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# SOCIAL MEDIA - THE NEW POWER OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE

VERSION 1.0  
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# 1. Social media changes society

What do demonstrations on city streets in the Philippines in 2001, the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, revocation of the results of the fraudulent elections in Moldavia in 2009, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011, the so-called “Arab Spring” in the Middle East in early 2011, and the “Occupy Wall Street” movement that started in New York, also in 2011, all have in common?<sup>1</sup>

They have all used social media to help organise such protests and mobilise their responsible agents. Yet these were much more than just about arranging a party: they all greatly exploited social media to establish communication networks and move towards their objectives.

Today’s social media have helped make real the idea of a “global village”, first put forward by communications theorist Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, and suggests the claims of a “flat world” by twenty-first century essayist Thomas L. Friedman are true.<sup>2</sup> According to Friedman, personal computers and the speed of the optic cable in the transfer of information have marked the modern revolution and almost removed the limitations of time and space.

Social media’s quick development into an important way to influence society is part of the advancement of information and communication technologies.

The first noteworthy trend has been the evolution of the Internet. The modern Internet is often called “Web 2.0”. The central components of Web 2.0 are the different social media and social web communities. Invented by Tim O’Reilly in 2005, the term “Web 2.0” is just a name for the evolution of Internet-based communications, and it shows that networking and electronic interaction have advanced to the next level.<sup>3</sup>

The quick development of mobile technology and different mobile terminals has been important for the creation and use of social media. A modern, well-equipped smartphone can be a pocket-sized mega-studio.

The applications and services of information and communications technology are merging together more and more. An ubiquitous presence, the different hardware and services we use now contain a new kind of “intelligence”, where these machines and services communicate with each other without any particular action by the user.<sup>4</sup>

## **Case: Yes We Did – Obama’s 2008 campaign and the social media**

*Barack Obama’s 2008 US presidential campaign has often been described as the first electoral campaign in which the use of social media had a decisive impact.<sup>5</sup> The core of the web-based campaign was a well-designed, versatile and dynamic website, “my.barackobama.com”.*

The power of social media to affect society is based exclusively on its social aspects: this means interaction and participation. In several different studies of citizen voting habits - ever since the classic Lazarsfeld investigation in the 1940s - results have shown that voting decisions are not usually based on one-step communication. More noteworthy is two-step communication, which means conversation with opinion leaders, colleagues, friends and acquaintances who can either consolidate or weaken the voter’s opinion.

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1. also e.g. Shirky, C. The political Power of Social Media. Foreign Affairs 2011; 90(1): 28-41.

2. Friedman, T. The World Is Flat 3.0: A brief History of the Twenty-first Century. Picador 2007.

3. O’Reilly, T. What is Web 2.0? - Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (read 03.11.2011)

4. e.g. Mannermaa, M. Jokuveli - Elämä ja vaikuttaminen ubiikkiyhteiskunnassa. WSOY Pro 2008.

5. several sources e.g. Harfous, R. Yes We Did - An Inside Look at How Social Media Built the Obama Brand, new Riders 2009 and Pew Internet. The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008. Pew Internet and American Life Project, April 2009.



Many governments have tried to block or hinder diverse and open communications, and social media have disrupted these restrictive practices. A good example is the Egyptian Revolution, part of the “Arab Spring” of 2011. In Tahrir Square in Cairo, hundreds of people sent continuous information and updates as text, pictures, and video all over the world through the Internet.<sup>6</sup> Expert in communications networks and information sharing, Harvard professor Yochai Benkler says that the average individual has risen to the centre of digital content production, sharing his own knowledge, wisdom and personal experiences with his peers.<sup>7</sup>

Traditional media still has an important role. Although some commentators, such as Anglo-American writer Andrew Keen,<sup>8</sup> suggest that different communities in social media are destroying our western culture and drowning us in subjective, somewhat entertaining and badly-written and sourced trash, in reality the situation is more complicated. Traditional media, with their television broadcasts, newspapers and magazines, are in active interaction with social media: traditional media follows the lead of social media, but aspects of the latter can also be found in the former. It is premature to claim that traditional media would stand aside and be replaced only by social media services. However, American essayist Malcolm Gladwell helpfully reminds us about the limited role of social media.<sup>9</sup> Real change in society requires active participation by people, often by taking risks and making sacrifices.

