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SOCIAL MEDIA? WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA?

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Abstract

This developmental paper is flagging up the issue of insufficiently clear definition of two contemporary concepts: social media and enterprise social media. Drawing on the findings from empirical case studies, differences in users' perceptions of what is and is not social media are highlighted. These are juxtaposed with extant definitions from IS literature. The concept of "in-house" or "enterprise" social media is introduced from the literature and its clarity and necessity is challenged based on the data from the case studies. The aim of this early research paper is to evaluate whether a re-definition of "social media", for example through performative lens is meaningful, necessary and helpful.

Keywords: Social Media, Enterprise social media, Definitions, Literature Review

1 Introduction

The field of information systems (IS) is concerned with the investigation of Information Technologies (IT) impacts on individual, organisational and societal levels (Lucas Jr, Agarwal, Clemons, El Sawy, & Weber, 2013). One of the recent most impactful IT phenomena is the emergence and spread of a sub-set of IT technologies referred to as social media (Kane, Alavi, Labianca, & Borgatti, 2014; Kapoor et al., 2017). (Kapoor et al., 2017) list top one hundred IS research topics on social media which range from foreign languages, politics to machine learning and even smoking related issues, touching virtually every aspect of people's personal and professional lives.

Interpersonal web-based communication technologies have long been investigated by IS researchers (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Social media are, however, qualitatively different from traditional media and on-line communication systems.

Social media have been defined in a variety of ways. The definition of social media as a "platform to create profiles, make explicit and traverse relationships" by (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) has been cited over 13,000 times according to google scholar. Other definitions, identifying social media by the set of functionalities or "building blocks" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011), has 3,000 citations. A taxonomy of "social media" splitting the field into 6 distinctive categories (Blogs, Social Networking Sites, Collaboration Projects, Content Communities, Virtual Social Worlds, and Virtual Game Worlds) introduced by (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), too finds resonance with 11,000 citations on google scholar. The trend of creating new and updating old definitions continues, as does the development, use and adoption of social media (Kapoor et al., 2017).

This paper is raising two definitions which stem from an empirical qualitative comparative case study on social media use in organisations and juxtaposes them with current definitions in the literature. The first question is "what is social media and *how do academically accepted definitions resonate with the definitions in the field*"? The second question is based on research in "enterprise social media" and the highlighted importance of research in this field (Hauptmann & Steger, 2013; Kapoor et al., 2017; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfeld, 2013; Maruping & Magni, 2015): "what makes a social media platform an *'in-house'* or '*enterprise social media*'"?

The paper starts with the introduction of possible definitions of "social media" from recent literature. This is followed by a brief introduction of the research project. The question of how to define social media and how to define enterprise social media are then discussed followed by conclusions and summary.

2 Discussion

To be considered "impactful", academic research needs to be communicated and applied outside academia (Lucas Jr et al., 2013). One of barriers to communication is the language and definitions used in academia and in practice. There is no clear definition of what social media is, which means that research findings are often not comparable or transferable. In the case of social media, researchers have focused on one specific platform or application, albeit in a different context, e.g. use of twitter (Delery & Roumpi, 2017), Facebook (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Gilbert & Karahalios,

2009; Lim, 2012; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009), blogs (Lu, Guo, Luo, & Chen, 2015; Vidgen, Sims, & Powell, 2013). Lacking a clear definition, it is uncertain and disputable whether e.g. findings from a "twitter-study" would apply to a "WhatsApp-study" etc. The definitions of social media in the literature, while disagreeing on many points, have some common properties.

2.1 Social Media Definitions – common denominators

Social Media has been defined as websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008); web-based applications which provide functionality for sharing, relationships, group, conversation and profiles (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media has been referred to as "social media sites" (Diga & Kelleher, 2009), or a set of information technologies which facilitate interactions and networking (Kapoor et al., 2017; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013). However, there appears to be a broad agreement that Web2.0 technologies played a significant role in the development and adoption of social media.

Another definition of social media refers to "Internet-based applications built on Web 2.0, while Web 2.0 refers to a concept as well as a platform for harnessing collective intelligence" (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013 p. 246). Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, provide people with a pervasive network connectivity (Asur & Huberman, 2010).

The term "Web 2.0" refers to the set of technologies and ideologies that enable and drive media rich content creation on the internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is rooted in the open source ideology, whereby users collaborate freely using free tools and sharing their work and information with each other. Technological advances in Web 2.0 and open ideology supported the emergence of User Generated Content (UGC). The UGC – the ability to create and share content free of censorship and at low cost, contributed to the proliferation of social media (DesAutels, 2011).

