

2 The Social Web

2.1 Definition

The emergence of the social web has fundamentally changed the online world. According to the Bundesverband Digitale Wirtschaft (BVDW), the world is currently in the biggest media revolution ‘[...] since the invention of modern letterpress printing by Gutenberg in 1452’.²⁷ Searching the keyword social web on Google reveals more than 1.87 billion results²⁸ – but what exactly is meant by this term? Web 2.0, social web, social media: all of these catchphrases describe the modified Internet usage of the last few years, however, their definition differs.

The term web 2.0 was made popular by Tim O’Reilly and Dale Dougherty in 2004, when they were looking for a title for their conference about the changing Internet.²⁹ Within a short time, web 2.0 became a popular catchphrase. It is defined by O’Reilly as follows: ‘Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation” and going beyond the page metaphor of web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.’³⁰ Hence, the term web 2.0 describes applications that use the Internet as a technical platform where programs and UGC is provided.³¹ The UGC is published by users themselves in contrast to media and brand-generated content, which is provided by the press and companies.³² In general, the addition 2.0 describes a technical version number, where the number 2 is called release number while the 0 is called level number.³³ According to this, web 2.0 would only describe an extension of web 1.0. Web 1.0 was mostly defined top down, meaning that programmers determined the contents and users could only access them.³⁴ However, web 2.0 is not only an extension but rather a modified perception of the

27 BVDW 2010, p. 12 (author’s translation)

28 As of 18th of November 2012

29 Cf. Huber 2010, p. 14

30 O’Reilly Radar 2005

31 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 3

32 Cf. Knappe et al. 2007, p. 3

33 Cf. Bastian et al. 2009, p. 79, in: Bastian 2009

34 Cf. Sturm 2010, p. 11f.

Internet.³⁵ The social aspects of web 2.0 have fundamentally changed the Internet and therefore the rather technical term web 2.0 is not appropriate. The term social web paraphrases its meaning in a better way. Ebersbach et al. understand the social web as one part of web 2.0 that does not deal with technical programs but rather supports social structures and interaction on the Internet.³⁶ Another term that has arisen within the last years is social media. It is defined by the BVDW as follows: ‘Social media is a variety of digital media and technologies that allow users to interact and create media contents alone or together. The interaction comprises the mutual exchange of information, opinions and experiences as well as the contribution of contents. Users actively refer to the contents by means of their comments, ratings and recommendations and hence establish a social relationship. [...] Due to these factors, social media can be distinguished from the traditional mass media [...]’.³⁷ The terms social web and social media hence rather describe the same process while web 2.0 puts the emphasis on technical aspects. Some people agree with O’Reilly’s view and associate web 2.0 with technical features while others put the emphasis on the social aspects.³⁸ Furthermore, there are people who do not see any innovation in web 2.0, e.g. Internet founder Tim Berners-Lee, who states ‘If web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the web was supposed to be all along’.³⁹

Throughout this paper, the term social web will be used to refer to the social part of the Internet. It is described by the author as the **social part of the Internet that enables (personally unknown) people to socially interact with each other**, thereby cherishing old and establishing new relationships. The term social web is not new but was described for the first time already 15 years ago: In 1998 Hoschka used the word social web which would transform the Internet into a social platform.⁴⁰ Back then, he predicted the modified Internet. Hence, the social web as we know it today did not come as a surprise but was already foreseen more than a decade ago.

35 Cf. Sturm 2010, p. 11f.

36 Cf. Ebersbach et al. 2008, p. 29

37 BVDW 2010, p. 6 (author’s translation)

38 Cf. Gehrke et al. 2007, p. 11f., in: Gehrke 2007

39 IBM n.n.

40 Cf. Hoschka 1998

The social web is characterized by three aspects:⁴¹

- architecture of contribution: due to simple requirements, every user can partake in the social web – even without great expertise
- architecture of networking: on the social web, users upload personal profiles and connect with friends to cherish old friendships and make new acquaintances
- architecture of communication: while formerly only monologues were feasible, the social web enables users to enter into a permanent dialogue.

The social web is enabled and characterized by the following influencing factors:

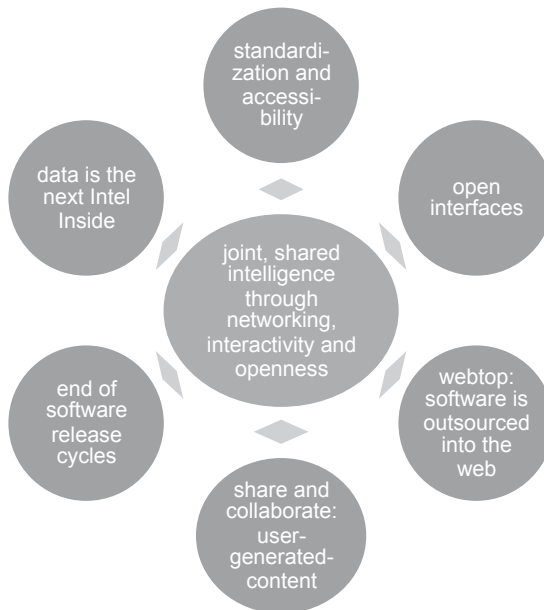


Fig. 2: Components of the Social Web. Source: O'Reilly⁴²

41 Cf. Amersdorffer et al. 2010, p. 4f. in: Amersdorffer et al. 2010

42 O'Reilly Verlag 2007, p. 7 (author's translation)

The social web's core – networking and interactivity – is based on many variables. Open interfaces enable users and sites to connect with other users, sites and data. Computer and web applications are merging and more and more software is being completely outsourced to the web. One essential part is the UGC implying that users have the power to determine the social web's content. Furthermore, the classic software cycles ended and applications are continuously refined further online. The social web is not based on programs or technology but on data. Without content the social web would be of no avail. Standardization and easy accessibility enable all users to be an active part of the social web and to interact easily in real-time with one another.⁴³

Contents on the social web can be presented in terms of texts, pictures, audio files and videos. Since gestures, mimics and intonation cannot be expressed in written communication, the so-called para-language has evolved in order to deliver emotions.⁴⁴

2.2 Development

Within a short time, the Internet has reached an all-time high: while the radio had to play 38 years and the television had to broadcast at least 13 years to reach 50 million people, the Internet reached this number in only 4 years.⁴⁵ From a former technical platform, the Internet has evolved into an advanced living environment.⁴⁶ The social web's development was mainly possible due to technical development. In the 1990's, the formerly used modem was largely taken over from the ISDN technology.⁴⁷ The speed of loading of today's access is up to 80 times higher than some years ago and the costs of Internet usage have decreased drastically within recent years.⁴⁸ In order to publish content, only very little know-how is necessary. Hence, there are practically no entry barriers for active participation in the social web.

The sharing of UGC is enabled by the technologies Ajax (asynchronous javascript and XML) and RSS (rich site summary, RDF site summary or really simple

43 Cf. O'Reilly Verlag 2007, p. 7

44 Cf. Kielholz 2008, p. 61

45 Cf. BVDW 2010, p. 13

46 Cf. DIVSI 2012

47 Cf. Bernauer et al. 2011, p. 13

48 Cf. Buss 2009, p. 279

syndication, dependent on the version).⁴⁹ Ajax is responsible for the specific data transfer between browser and server; using Ajax, only the new page elements are being uploaded and replaced, making applications much faster.⁵⁰ RSS feeds show new content on a site.⁵¹ Users can subscribe to RSS feeds of a certain website and view them whenever it suits them via a so-called feed reader. This represents a great added benefit as users can read all preferred news centrally at when convenient.

In addition to the technical development, there are also economic and social backgrounds for the social web's rapid growth.⁵² Economic reasons are the network effect, the long-tail theory and the theory of collective intelligence.⁵³ The network effect implies that the value of using a network rises with increasing number of participants. Robert Metcalf stated the law that the benefit of a network exponentially increases with growing number of users.⁵⁴ This principle can also be applied to the social web: if there are only two members in a community, users can only write to one person. If the community has four members, users can write to three persons and so on. Therefore, the value of the social web as a whole increases with growing user numbers.

The majority of traditional business models focuses on products with a high selling volume. As sales and storage areas are limited, it seems to be economically advisable to concentrate on them.⁵⁵ However, due to innovating information technologies these limitations diminish and serving niche markets becomes economically efficient.⁵⁶ This effect is described with the so-called long-tail theory, stating that the sum of niche products presents an important market.⁵⁷ The long-tail theory is of particular relevance to the social web, where millions of products in terms of pictures, videos, comments etc. are being produced and accessed.⁵⁸ It seems that every niche group has their own sites, applications and – most importantly – fans and members.

49 Cf. Back 2009, p. 76f.

50 Cf. Buss 2009, p. 281

51 Cf. Buss 2009, p. 281

52 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 7f.

53 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 7f.

54 Cf. O'Reilly Verlag 2007, p. 8

55 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 8

56 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 8

57 Cf. Anderson 2008, p. 12

58 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 9

The theory of collective intelligence states that the collective knowledge of all market players cannot be exceeded by a single market participant.⁵⁹ If the knowledge of many is united on the social web, an enormous pool of knowledge is created, surpassing the knowledge of each individual. This can be best illustrated with the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, where every user can publish new articles or modify existing ones. Hence, the extent of Wikipedia is constantly increasing and its content permanently supervised by the crowd. Enabling collective intelligence is seen as the social web's biggest chance.⁶⁰

Social reasons have also favoured the social web's popularity.⁶¹ They can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators are caused by the enjoyment of the thing itself and do not depend on an external reward,⁶² for example when users have fun publishing holiday reviews and pictures because they somehow experience their holiday once more and want to share their reviews. Extrinsic motivators depend on a gratification, for example when users are active on the social web to make new acquaintances or to benefit in other ways from it. The motivators for the social web usage can be classified into four categories. Although this classification was originally created for the Internet it can be adapted to the social web as well:

59 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 10

60 Cf. O'Reilly Verlag 2007, p. 8

61 Cf. Alpar et al. 2007, p. 7f.

62 Cf. Kielholz 2008, p. 61f.

identity management	capital management	daily life management	emotion management
autonomy	<u>social capital</u>	daily life structure	sense of community
individuality	maintaining contacts	simplification of daily life	change
independence	extension of contacts	gateway to outside world	relaxation
self-determination	facilitate networking	pastime	excitement
self-realization	<u>cultural capital</u>	flexibility	fun
image	access to world knowledge	reachability	curiosity
anonymity	miscellaneous knowledge		
distinction	competence experience		
legitimacy	<u>economic capital</u>		
group identity	earnings		
	savings (time and money)		
	<u>symbolic capital</u>		

Fig. 3: Motivators for Internet Usage. Source: Pfaff-Rüdiger et al.⁶³

According to the classification, there are four different main reasons for being active on the social web. The social web enables users to define and refine their identity. Furthermore, social, cultural and economic capital can be managed. By easily finding like-minded people, it is simple to socialize and to augment the circle of acquaintances. Being present beyond national frontiers, the social web also enables users to interact with other cultures and hence to broaden their horizons. With more and more companies being present, users can also benefit from reduced transaction costs by informing themselves about products and services directly on the social web and in their familiar environment, which saves time.⁶⁴ Also, people's daily lives may be improved by the social web since it offers great opportunities for pastime communication as well as the possibility of social interaction 24

63 Pfaff-Rüdiger et al. 2009, p. 53, in: Meyen et al. 2009 (author's translation)

64 Cf. Pfaff-Rüdiger et al. 2009, p. 60f., in: Meyen et al. 2009

hours a day. The social web is also emotionally influencing, for example, when the joint discussion or the sharing of information increase the sense of community.⁶⁵

The social web has already revolutionized today's life. However, the development does not stand still but continues. People are already talking about web 3.0 – the successor to the current social web – which will bring more 3D applications and location-based services.⁶⁶ In addition, the semantic web will gain in importance. The semantic web can be defined as an accumulation of information that can be processed not only by users but also by software agents.⁶⁷ Moreover, the social customer relationship management will become more important: companies will gain more customer information from the cloud of websites and social web channels. All this information is being evaluated with intelligent mechanisms, allowing companies to provide individually tailored offers to their clients.⁶⁸ Although data privacy is a crucial factor, users are willing to exchange personal data for added value and this trend will become even more distinct in the future.⁶⁹

2.3 Usage

2.3.1 *User Numbers and Typology*

The social web is based on its users, who were chosen as 'Person of the Year' by the TIME Magazine in 2006.⁷⁰ Having been passive spectators in the past and having used the Internet only to look for information, users today actively determine the social web's content.⁷¹ They changed from consumers to prosumers⁷² and have significantly influenced the social web's development.

The following table presents the changes in the use of the Internet over the last 16 years:⁷³

65 Cf. Pfaff-Rüdiger et al. 2009, p. 63, in: Meyen et al. 2009

66 Cf. Ebersbach et al. 2010, p. 272f.

67 Cf. Koch et al. 2009, p. 201

68 Cf. Impulse4Travel 2012, p. 7

69 Cf. Impulse4Travel 2012, p. 7

70 Cf. TIME Magazine 2006

71 Cf. Buss 2009, p. 280

72 Cf. Kagermeier 2011, p. 59, in: Boksberger et al. 2011

73 From 1997 to 2009 the data refer to adults over the age of 14 years in Germany. Since 2010 the Germanspeaking population over the age of 14 years has been surveyed.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
in %	6.5	10.4	17.77	28.6	38.8	44.1	53.5	55.3	57.9	59.5	62.7	65.8	67.1	69.4	73.3	75.9
in m	4.1	6.6	11.2	18.3	24.8	28.3	34.4	35.7	37.5	38.6	40.8	42.7	43.5	49	51.7	53.4
growth in %	61	68	68	64	36	14	22	4	5	3	6	5	2	13	6	4

Table 1: Internet Usage in Germany from 1997 to 2012 I. Source: ARD/ZDF⁷⁴

74 ARD/ZDF 2012 (a)

Within the last 16 years the German Internet usage has drastically increased. While only 4.1 million people in Germany accessed the Internet in 1997, this number rose to 53.4 million people in 2012. This huge growth was favoured by the new open-mindedness of the population as well as the introduction of easy-to-use, cheaper devices and low-priced access rates.⁷⁵ The yearly growth rate has decreased within the last two years, but is still positive. Most of the growth is caused by users over the age of fifty.⁷⁶ In 2012, more than 70% of the German population could be reached online. The following table presents the data of Internet usage by gender, age and occupation (occasional usage):

75 Cf. van Eimeren et al. 2012, p. 362

76 Cf. van Eimeren et al. 2012, p. 378



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