### Case: Social media in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution

*The transition of power in Egypt was the most significant change in the so-called Arab Spring – it happened in a large, populated and traditionally Arab state. The chain of events leading up to it was quite intense, and social media played a central role.<sup>10</sup>*

6. Wolman, D. The Instigators - How a Small Band of Digital Activists Risked Their Lives and Helped Bring Down the Government of Egypt. Atavist 2011.

7. Benkler, Y. The Wealth of Networks. Yale University Press 2006.

8. Keen, A. The Cult of the Amateur: How blogs, MySpace, YouTube and the rest of today's user-generated media are killing our culture and economy. Nicholas Brealey Publishing 2008.

9. Gladwell, M. Small Change - Why the revolution will not be tweeted. The New Yorker, October 4, 2010.

10. mainly Wolman, D. The Instigators - How a Small Band of Digital Activists Risked Their Lives and Helped Bring Down the Government of Egypt. Atavist 2011 and the article by Khamis, S - Vaughn, K. Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance. Arab media and Society, Summer 2011.

## 2. Social media and societal communication – eight central changes

Social media has changed the way people communicate. This section deals with eight key changes it has produced.<sup>11</sup> Engaging with social media is a communal activity, so it's important to understand that influencing social media is a much more diverse and difficult task than working with traditional media.

**The first** change specific to social media is the anonymity of its agents, which means that those who write and comment often use nicknames or aliases. Even though anonymity provides an opportunity to comment on delicate issues, it can also sometimes lead to “flame wars” and avoiding responsibility. Use of the writer's real name makes the message stand out (for example, in the “Letters to the Editor” in newspapers), since the author wants to be identified as owning that comment. Those who communicate need to be able to appear with their own names.

**The second** change is the richness and diversity of information social media provide. Users are no longer dependent on a single source for their news and other data any more, but can flexibly use several different media side by side. The modus operandi can be thought of as remediation, where media use, modify and reorganise contents gathered from other media. Also connected to this changed information environment is the fact that it is not possible to participate in every conversation.

**The third** change is omnipresence – there are no longer any isolated places or hiding holes. The private and public lives of society's most influential figures have merged and become public space. Many a politician has had to face the fact that a phrase taken out of context or a joke they told during a private conversation has been recorded by outsiders and quickly made public on the Internet.

**The fourth** change is speed. News and information are spread more quickly than ever before, and the demand for speed can also lead to reports without any confirmation. William Davidow, an engineer and technology investor, describes the current era using the term “overconnected”: we are too often and too quickly in contact and can't process new information adequately due to haste.<sup>12</sup> He cites the example of the modern stock exchange that has become a particularly fickle monster due to computerisation and automation.

**The fifth** change is the multitude of roles that users assume, and their relationships to each other. The lack of a clear hierarchy is characteristic of social media. A good example is the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which doesn't really have a main editor, but an army of tens of thousands of writers, inspectors, and editors.<sup>13</sup> So, if inaccuracies are found, to whom at Wikipedia should complaints be directed? The answer to this: don't complain! Instead, supplement the article in question and correct perceived mistakes alone.

**The sixth** change is the move from objectivity to subjectivity. For example, in the United States, some of the so-called traditional mainstream media have abandoned the promotion of equality and pluralism. One case observed across different social media platforms has been the rumour that the current president of the United States, Barack Obama, is a Muslim. Over 20% of Americans still believe that Obama is a Muslim, even though this false information has been repeatedly refuted.<sup>14</sup>

**The seventh** change is the new ability to combine different kinds of recorded information in very flexible ways. Social media isn't just text, pictures, audio, video, and animation, but all of these combined. With today's compact video cameras, sound recorders, laptop computers and other mobile devices, combined with affordable software, one can easily create and edit impressive presentations.

**The eighth** change is the near absence of traditional methods of regulation. A government can attempt to restrict the content of social media, but traditional censorship cannot keep up with ever-changing web pages. China and Saudi Arabia, for example, tightly control their citizens use of the Internet and social media. On the other hand, it is technically difficult to interfere in even in the most radical web-distributed propaganda.