As an Information System, social media is built upon a set of (available) Internet, communication and computing technologies, as well as a set of ideological beliefs about how information should be created, accessed and distributed (Figure 1).

Social Media Social Networking Sites, Blogs, MMORPG, Virtual Words, Knowledge Sites, Online Communities of Practice, Corporate In-House Platforms…									
Web 2.0 Technologies			Web 2.0 Ideology			IT Technologies and Market			
Media Richness	Interactive Applications	Content Creation	Transparency	Information Availability	Tools Availability	Smartphones fast CPUs and GPUs	Affordability	Fiber Broadband, WiFi, 4G	GPS

Figure 1 - Technological, Ideological and Market foundations of Social Media

All definitions of social media agree that social media implies use of online or internet technologies. Following the transparency, sharing and integration ideology of Web 2.0, many of the applications (websites, mobile applications, online systems) are allowing programmatic integration with other Web 2.0 applications. Notable is the definition and proliferation of standard integration protocols which allowed the integration of several systems to be implemented in an easier and quicker manner, as the integration interfaces would follow pre-defined standards (for example Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) 1.1 in 2000, 1.2 in 2007, and Open Data Protocol (OData) for Representational State Transfer (REST) services initiated in 2007). Arguably, a definition of social media should include the technological (internet and mobility), the ideological (transparency, sharing and integration) as well as functional component.

2.1.1 Social Media Functionalities

One of the approaches to identify "social media" is to describe the functionalities of a given platform and application in terms of essential "social" properties. (Kietzmann et al., 2011) specify seven functional building blocks of Social Media which are present to greater or lesser extent any social media application and which can be substituted and enhanced through integration of several applications (Figure 2).

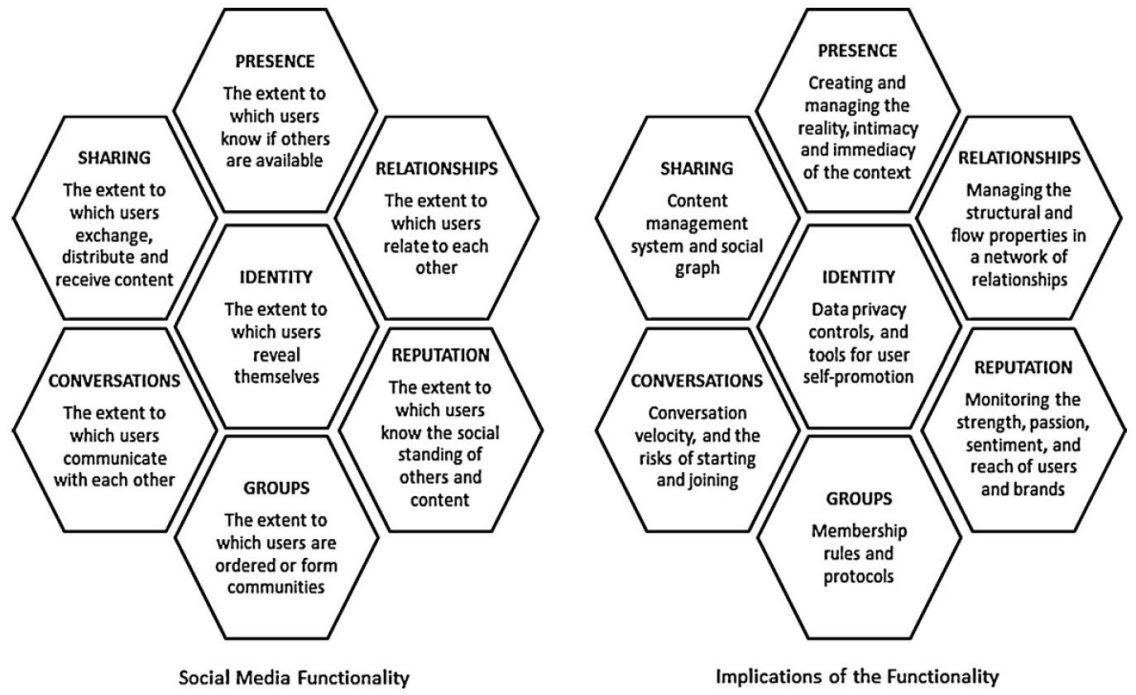

Figure 2 - Building blocks of Social Media (Kietzmann, 2011)

Identity refers to the representation of the user in the virtual world. It could be as descriptive and personal as a profile on Facebook, listing birthday, hobbies, family relationships etc., or could be as vague as an imaginary pseudonym.

