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## Theories of Social Media: Philosophical Foundations

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### ABSTRACT

Although many different views of social media coexist in the field of information systems (IS), such theories are usually not introduced in a consistent framework based on philosophical foundations. This paper introduces the dimensions of lifeworld and consideration of others. The concept of lifeworld is based on Descartes' rationality and Heidegger's historicity, and consideration of others is based on instrumentalism and Heidegger's "being-with." These philosophical foundations elaborate a framework where different archetypal theories applied to social media may be compared: Goffman's presentation of self, Bourdieu's social capital, Sartre's existential project, and Heidegger's "shared-world." While Goffman has become a frequent reference in social media, the three other references are innovative in IS research. The concepts of these four theories of social media are compared with empirical findings in IS literature. While some of these concepts match the empirical findings, some other concepts have not yet been investigated in the use of social media, suggesting future research directions.

### 1. Introduction

Research on social media has become a very successful topic in recent years. One of the research streams regarding social media focuses on the aspect of techniques. Most researchers in computer science use this type of research methodology to analyze users' behavior on social media and develop automatic intelligent services for users. The other research stream on social media focuses on the aspects of management and other social sciences. Among these kinds of research, information systems (IS) is one of the main areas producing research on social media. Unlike the technical research stream, in the second research stream, multiple disciplines are used to understand the usage of social media, such as data science, social science, behavioral science, design science, and more. Among these many disciplines, some are much popular than others. For example, the topic of this research paper is the application of philosophy to social media, in part because such a topic is usually overlooked in favor of sociology-related studies in social media. However, for the purpose of constructing a theoretical lens to understand humanity's social media usage behavior, it is possible that philosophy provides a more basic foundation than sociology. Combining sociology and philosophy will allow us to obtain more powerful theoretical tools to explore people's deep requirement for social media usage; such work will also lend strong support to the technical research stream on social media.

Current IS research on social media use may be characterized by reductionism and universalism. Whereas reductionism appears through a lack of alternative theories, universalism is to be found in a lack of contextualization of the findings. In

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