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11. as an important background information for this chapter has been Fox, RL - Gangl, A: “News You Can't Use” - Politics and Democracy in the New Media Environment. In the book by Le Cheminant, W - Parrish, JM (edit.): Manipulating Democracy - Democratic Theory, Political Psychology, and Mass Media. Routledge 2011. 12. Davidow, W. Overconnected - The Promise and Threat of the Internet. Delphinium 2011. 13. e.g. Tapscott, D - Williams, AD: Wikinomics. Portfolio 2006 14. BBC News: Growing number in America believe Obama a Muslim - poll. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-11027568> (read 28.11.2011)

### 3. The Finns as users of social media

The Internet has become a daily tool for an ever-increasing number of Finns. In 2011, about 89% of Finns aged 16 to 74 used the Internet, and three out of four in the same age group used it daily. In the last couple of years, Internet use has grown more common among older members of the population, and even for people aged 65 to 74, some 53% used the Internet in the last three months before they were surveyed.

There are still clear differences between age groups: younger people are both more active on the Internet, and use it in more diverse ways. Although the younger age groups more actively produce content than the older ones do, the “one percent rule” applies to the active production of content. In other words, one percent of users actively produce content, 10 percent are in active interaction with this content, and 89 percent are passive followers.<sup>16</sup>

#### Case: The voting advice application by Finnish voters in 2011

*In 2011, Tilastokeskus mapped the use of Internet as a source of electoral information. At the time of the parliamentary elections that year, almost every second person in the 18-74 age group had searched for information about political parties electoral platforms and candidates on the Internet. The voting advice application didn't have much of an influence on the choice of political party. The study also examined the impact of social media on the voting decisions of individuals. The results showed that information gathered from social media had very little effect on voting decisions. The content in traditional media, electoral machines, and the parties and candidates websites were considered much more important sources of information.<sup>17</sup>*

### 4. What is social media?

#### 4.1 THE DEFINITION AND FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilising interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. Typical social media network services could be content sharing, web communities, and Internet forums.<sup>18</sup>

**At least five major features are easy to identify:**

1. Social networking and social interaction
2. Participation
3. The use of different providers (e.g. search engines, blog spaces, etc.)
4. Openness
5. Collaboration (between both users and user groups).<sup>19</sup>

#### Case: The French presidential election of 2007

*In 2007, the centre-right UMP party's Nicolas Sarkozy scored a decisive victory over the opposing socialist candidate Ségolène Royal for the French presidency. Social media had a strong influence on the outcome of the election: over 40% of Internet users reported that conversations and other activities on the Internet had an effect on their voting decisions.<sup>20</sup>*

15. survey by Tilastokeskus “Tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö 2011”. Suomen Virallinen Tilasto (SVT): Tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö [web publication]. ISSN=1799-3504. 2011. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus [referenced 4.11.2011]. From [http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi\\_2011\\_2011-11-02\\_tie\\_001\\_fi.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi_2011_2011-11-02_tie_001_fi.html)

16. e.g. Matikainen, J. Yleisöjen sukupolvet - vastaanottajista tuottajiin? In the book Matikainen, J.(edit.) Muuttuvat mediat - haasteelliset sukupolvet. Infor 2011.

17. Mooring, T. - Mykkänen, J. Vaalikampanjat ja viestinnällistyminen. In the book by Borg, S.(edit.) Muutosvaalit 2011. Oikeusministeriön julkaisuja 16/2012

18. Sanastokeskus TSK: Sosiaalisen median sanasto. Helsinki 2010.

19. e.g. Eysenbach, G. Medicin 2.0: Social Networking, Collaboration, Participation, Apomediation, and Openness. Journal of Medical Internet Research 2008; 10(3): e22.

20. mainly article by Baygert, N. French Politics at the Digital Age. Recherches en communication, no 28, 2007.

Social media's greatest change to the way people communicate is user-produced content and the fast and flexible sharing of this content. Some examples of the different ways in which social media distributes user content are shown in the following table:<sup>21</sup>

Social Networks	Facebook, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, IRC
Mediaproducts community	YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare
Blog services	Wordpress, Blogger, Twitter, Posterous
Information creation community	Wikipedia, Wikispaces
Link sharing services	Digg, Diigo
Virtual community	Habbo Hotel, Second Life

To create an effective social influence, content creators must decide carefully which social media websites, which could also be thought of as social media “tools”, are best for their purposes. Each tool has its own particular features, and comes along with its own operating culture and user communities. That is why it is useful to focus on two or three social media tools to distribute content and monitor the effects.