Conversations allows users to interact with each other in a broadcast or dialogue manner synchronously in real time or asynchronously with time lapse between statements.

Sharing refers to activities through which existing content is spread (and possibly enhanced) through the social graph. Hereby the social connections might not be necessary be made explicit, for example publicly sharing on Facebook or posting on Twitter does not rely on existing connections: on the contrary in the example of Twitter "sharing" often precedes connections (expressed through "following").

Presence allows users to know where other community members are (on/off-line and actual/virtual location).

Relationships allows community members to visualize their networks in many ways ranging from "likes" and "followers-followed" to virtual representation of real-life relationships. These social-graph abstractions can be uni- and bi-directional and allow strong and weak ties. For example, "following" on Twitter is not necessarily reciprocal, whereas a connection on LinkedIn requires both parties to accept the connection and both to indicate the nature of their relationship (e.g. colleagues).

Groups refers both to membership groups where users can articulate their affiliations with, or interest in, a specific subject and groups utilized by users to manage their relationships.

Reputation allows users to qualify the content provided by another user and establish trust-levels between community members. These trust-levels can be made explicit, for example through a scoring or ranking system (LinkedIn "influencer" status, StackOverflow points system), or remain implicit (Twitter number of followers).

Many of the platforms provide users with the ability to integrate other applications. Through the integration of two or more platforms the building blocks, the affordances of one system can be greatly enhanced, but also jeopardised. For example, by enabling the integration of Twitter and Facebook whereby a "tweet" also appears in the personal thread in Facebook, the "identity" of a (fairly anonymous) Twitter-account becomes much more personal on Facebook. Vice versa, a Facebook post, visible inside that platform only, could reach much wider (unintended) audiences when simultaneously (and automatically) posted on Twitter.

The inherent integrative nature of Web 2.0 applications makes the assessment of the functional blocks in a single application/platform difficult at the least, and meaningless at most. Integrated social media *systems* combine their capabilities and thus could be assessed as a system and not as individual applications. However, this poses another challenge: specific applications and technologies can be combined by the end-user to meet their individual needs, so that a "social media system" of one user is not necessarily the same or comparable to the "social media system" of another user. Arguably, definitions of "social media" as "landscapes" or "groups" would address this challenge.

2.1.2 Social Media Definitions

A technocratic definition of social media reads: *"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"* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This definition is suited for defining "media" – generation of content, internet based set of technologies. However, the "social" part of the definition is made only implicitly through references to "Web 2.0" and "Unser Generated Content".

(Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211) take a less technical approach and define *"social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or*

semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". (Kane et al., 2014) extend this definition by adding that users should also be able to create and access digital content. These definitions enhance the technical definition of Kaplan and Haenlein by adding the "connection" element (list of interconnected users) and a "human" element (profiles). However, the boundlessness of these systems: the ability of users to integrate and combine applications and features into a new unique system is explicitly excluded in this definition. Also, the "interactive" nature of social media: the ability of users to establish and maintain social contact is not made clear.

(Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013) employ the term "social computing" as a placeholder for online IT technologies which enable and facilitate social interactions and are deeply embedded in day-to-day human interactions. The focus on "any technology which supports relationships and collaboration" is also supported by (Kapoor et al., 2017). These definitions highlight the "social" nature of social media and focus on interpersonal communication and information exchange independent of technological platforms involved. These views lean towards the performative view, concentrating on what the platforms are *used* for rather then what the technology was intended to support.

2.1.3 Social Media – definition discrepancies

Despite a plethora of definitions and view-points being available many of the applications, websites, platforms which we "naturally" perceive as social media are not covered by these definitions. These applications are

- Accessible through apps and not (only) through websites – e.g. WhatsApp, or Facebook, which makes the "social media site" term too narrow;
- Always online through notifications in desktop applications and on mobiles, which is not mentioned in either definition and is not covered by the "presence" building block by (Kietzmann et al., 2011), as they become "intrusive";
- Integrated and Media Rich, which goes beyond simple "interactions" (otherwise "pine" – the email client released in 1992 would be "social media");

- Support “passive sharing” of content when information is pushed towards users without the creator actively doing that, which extends the “relationships” beyond explicitly made connections.

