identify issues and trends in a timely way and inform strategy.

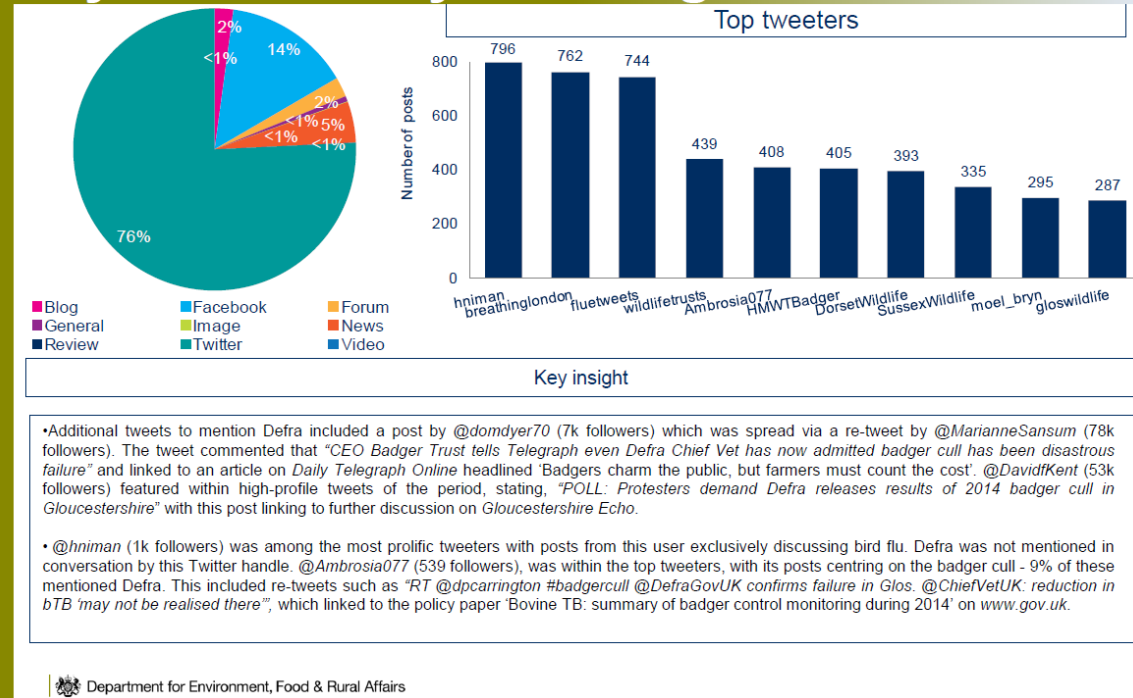
A two-year, three-country study that closely examined the public communication practices of 36 major organisations in the US, UK and Australia including their research, public consultation, and customer relations as well as social media use found that, on average, 80% of their communication resources and time is devoted to disseminating the organisation’s messages – that is, speaking. In some cases, up to 95% of so-called public communication is organisational speaking. On average, only 5–15% of public communication resources and time are assigned to listening through various methods such as research and monitoring social media (Macnamara, 2016).

### ***Evaluation of digital and social media communication***

Use of social media should be measured and evaluated in the same way and to the same standards as other PR activities. A number of social media monitoring and analysis software applications and services have been noted already in this chapter (See ‘Social media monitoring and analysis’). Typical metrics collected to evaluate social media communication are the **volume of views** of pages or content such as videos, volume of **subscribers** (e.g., to e-newsletters or forums), and the number of **friends, followers, likes, retweets, shares, and pins**. However, it needs to be borne in mind that these measure *outputs* only (what information was distributed) and, while likes, retweets, and shares give some indication of support, they are mostly quantitative measures. Qualitative analysis can include examination of the content and tone of posts such as comments and reviews using **content analysis** software or service providers. Comments provide indications of awareness, understanding, and attitudes as well as intention (e.g., likelihood or unlikelihood to buy a product or service). Other qualitative factors that can be measured include key **messages** (the main themes being expressed online) and **issues** and **topics** being discussed (these indicate interests and concerns of users)

## SET 6: Social Analytics

### Key social analytics insight



**Figure 3.3. Social media analytics presented as part of a UK Government department evaluation of communication (Source: Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs).**

### Mini case study 3.2

#### UK Government Communication Service mandates evaluation

The UK Government Communication Service (GCS), based in the Cabinet Office, Whitehall, has mandated evaluation of all strategic communication including social media. This evaluation program was still in development at the time of publication, but it is a landmark in the adoption of rigorous measurement and evaluation of communication and public relations worldwide. UK government campaigns won awards at the



2015 International Summit on Measurement hosted by the Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC).

Social media evaluation is an integral part of GCS's overall evaluation framework. This involves:

- A **mandatory** requirement for all UK government departments and agencies to report monthly on the outputs, outtakes, and outcomes of their communication activities;
- Adherence to **international standards** for measurement and evaluation developed by AMEC in association with 15 other communication, PR, advertising, and marketing organisations worldwide (xxx);
- Provision of **templates** for reports. These typically require charts and tables as well as textual reporting;
- Provision of a **professional development** program for UK government communicators to develop 'Evaluation Champions'. This program has 'Introduction', 'Advanced', and 'Champion' levels and includes regular 'master classes' as well as online resources.