#### 4.2 THE TOOLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Most of us know social media from its different tools and communities. Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr and Wikipedia are the most famous. The tools of social media – we can also call them “Web 2.0” tools – developed quickly, and new tools, functions, and services are born every day.<sup>22</sup>

##### Case: Elections in Berlin and the Pirate party

*In Germany, in the 2011 Berlin state election, the Pirate party unexpectedly received 8.9 per cent of the vote and 15 seats in state parliament.<sup>23</sup> The party collected their 120,000 votes from many different sources: those who had just reached voting age, past silent voters, the Greens, Social Democrats, the left-wing, liberals and Christian Democrats. One in five voters aged 18-34 gave their vote to the Pirate party. And all this was achieved on a €50,000 budget!*

#### 4.3 FUNCTIONAL AND VERSATILE WEBSITES

Social media is part of the whole body of activity consisting of Internet communications and online interaction. When operations are based on quickly-changing content, linking and sharing, a working “online headquarters” becomes necessary, which requires the creation and maintenance of good and interesting websites. Visitors to different websites should be able to actively follow what new content has been published on the website without actually using the site. Sharing operations like AddThis and ShareThis or RSS feeds offer these possibilities. Sharing options often appear as buttons on websites, making it very easy for users to forward the site's content. Many websites also carry a Facebook “Like” button which, when clicked, then recommends the site to the clickers own friends. On the other hand, RSS feeds keep users informed of site changes, but do not share this information with others.

21. Seppälä, P. Kiinnostu & Kiinnosta - Näin markkinoit järjestöasi sosiaalisessa mediassa. SKAF 2011..

22. Seppälä, P. Kiinnostu & Kiinnosta - Näin markkinoit järjestöasi sosiaalisessa mediassa. SKAF 2011.

23. Häusler, M: Die Piratenpartei - Freiheit, die wir meinen. Scorpio 2011



#### 4.4 BLOGS

Blogs have been published since the mid-1990s, when they mostly resembled online personal diaries, and were basically “web log books” from which the word is derived. The main difference to a real diary is that this online version can receive comments, links, and other feedback from readers. A blog is, above all, the writers tool for the publication of their own thoughts and opinions. What makes blogging an effective information network is the inter-user blogosphere that shares links between blogs referring to similar content. Blogs can be tagged using different search terms, they can be listed in blog directories according to name, and each blog entry is another hit on search engines. Although the basic idea of a blog is to stimulate conversation, the communication between blog writers is usually quite scant. For example, in following the interactions between American social bloggers, it has been noted that bloggers often quote bloggers of identical backgrounds and borrow and recycle things or themes they have brought forward. However, occasionally a blogger may highlight and support or criticise the opinion of a fellow blog writer.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.5 TWITTER

Twitter is a free, Internet-based microblogging service, on which users can send short, 140-character messages to each other. Its use is based on quick exchanges of thoughts and information between friends, acquaintances, and all the users of the Twitter platform. Twitter messages are most commonly called “tweets.” These tweets form a current of messages that are followed in chronological order from a computer screen or some other screen, like that of a cell phone. A sort of keyword called a “hashtag” can be added to tweets to connect the current message to some other message, making it easier to follow the messages. In conversations concerning society, Twitter can be an interesting vessel, because its messaging form is very compact. In short messages, there is no opportunity to justify a point of view or cite sources, and because of this, political messaging and conversation can be more heated and critical here than on other social media platforms.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this, Twitter can be used for active political discussion. Twitter can also be used to steer the user to more detailed content elsewhere, through web links or other references. However, studies on the use of Twitter to influence voting behaviour highlight only small groups of “super users”.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.6 WIKIS

Wikis and similar text-based works of collaboration are web pages that can be modified by anyone who has the right to do so. Wikipedia is the most famous example of all wikis and “wiki-like” works. The basic idea behind wikis is to provide voluntary, decentralised and open information. Text can be added or corrected, and new sections can be added without the need to modify the structure of the entire page. Those who add new information are also the ones checking it. Having many individuals participate in a common task and the chance to take advantage of group intelligence are the greatest strengths of wikis.<sup>27</sup>

The quality of information has stayed relatively stable on wiki sites, although some mischievous updating sometimes occurs. However, some wikis, such as Wikipedia, have users who commit themselves to maintaining high quality and to communal problem solving when content from different users does not agree.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Case: the Canadian Green Party and the Living Platform wiki.**