The difficulty of positively identifying social media became obvious in this study, a multiple case study performed in 2013-2017 which focuses on the impact of social media use on intra-organisational communication process. The researcher’s understanding of “social media” was different from that of the case study participants, and the participants did not agree on one single definition. The following section presents the study and the resultant questions for the need of a different (better, narrower, wider?) definition of social media.

2.2 Case Study

Social Media use in the context of Human Resource Management (HRM) was investigated in a comparative case study conducted in three large organisations in the UK. Traditionally, HR communications were one-way top-down communications with limited feedback mechanisms. In the case organisations employee feedback would be sought and collected through (bi-) annual employee surveys, without any means for the employees to provide immediate feedback on HR initiatives, activities and policy. This flow has been challenged by the emergence of social media, when social media platforms which are open and freely accessible by employees became part of communication resources (Huang, Baptista, & Galliers, 2013). The introduction of social media in the case organisations lead to enhanced ability of management to seek timely employee feedback on one hand, and to diminished ability of the management to control and censor this feedback.

The research involved three qualitative case studies in organisations which used social media for different purposes, with different intensity and with different outcomes. The three organisations UKBank, UKConsulting, and UKOutsourcing represented different industry sectors, however, they also shared many commonalities with regards to the geographical markets they operate in, location of headquarters, workforce size, composition and education level. The differences in social media use in each organisation are partially explained by the regulatory framework constraining the use (for example, UKBank, as a financial services provider, is subject to different regulations than UKConsulting – a technology consultancy, and UKOutsourcing, that provides services to private and public entities). Further, some differences are explained by the physical location and access to computers and internet (UKBank employees are

not officially permitted to use personal devices at work, or work-computers for personal use (such as visiting social media sites); UKConsulting employees are allowed to use their own devices and to access social media from within the office; Many of UKOutsourcing employees are not office-based and sometimes do not have access to internal network and/or corporate computers). Finally, the factors dictating, framing and enabling social media use in these organisations were the management's involvement, strategy and policy. These *internal* factors were the focus of the research. The data collection was performed in a series interviews with informants from a range of hierarchical levels from associates (shop-floor employees), middle-managers, to higher-level managers who are (partially) responsible for setting and executing firm-wide policy and strategy. To protect the informant's anonymity, whenever a proprietary in-house developed software was used, the name of that product has been changed by the authors to avoid the identification of the case organisations.

During the data collection and analysis stages of the research two issues became obvious: first, the differentiation between public and "in-house" social media was consistently being made by interviewees. Second, the conceptualisation of "social media" differed from interviewee to interviewee. The following sections discuss the observed differences and address the need for a re-definition of "social media" in IS research.

2.2.1 What is social media?

The three organisations use a variety of tools – in-house built applications, on-premise applications and web-bases tool, to communicate, share information and connect employees and managers. Some of the applications were used in all organisations, others were organisation specific (Table 1).

Platform	Description	UK Bank	UK Consulting	UK Outsourcing
LinkedIn	Public Professional Networking Website	pwx	pw	pw
Facebook	Personal Networking Website	p	p	p
Avature	Web-based Semi-private community (invitation only)	w		
Yammer	Web-based private community			pw
Sharepoint	On-Premise private document sharing platform		w	
Email	asyncrounous communication	pw	pw	pw
Whatsapp/Skype	Public communication applications	x	pw	
BankTalk*	Web-based private community	pw		
Gratitude*	In-house private community		w	
Networking*	In-house public community		w	

Legend
p = for personal purpose
w = for work purpose
x = unsanctioned work purpose
* = name changed for anonymity

Table 1. Social Media use in case organisations

Two organisations (UK Bank and UKOutsourcing) used a similar application for internal communications. Both applications provided similar functionalities: users had profiles, groups can be created by users and by administrators (e.g. employees could create a group of people interested in a subject, or all employees from a department could be placed into a group), messages and media could be shared individually or within the group in asynchronous manner.

One of the interviewees in UKBank described the "BankTalk" in-house tool which allowed employees to have direct and group conversations with each other a "nothing but a messenger tool". The statement dismissed the tool as "not social media". Simultaneously, "Yammer" – an online, private communication platform which had very similar functionalities, was described as a "collaboration tool as well as being social". The participants in UKOutsourcing were excited about the "relational" value of the tool: it acted as a "shrinker": blurring departmental divisions and bringing geographically separated employees closer together. This platform was so much "social", that UKOutsourcing reported struggles with middle management not permitting employees to use the communication platform: "they want to block it because it is 'social media'".