UK government departments and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) use a range of software tools for social media evaluation including **Google Analytics**, **Hootsuite**, and **Netvibes**, as well as service providers such as **Gorkana Radar** and **Gorkana Social Media Pro**.

The UK Government also commissions an annual **RepTrak**<sup>®</sup> study conducted by Ipsos-MORI to evaluate public perceptions of departments and ALBs; undertakes the annual **Civil Service People Survey** to evaluate government employee attitudes, perceptions, and satisfaction; and subscribes to the **British Social Attitudes Survey** conducted by NatCen Social Research to understand public attitudes, perceptions, and expectations. As well, many departments and ALBs conduct **customer satisfaction surveys** and their own specialised **employee surveys**.

## Web 3.0: The Semantic Web

The Web is evolving further to what its founder, Sir Tim Berners-Lee (2002), calls the Semantic Web and others refer to as Web 3.0. Berners-Lee (2002) says that further change in how the Web is structured and used is necessary for the Web to reach its full potential. While the technicalities of these developments do not need to be known by PR practitioners, a broad

understanding of the impact on communication practices is essential. The semantic Web is so-called because it will have far greater sense-making potential than current technologies and will recognise meaning – not just strings of characters and words. While HTML allows digital files to be ‘tagged’ with identifiers that can be found through searching, it works largely through matching *human language* words – albeit supplemented with Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology. Files can only be found when they contain exact word matches.

The Semantic Web works by describing information online using a sophisticated *machine language* such as Resource Description Framework (RDF), which categorizes and describes people, products and concepts using metadata rather than textual data. It can be thought of as computer code attached to each file that is invisible to humans, but visible to computers. This enables users of the Semantic Web to move beyond simple word matching to **conceptual searching**. For example, a conceptual search for ‘companies investing in green energy’ could return data about companies investing in solar, wind, and other alternative sources of energy – not only documents containing the specific search words.

### **You don’t find information – it finds you**

With increased semantic capabilities, Web 3.0 will increasingly deploy **recommendation engines**. While search engines such as Google allow users to find specific information that they search for, recommendation engines – already evident in sites such as Amazon.com – track users’ digital trails and proactively offer information that is relevant to them based on their interests as indicated in previous searches, views, downloads, posts, and purchases. Increasingly in future, Web users will not have to find information – relevant information will find them.

When combined with technologies such as **geolocation** tracking and ‘**Big Data**’ – the vast repositories of information now captured and stored in databases – this will revolutionise targeting,

making it possible to send messages to people in specific locations at specific times based on their specific interests. This has major implications for marketers and providers of government services.

## Ethics

With such evolving and expanding capabilities, PR practitioners need to be mindful and respectful of the rights of social media users and be ever more mindful of ethics. Use of data and targeting should not invade privacy. Organisations should not misrepresent their intentions in participating in social networks and be transparent in their marketing and promotional activities. The blurring and disappearing boundaries that are occurring online between advertising, news, and commentary in new forms of content such as '**native advertising**', '**sponsored content**', '**paid content**', '**embedded marketing**', and other euphemistic terms such as '**content integration**' (de Pelsmacker & Neijens, 2012; Macnamara & Dessaix, 2014) need to be carefully considered and addressed with reflective practices and appropriate codes of ethics.

## Summary

Digitalisation of all types of information including text, statistical data, photos, graphics, and video has changed the media and communication landscape, allowing information to be easily transferred between computers. The Internet has enabled digital files and images to be transmitted easily and almost instantly around the world and for communications to occur online 24/7. However, beyond the major changes in information distribution, the most significant changes caused by the 'fourth media revolution' in what Mark Poster calls the Second Media Age are changes in the practices of information production and consumption. Whereas in the past media were centralised and controlled by a few and information flowed predominantly one-way top down, today social media have spawned the *prosumer* and *producer* who is a producer as well as consumer of information. The twenty-first century media revolution has brought many challenges, ranging from the need for fast response to a growing range of voices and increased risks of criticism to sinister dysfunctions of

the Internet such as invasion of privacy, breaches of security, cyberbullying and trolling. However, the reduced costs and speed of digital communication, and the open access of social media, provide increased opportunities for organisations to engage directly with their stakeholders and publics in dialogue and even collaboration.

### **For discussion and research**

- What forms of 'Big Data' can you identify? Think about all forms of data that citizens provide to government and corporations, which are entered into databases, as well as data that citizens post online themselves.
- What are the potential downsides and risks of regulation of internet content by governments (e.g., to remove offensive and inaccurate content), as well as potential benefits? What else could government regulators remove or block if greater powers of censorship are granted?
- What are the legal and ethical requirements for ensuring the accuracy of information posted online and the disclosure of the source of information and commercial or political interests of the author?

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- <sup>1</sup> Also taken to mean 'before the Christian era' – the calendar dating from the birth of Christ.
- <sup>2</sup> Some identify the birth of the internet as the changeover from NCP (Network Control Protocol) to TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol) on 1 January 1973, which provided instructions for the transmission of data that became adopted worldwide.
- <sup>3</sup> The term 'self-correcting adhocracy' was first used by Cory Doctorow (2003) in his science fiction novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* referring to self-organizing groups.
- <sup>4</sup> Note that these companies and products change names often because the digital and social media monitoring and analysis market is dynamic, with frequent takeovers and mergers.