*At the beginning of the twenty-first century, voting support for the Canadian Green Party increased quickly. From the year 2000, when it received only 0.8% of the vote in the federal parliamentary election, it managed to secure 4.3% of the vote in the 2004 election. In 2008, the party got 6.8% of the vote but in 2011, support for the Party dropped to 3.9%. This increased support for the Party is due to the Living Platform. Introduced in 2004, it is the open wiki project for the election campaign of the Canadian Green Party.<sup>29</sup>*

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24. e.g. Christanakis, NA - Fowler, JA. Connected. The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives. Little, Brown and Company 2009. 25. e.g. Conover, MD et al. Political Polarization on Twitter. Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media 2011. 26. e.g. Tumasjan, A et al. Predicting Elections with Twitter: What 140 Characters Reveal about Political Sentiment. Proceedings of the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media 2010. 27. e.g. Leadbeater, C: We-think: The Power of Mass Creativity. Profile Books 2008 and Surowiecki, J: The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few. Abacus 2005. 28. e.g. Lih, A: The Wikipedia Revolution - How a Bunch of Nobodies Created the World's Greatest Encyclopedia. Hyperion 2009. 29. Raynes-Goldie, K - Fono, D. Wiki Collaboration Within Political Parties: Benefits and Challenges. In the Book by Davies, T - Gangadharan, SO (edit.) Online Deliberation: Design, Research, and Practice. CSLI Publications 2009 and Raynes-Goldie, K - Fono, D. Wiki Use by Political Parties: A Case

## 4.7 YOUTUBE

YouTube is the Internet's leading video service. It began operating in 2005, and grew very quickly, with 50 million visits to the site just by the end of the same year. In 2010, there were already more than 2 billion visits to YouTube every day. The basic idea behind YouTube is that users upload videos to the site and at the same time, watch and comment on what they see. Based on the number of viewers, the most popular videos on YouTube are music videos, entertainment programmes, and news videos, but there are also some user-made videos about personal problems that have found quite a large audience. YouTube is also an important channel for parliamentary and regional election candidates, with a much lower cost than TV commercials. YouTube users have so far been more inclined towards entertainment than politics, and because of this, the most watched political content has been satirical "mash-ups", where a video recording is mixed with a different audio recording, changing the message and meaning of the video. Also popular are secretly-filmed slip-ups and witty remarks made by politicians. The contents of satirical TV shows are also popular.<sup>30</sup>

## 4.8 FACEBOOK

Facebook is the Internet's leading online community. Most consider Facebook as the very image of social media. The basic idea is to offer each registered user the chance to create a user profile with pictures and to keep in touch with their so-called "friends", or contacts they link to on the site. Facebook wasn't the first of its kind: similar services already existed in the late 1990s, but the way Harvard university student Mark Zuckerberg linked a person's photograph and profile to others and created a way to share thoughts, pictures and links was completely new. It was easy for users to adapt to it. Facebook was first available in February 2004 to Harvard students. Within one year, Facebook was used in almost all American schools, and was opened for public use in 2006. Facebook came to Finland in 2007, and at the time of writing, it has 1.5 million Finns registered as users. The worldwide fascination with Facebook is based on the possibility it offers to be in contact with people whose e-mail addresses and phone numbers have changed or become outdated. But an even more important feature of Facebook is the chance to create networks: Facebook's activity is based solely on communities. Being on Facebook isn't just limited to information within a group of friends. Through groups, users can form new networks. A user's posting, in the form of text, pictures or both, can receive feedback from other users in the form of the "Like" button, and the option to make their own comments. They can also forward the posting to their own Facebook contacts using the "Share" option. One popular feature Facebook supports is community pages for common interests. Many political candidates create a page for themselves, and when a user clicks on the "Like" button, that user indicates that they would like to receive updates each time the candidate adds something to Facebook.

### **Case: the use of social media in the Finnish parliamentary election of 2007**

*In Finland, YouTube videos were expected to play a major part in party campaigns for the 2007 parliamentary election. Carlson and Strandberg, who have researched the use of social media in Finland, found that the effect YouTube had on the election results and voting behaviour was marginal. The most-watched election campaign videos were the so-called "negative" clips, where some of the gaffes made by the candidates were highlighted.<sup>31</sup>*

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30. more e.g. Hanson, GL - Haridkis, PM - Sharma, R. Differing Uses of YouTube During the 2008 U.S. Presidential Primary Election.

