Responses to Original Digital Terminology Blog Post

The original [“Social Media” is SO 2009! 7 Proposed Digital Terminology Upgrades](#) post appeared on the Social Media in Organizations (SMinOrgs) S.M.A.R.T. Blog in February 2013 and generated a number of comments both on the blog and in various LinkedIn groups where it was shared. Here is the dialogue from the blog post comments:

Bill Michalak wrote:

Courtney,

Goodness gracious. You said a lot in an incredibly small amount of space.

From my perspective as an HR professional, I can't argue with what you have stated, but I think you are in a unique position and thus you have more complex thoughts on these terms, leading to you current position. I am simply a user, so terms like "social media" mean something to me, and like most people, this sort of works for us. You are a user who understands much of the technology behind the terms, as well as, a professional that consults on how to create value using these technologies, recognizes the inadequacy of some of the terms because of your greater knowledge on the subject.

So, this brings us to your audience. If you are talking to the masses, "social media" and "smart phones" work just fine. But, if you are talking to the people who create and build these things, your suggested terms would seem to make a lot of sense. Then, if you are talking to people in organizations that implement processes using these terms, they are communicating to the masses, so perhaps the current understood terms still make sense, but they really need to understand some of the points you made in the article. The resisters and the laggards probably are not going to change, so they don't deserve any of your very valuable time.

In summary, the utility of these terms would seem to depend on to whom you are speaking. Personally, as a not-so-smart user, I trust your useful-blog, without any regard for its size, to sort through these more complex ideas for me. Once again, you have broadened my thinking on this subject, yet, as a simple user, spared me the need to do anything about it, because I know you are on the case and you will keep me informed as progress is made. So thanks.

Emily Hazzard wrote:

Courtney, as I said on LinkedIn - SMACers. It has a nice ring to it. :) It gets around that whole "I'm a social media person" or "I do social media." Now we just get to SMAC!

Carlos E. Cortes wrote:

Dear Ms. Hunt,

Thanks for another valuable piece of common sense and clever reflection on SMinOrgs. I think the whole bias started with the infamous e- standing for electronic, which created the technocentric idea of all things being an IT outcome. I would delete all of them if I could.

I agree with your suggestions, even though acronyms are not my favorites. But I would like to highlight another interesting term, already well developed in Wikipedia: The social web, described as "a set of social relations that link people through the World Wide Web. The Social web encompasses how websites and software are designed and developed in order to support and foster social interaction. These online social interactions form the basis of much online activity including online shopping, education, gaming and social networking websites."

Have a nice day.

I responded:

Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts, Bill, Emily and Carlos.

Bill, I love your comments, and this one made me smile! As much as I understand and appreciate your point of view, however, I have to push back a little on whether non-technical users need to have a better understanding of the meanings of different terms. Specifically, I have found that because people - especially leaders - have such a narrow perception of what social media means to them, they are unable to grasp the true implications of these technologies for them and their organizations, as well as the responsibilities they have with respect to leveraging and managing them. So it's less about whether the term is okay and more about whether their understanding and use of that term is appropriate. The points in this post are points I regularly make in my presentations to senior professionals who are technology rookies, and they seem to help expand their Digital Era perspectives.

Emily, I love the notion of referring to folks who work with evolving technologies as SMACers.

Carlos: You're right, the "social web" is a great term that accurately describes how the web has evolved - and it's one that personally resonates with me. Tim Berners-Lee, however, might disagree. He argues that the www was always intended to be "social," so there's no need to add a qualifier.

One last comment from me:

Interesting timing. Nilofer Merchant just published a piece on semantics in the HBR blogs. Here's a link, along with an excerpt of my comment:

Interesting timing. I just published my own semantically oriented piece entitled ""Social Media" is SO 2009! 7 Proposed Semantic Upgrades." In the piece I specifically address terms like "social media," "enterprise 2.0," and "social business," but my assessment and recommendations differ in some key respects from those offered here. Among other things, I suggest we start to move away from the social and 2.0 qualifiers. They will increasingly become redundant and unnecessary as the elements of social technologies become more fully integrated into the systems and operations of organizations and the daily activities of individual workers and teams. In addition, continuing to refer to "social" highlights only one aspect of a four-pronged movement of converging technologies - social, mobile, analytics, cloud (aka SMAC). Given the rise of these complementary and integrative technologies, we need to consider "social technologies" in context rather than as a separate thing/activity/trend/set of tools.

Precision in terminology is certainly important, and I would build on your point that we shouldn't perpetuate the use of terms anchored in the past (see my comment about "smart phones" by noting that we should also be careful not to anchor terms too much in the present. Given the speed of change, we should be trying to develop and employ terms that focus on where we're going rather than where we are or where we've been.

PS - To reinforce a broader perspective on the changes in communication technology (i.e., the elements of SMAC and whatever else is coming), I prefer to use the term Digital Era.

I also shared the post in the [GovLoop](#) and [Recruiting Blogs](#) digital communities. Here is a great comment from a GovLoop member, along with my response:

Dick Davies wrote:

Cool! I learned some new jargon! Reading your post, I realized people use language for what THEY want, which is for more than just meaning. Terms pick up color and then re-color based on a life cycle and how frequently they are used in a milieu. I really like what you built.

I responded:

Thanks for your comment, Dick, especially your point that " people use language for what THEY want, which is for more than just meaning." That has definitely been true for the term "social media." I never cease to be amazed at the definitions people assert as factual even though they're basically a perception based on their own individual experience. It's very common to project personal reality as universal truth...