In the third organisation: UKConsulting, the use of Microsoft SharePoint was considered "social media" by one interviewee and not by another. While one interviewee considered SharePoint as a work-tool, others considered it as a part of a wider "social ecosystem": one application which, integrated with other platforms (in this case an internal communication and sharing platform "Networking"), provided "social media" functionality for internal collaboration and communication.

Looking at these anecdotal examples, the question of definition of social media through the *use* of the application, rather than through its functionalities might appear appropriate. Would a performative lens provide a better and more "crisp" definition?

2.2.2 What is "in-house" social media?

Some interviewees in each of the organisations made explicit differentiation of using social media platforms for private and professional purposes. Some of the platforms were stated to be used internally, others only externally, however the boundaries of some platforms were blurred. This realization in parts supports findings from other research which call for a focus on in-house social media use (Leonardi et al., 2013). However, "Enterprise Social Media" – a concept coined by Leonardi et al., deviates

from the "perceptions" of the interviewees in our studies. The first defining property of an Enterprise Social Medium is the ability to "communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization" (ibid., p2). The participating organisations were using *public social media platforms (notably LinkedIn) for internal* communications and exchange, which, inevitably, resulted in those exchanges becoming public. For example, UKOutsourcing employees in the recruitment area would share each other's roles on LinkedIn to attract candidates, or tag the hiring managers in their job postings. On the other hand, UKConsulting employees would use an *internal social media platform for collaboration with external audiences (partners and customers)*.

The clarification of what "in-house" means is essential here. Is an "in-house" system a system which is developed "in-house" (like the "Networking"-platform in UKConsulting), or one which is used for internal communications only (like "Yammer" in UKOutsourcing), or one which has both these properties: internally developed and used for intra-company communication (for example "BankTalk" in UKBank)?

Further, the way in which the platform use was sanctioned by management and in which the employees used these platforms also varies. In all organisations employees reported deviant use of social media platforms. This actual use: mis-use, not-use, other-use defies a rigid definition of "in-house" social media. For example, the recruiters in UKBank were instructed to use LinkedIn to attract candidates and arrange interviews, instead they migrated to Skype and WhatsApp to talk to potential candidates. Employees in UKConsulting were encouraged to use "Networking" to share project documentation with clients, instead they used SharePoint and emails to collaborate. In UKOutsourcing the employees are asked to use the (private) Yammer platform to share and consume information about the organisation, but instead ten times more employees are participating in LinkedIn groups than in similar groups on Yammer.

These, again anecdotal, observations pose the question of whether a differentiation between in-house and public social media is possible or even meaningful?

Further, the perceptions of what constitutes "organisational" use of social media also differs. One of the UKBank employees suggested that creating connections and profiles on LinkedIn is a "personal matter", which was contradicted by another employee who claimed that having an up-to-date LinkedIn profile would benefit the organisation by improving internal mobility. Referring to collaboration on internal social media in UKOutsourcing one interviewee said that it was great to be "just having fun". Whereas

one of the UKConsulting employees stated that they did not want to use their "personal" LinkedIn account for work related activities. The borderline between personal and professional use, between in-house and public tools appears blurred.

2.2.3 Blurring of boundaries

There is an emerging networked competitive landscape (Merali, Papadopoulos, & Nadkarni, 2012) where ubiquitous IT is an integral part of organizational strategy that spans inside and outside organizational boundaries (Nolan, 2012). Informal networks are critical to knowledge creation and sharing (Huysman & De Wit, 2004). Collaborative technologies enable informal networks to interact across geographic and temporal boundaries (Sims, 2016). The term 'on-line community' encompasses a wide range of Internet fora including markets and auction sites, bulletin boards, listservers, social networking sites, blogs, gaming and shared interest sites (Miller, Fabian, & Lin, 2009). On-line communities enable asynchronous, immediate, interactive, low cost communication and weblogs offer asymmetric communication (Silva, Goel, & Mousavidin, 2008). Online and offline social networks allow content to spread further, e.g. the "Youth Movement for Egyptian Opposition" group on Facebook in 2007 had 300 users who were invited via email, within three days the awareness grew and the number of group members reached 3000 (Lim, 2012). The content spread along the social graph, crossing virtual platform borders, political and geographical boundaries and the boundaries between virtual and real worlds (Wolf, Sims, & Yang, 2015). Huang et al (2013) noted that organisations lose control over their rhetorical resources, with boundaries between the rhetor and the audience becoming blurred. Social media enables the creation of online communities of practice, which exist within and outside organizations, span organisational boundaries, as well as spanning domains of specialist practice and knowledge (Sims, 2016). In the case of Social Media-use in HR, new audiences (Alumni and Candidates) are entering the space of corporate communications (Wolf, Sims, & Yang, 2017). Simultaneously, organisations are also able to penetrate the "in-house" boundaries and enter the personal space. Managers and leaders can extend their personal influence to promote their organisations (Billington & Billington, 2012). Selection activities on Facebook, checking potential employee's profiles are not uncommon and clearly remove the professional/personal divide on social media (Weathington & Bechtel, 2012). Individuals are prepared to give up their privacy and lower their guard in order to promote themselves professionally (Van Dijck, 2013).