31. Carlson, T - Strandberg, K. Riding the Web 2.0 Wave: Candidates on YouTube in the 2007 Finnish National Elections. Paper for presentation at the 4th General Conference of the European Consortium of Political Research, Pisa, Italy, 6-8 September 2007

32. this case is based mainly the article by Erkka Railo "Tunteista politiikkaa" in the book by Railo, E - Vares, V. Oikeistopopulismien monet kasvot. Suomen Toivo -ajatuspaja and Centre for European Studies 2011.

33. Li, C - Bernoff, J. Groundswell - Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies. Harvard Business Press 2008.

## 5. The impact of social media on the world

### 5.1 BASICS OF THE OPERATING MODEL

There are four components in this model about the impact of social media on the world:

- a. Learning from others and recognising the practices
- b. Planning and starting an operation according to the POST-model
- c. Mapping and maintaining content
- d. Continuous evaluation and improvement

### 5.2 LEARNING FROM OTHERS AND RECOGNISING BEST PRACTICES

When entering the world of social media for the first time, a good way to start planning is to learn from others. What have others done? What operating models have they used? How have they committed users to join? How have they organised and funded the operation? What results have they achieved? Learning from others doesn't mean removing the personal touch: the objective is not to copy or reproduce the actions of others, but to learn from their work, wisdom and experience, and use that knowledge in new work.

#### **Case: Blogs and the electoral success of the True Finns party**

*In the Finnish parliamentary election of 2011, there were clear indications that the True Finns were the first party in Finland to succeed in using social media to mobilise their supporters.<sup>32</sup>*

### 5.3 PLANNING AND STARTING AN OPERATION ACCORDING TO THE POST MODEL

Most planners develop a strategy and set basic objectives, then choose their technologies, establish more precise objectives, and finally specify how to actually do it. Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff call this the STOP model (Strategy, Technologies, Objectives, People) and in the world of social media, it has produced only mediocre results. Social media is people interacting with other people.<sup>33</sup> They designed instead the POST model (People, Objectives, Strategy, Technologies), to focus first on people, their preparedness, and their willingness to adopt new solutions and technologies, and only then should planners work on their objectives, strategies, and choice of technology.

When thinking about making use of social media, it must be asked: What do people want? What expectations do they have? What changes are they prepared for? What resources are available for them? How much time are they willing to spend on social media?

Generally, it's better to have very good web pages on only a few social media sites than have bad pages on a lot of sites. Quality over quantity.

### 5.4 MAPPING AND MAINTAINING CONTENT

Creating a blog or a Facebook account is not starting a social media operation, but merely preparing for it: social media lives off its content. Activity in social media is fast-paced and requires a continuous commitment from its users. That's why it is important to have a clear vision and schedule of operations.

The advantage (and occasional disadvantage) of web-based applications is that the information provided earlier is always visible. Once published on the Internet, material can almost always be found, even if the writer deletes it from his or her blog.

### 5.5 CONTINUOUS EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

A high-quality operation includes continuous assessment. Set objectives are evaluated, and planners can establish whether operational and economical objectives have been met.

With evaluation, it is possible to plan improvements. Should some badly-made applications and operations be made better or abandoned? Should popular operational models be expanded?

## 6. Practical work in social media

### 6.1 ORGANISING THE WORK

For practical reasons, it is good to assemble a team to be responsible for activity in social media. Work should be divided between several people, with certain people assigned to particular tasks. A limited Facebook group can be applied to a team's web-based communication and cooperation.

Good scheduling is also important. Spread the work across time and begin it too early rather than too late when a new project starts in social media and the amount of time and work necessary can be surprising - and sometimes overwhelming. Therefore, concentrate on the continuity of tasks already started rather than always beginning new ones.

### 6.2 THE STYLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Social media's many styles of communication differ from traditional media. In the world of social media, there are many public and hidden codes of communication that users should know and control.