The case organisations in this research report deliberate and unintended breaches of the "in-house" barriers. UKBank's initiative to introduce Avature – an online community to engage with potential candidates shows the organisation's desire to reach beyond the organisational borders. UKConsulting's employees actively participate in online Groups on public websites which are dedicated to either UKConsulting's products or to areas related to individual employee's work (e.g. HR or Project Management). They do this in order to learn more about the products and services offered by the organisation: seeking "in-house"-relevant information on public spaces. UKOutsourcing employees, too, engage on public social networks. They overstep organisational and geographical boundaries by re-posting job adverts from other locations, by tagging hiring managers in job posts on LinkedIn. The cases of UKConsulting and UKOutsourcing are examples of social media use across organisational boundaries which is not sanctioned or supported by the respective organisation. The democratisation of communication within and without of organisations is an outcome of social media and user-generated-content; defining any tool as "in-house" social media appears to undermine the trans-organisational reach that social media enables.

2.2.4 Social Presence

Social presence is a key part of social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social presence is the sense of "warmth" and sociability within a website (Gefen & Straub, 2003). Social presence is defined as "the extent to which a medium allows users to experience others as psychologically present" (Hassanein & Head, 2005). Presence is the "illusion of being there or an experience of being in an environment while physically situated in another location" (Li, Daugherty, & Biocca, 2002). Short et al (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) suggest that intimacy and immediacy enhance the warmth of the media and presence is higher for interpersonal and synchronous communications than mediated and asynchronous (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A media is perceived as warm if it enables human interactions, sociability, and sensitivity (Hassanein & Head, 2005). Information seeking increases the perception of social presence (Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, & Richard, 2017) and Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011) find that social presence enhances users' continued use of social media.

The empirical data from the case studies underlines the participant's understanding of social media as one which builds relationships and community. UKBank interviewees

suggested that productive social media use includes “just keeping in touch” and knowing what one’s colleagues “are up to”. One of the UKConsulting interviewees explained that they find it easier to work with someone if they have previously read their colleague’s blog or “liked” any of their posts, as this would create a “relationship” between them prior to and independent of any common task. UKOutsourcing interviewees gave examples of developing a sense of “belonging” and “affiliation” developed through group-membership on social media. Any definition of social media should somehow capture the experience of social presence and warmth engendered by belonging to a community: even communities of practice, which are essentially work related, bring about a sense of social presence.

3 Summary

Comparing definitions and focus of current IS literature on social media with the perceptions and definitions of social media and personal/professional use of these IT there are possible questions which deserve academic attention. One question is whether our current (set of) definition(s) for what is "social media" allows us to adequately identify social media. When academics are collecting data from the field – are they and their informants using the same language and concepts? A common terminology between "the field" and academia would make our research more transferable and allow for a greater practical impact. One of the difficulties discussed in this paper is the ambiguity of social media definitions in the society. Informants in our study used different definitions of social media and different interviewees described the same (or very similar) platforms as social media and as not-social media.

Another question is whether it is possible and meaningful to distinguish between personal and professional social media use, and between public and private social networks? One of the properties of social media (despite the lack of a universally agreed definition) is the boundlessness of individual applications, sites, and platforms. Social media is built around connections and relationships – these interpersonal interactions are not necessarily contained within organisational borders ("in-house" social media), and are not necessarily kept personal ("private" social media-relationships becoming part of organisational life).

Data from empirical study suggest that there might be discrepancies in what the academic world defines as social media, social media use and what the praxis world understands when interrogated about it. The data and literature further suggest that a clear-cut distinction between "in-house" and "pubic" social media may neither be possible nor desirable.

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