The first issue is a **new context**. Users read the content of social media from their computer screens. Research on human perception has demonstrated that both the speed and ergonomics of reading from a screen are quite different to reading a book or a newspaper. The content of social media is also increasingly consumed on tablet computers and smartphones, where screens are much smaller. Social media has now started formatting content for specific devices. Many online publications offer an alternative, optimal layout for mobile readers: Finnish daily Helsingin Sanomat and state broadcaster Yleisradio are two examples. The increasing use of mobile devices also indicates that people today are reading and communicating more often, regardless of time and space.

The second thing to remember is that the Internet and social media is chiefly **comprised of links**. Users can offer links to other sources of information, but other websites can also create links to a user's own content. Links, routings and cross references are part of the Internet's strength and making use of them is an important part of using social media. At the same time, it is good to remember that **reciprocity** is also a feature of the Internet. If a site owner wants visitors linked to his site from other sites, a prerequisite is reciprocal linking to other sites. Content **layering** is part of the new context of use. Not everything needs to be explained on one site, but the user can make use of content already on the Internet. This opens up interesting possibilities in conversations in social media, when parties to the discussion can point to authentic sources.

Many tools are used in social media, and each tool has its special characteristics. But whatever the tools, there are four essential features.<sup>34</sup> Communication across social media must be **conversational** – the weight on the term is in the word “social”. It must also be personal. A **personal** style and voice are recommended and help working. Because the Internet is flooded with content and the context of use changes, new content should be **easy to read**. One Internet jargon term is “stickiness”, which means how well content “sticks” or compels users to return again and again. **Stylishness** does not mean snobbishness but consistency in its own style. The rules of conduct on the Internet have been called web etiquette, or “netiquette” and these rules can also be followed in social media.<sup>35</sup>

### 6.3 THE USE OF BLOGS

Starting a blog is easy, especially with simple blog tools that facilitate their creation. Blogger and Posterous are two good examples of blog tools for beginners. For more advanced users, WordPress is ideal. The ease of starting a blog convinces many people to start one, but the real test is making regular updates. Basically, do not start a blog without a commitment to the long-term. A blog with the last update over a year old does not give a dynamic picture of its owner.

Before starting a blog, it is good to think whether the blog is a tool or a channel you want to use. Why start a blog with so many other different ways to communicate on the Internet? When is a blog more appropriate than other social media tools, or when could it be used in combination with them?

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<sup>34</sup> e.g. Korteesuo, K. sano se someksi. Infor 2010.

<sup>35</sup> e.g. Nettiketti - Suomen Internetopas - <http://www.internetopas.com/nettiketti/>

Readers can be found by making comments and signing guest books on other blogs, linking, or opening the blog to visiting writers.<sup>36</sup>

## 6.4 USING TWITTER

As noted earlier, Twitter is a microblog service, users of which can send and read each other's updates. Since Twitter is based on short, 140-character messages (a "tweet"), the text must be compact and interesting. The Twitter service operates from its own web address, where users register themselves. A registered user can be an individual or a group.

The basic idea of Twitter is to follow other users' tweets and write one's own. Just like Facebook, Twitter is also based on friendship: users can choose whose messages to follow, and the user's own tweets are visible only to those users who have chosen to follow that user's messages. While on Facebook, the goal is to make new friends, on Twitter it is also to one's advantage to gain a large group of followers - and not everybody is necessarily known to the user. By following interesting chains of messages and commenting on them, users can collect enthusiastic followers as well.

As Twitter's messaging form is short, two things are essential. Firstly, when starting on Twitter, it is recommended to only observe, so as to better understand how tweets work. Despite their short form, tweets can be used to talk about broader issues in an engaging way. Secondly, it is highly advisable to exploit links in Twitter, and to suggest looking for additional information from an additional source, such as the user's own blog.

One of Twitter's most recognisable features is hashtags, expressed with the symbol #. Hashtags are Twitter's own way of pointing out key words, and through them, it is possible to follow a certain theme or event: clicking on a hashtag lets the user see all the tweets related to that subject. In this way, all messages relevant to an election campaign can easily be read by any Twitter user following the campaign.

## 6.5 USING WIKIS

The basic idea behind wikis is to get as many people participating in the production, review and maintenance of knowledge. Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia is probably the most famous example, but a wiki can be used for other purposes as well. A political party could develop its electoral platform or write a procedural program, or any such cases where many people are needed for input.

Starting a wiki is relatively simple, since there are numerous free or affordable programs available that can be easily used through any Internet browser. In these cases, web hosting is done by an outside service provider, who also takes care of backups copies and other routine maintenance. It's easy to get started by looking at wiki services like Wikispaces and PBWorks.<sup>37</sup>

From the beginning, a wiki needs a good structure. If there is no basic framework around which to build the wiki, any additions, modifications and reviews of the wiki content will be incomplete. So the structure needs to be clear at the planning stage, but it can also be modified and improved later. The structure for wiki-based election campaign could be arranged thematically to get the writing process under way.

A wiki is composed of a number of individual wiki pages. Their content, in turn, is mostly text, links, pictures, and other embedded media such as video and audio files. Because wikis usually have more than one writer, the writing is quite different to the traditional way of writing. This is why it's good to agree on how to keep up the active writing and the manner in which the wiki is to be written. At the start, it is recommended to get about three or four writers to commit to the project, in order to have a "critical mass" of writers. While working on a wiki, it is best to remember that writing isn't the only important task in it; other important things include the production of media files, text editing, and enrichment, and, of course, content updating.<sup>38</sup>

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36 ibid

35 Viisautta wikin tekoon -opas - [http://fi.wikibooks.org/wiki/Viisautta\\_wikin\\_tekoon](http://fi.wikibooks.org/wiki/Viisautta_wikin_tekoon). AVO-hanke 2010.

38 ibid

## 6.6 USING YOUTUBE

YouTube is the Internet's most popular video service, where people can watch videos created and uploaded by its users. A good video presentation is an excellent communication device, and with modern production technology, good-quality video recordings can be made easily and inexpensively.

Videos distributed through YouTube are especially important in campaign work, because campaign staff can then use video messages to promote their candidate without costly TV commercials. A campaign video shouldn't be too long; it's hard to look at a "talking head" for more than two to three minutes. So it's a good idea to make several short videos rather than one long one. Similarly, to add variety, film a debate or an interview rather than just one person talking to the camera all the time. Use other visual material apart from face shots: a video presentation can be made livelier by adding visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and so on. Unless there's a compelling reason to publish the video immediately after filming it, it is, of course, beneficial to edit the material. However, even with good visuals, the greatest challenge for amateur and semi-professional videos is a good audio recording. Pay attention to the sound, as users tend to be more forgiving of poor video quality, but not bad audio.

Any video must be easy to find. Since the company Google owns YouTube, its popular search engine of the same name offers YouTube content very efficiently among the search results. However, there are certain conditions which allow the search engine to find a particular video more easily: the video must be well-named, and must include a good basic description of its content. It is important to name the video in an interesting way - very few anonymous users of YouTube would find the following title worth watching: "Regional election candidate Mutikainen discusses his campaign goals for the years 2013-2016 in Tyrnävä Square". The headline must be more clear and incisive, such as "Mutikainen demands: County unification now!"

Although the presentation of videos is the most important function of YouTube, this video service also contains some social media tools. Background information can be added to the videos, and it's also good to offer links to possible blogs, home pages, and other web resources.

Today, YouTube demands that its users respect copyright properly. Back when it started, YouTube was filled with all sorts of videos that were under copyright that users had uploaded. It is very important to take special care that you only offer material to which you have full rights.

## 6.7 USING FACEBOOK

Facebook is now a diverse online community used for a variety of purposes. To start using Facebook, every user must register, and then create a basic user profile. This profile can later be added to, adjusted and enhanced. Once the basic profile exists, the user can define the extent to which other users can see the contents of their profile. If Facebook is to be openly used to influence public opinion, then the profile should be as open as possible. Photos and videos can be added to the profile. There are no clear restrictions on what pictures can be used, but it is polite to add only photos of people who have given their permission.

At its core, Facebook is a virtual circle of friends: you chat there with your old friends and meet new ones. To individual users, reading their friends' messages and writing comments or pressing the "Like" button are the most common ways of communicating in this medium. Conversations created or commented on by users can be followed in the online community. If requested, Facebook can also notify users of new comments by email so they can follow developing conversations even when not logged on to the site.

Many users provide links to other information sources, like articles in online magazines or YouTube videos, in their messages. Messaging in Facebook is compact and intense. This compact nature means that Facebook isn't meant for blogging. Instead, a good practice on Facebook is to notify contacts that a new blog entry is available, and accompany the message with a direct link to it.

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