Social Media as a Technology for Being: The Qualities of Being on Social Media and the New Problematics of Social Media Research

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A B S T R A C T

What prevails in the today's research on social media is a functional view of technology. Technology is regarded as a set of technical devices used to conduct specific social functions, such as personal communication, social networking, public posting, and corporate advertising, among others. This paper proposes that such a functional view of technology renders social media research unduly limited and constrained in its scope, level, and direction of inquiry. Problematizing on some representative social media research efforts in the field of IS, this paper provides an alternative perspective, that is, to view social media as a technology-for-being that exerts a deeper level of influence on our existence, molding and shaping the nature and mode of being itself. Such a technology-for-being perspective has been rarely explored or subscribed to in the present IS social media research. Building upon the new conception of social media as a technology-for-being, this essay explores the quality of being in the context of social media. Five such qualities are discussed, including virtuality, materiality, externality, liquidity, and hybridity. The essay also explores the deep structural problems of research to guide future social media research. Six of such problems include *Problematize-the-Natural, Follow-the-Actor, Welcome-the-Frankenstein, Weber-meets-Frankenstein, Freud-meets-Frankenstein,* and *Marx-meets-Frankenstein.* The essay concludes with discussions on the implications of the essay, its limitations, and suggestions for future work.

Keywords: Social Media, Technology for Being, Modes of Being, Quality of Being, Problematics

Ⅰ. Introduction – Problematizing on the Social Media Research

Social media is a collection of web and mobile-based technologies that mediate human and social communication, collaboration, and leisure play via social network (APJIS, 2013). As a new breed

of enabling technology, it is expected to trigger and direct some novel phenomena in the society. A wide variety of impacts of the technology on people, business, and organization are noted and projected (Hajli, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Murphy, 2012; Schwarz, 2012). Indeed it has been touted as a technology for affecting and altering the *modus operandi* of the human society

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<Table 1> Summary of Key Social Media Research Questions Reproduced from Kane et al. (2014)

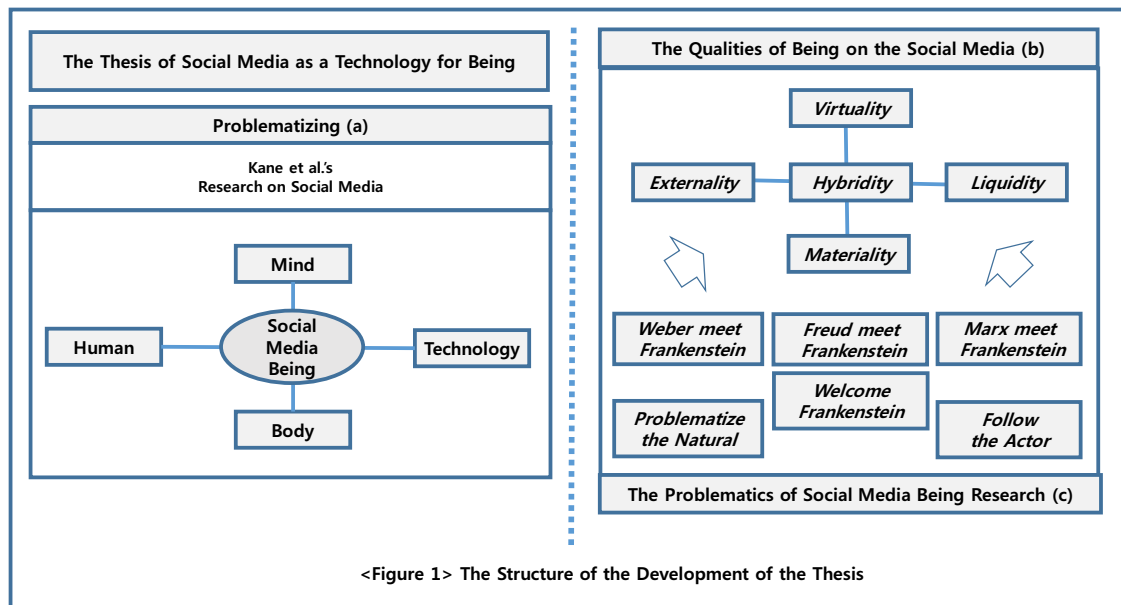|	Structure	Content
Social Homogeneity Induced by Platform	How do different types of ties (e.g. proximities, relations, interactions, flows), individually and in combination, affect users' networking behavior and shape the formation and characteristics of social media networks? • How do the features of relational ties (e.g., symmetry, allowable number) affect users' networking behavior and shape the formation and characteristics of social media networks? • What tie features are missing from social media platforms (e.g., strength, affect)? How might these features affect users' networking behavior and shape the formation and characteristics of social media networks?	How do the features of the user profile (e.g., content type, digital trace, third-party contributions) affect users' behavior and influence the way content spreads across a social media network? • How does the correspondence between the digital profile and the user (e.g., authenticity, modality) affect users' behavior and influence how content spreads across the network?
Performance Variation From User Behavior	How do people use information about the network structure provided by social media platforms to develop structural capital, and how does this use result in performance variation between users? • How do third parties use information about the network structure provided by social media platforms to develop structural capital, and how does this use result in performance variation between users? • How and why do people use (or not use) computer-aided networking recommendations to develop structural capital, and how does this use result in performance variation between users?	How do people use various content access mechanisms (e.g., keyword search, information streams), independently and in conjunction with their relational ties, to facilitate access to different types of digital resources on a social media platform, and how does this use result in performance variation among users? • How does the use of privacy features by a user and his or her network contacts facilitate access to digital resources on a social media platform, and how does this use result in performance variation among users?

today (Serres, 2012). The industry is betting heavily on the business potential of the technology, providing mega business deals and opportunities (Chui et al., 2012; Kaplan et al., 2010; Kiron et al., 2012). The academic community is no less alert in dealing with the technology as it is calling for and embarking on various psycho-socio-political exploration and investigation of the technology. The recent APJIS special issue on Social Media may be a case in point (Kim et al., 2014).

In this essay, however, I challenge on the present discourse of the social media. It is argued that the scope, level, and direction of the present research in the area are skewed and limited. And the resulting problematics lack relevance.

What has motivated this challenge on the social media research today is an article recently published in MIS Quarterly by Kane et al. (2014). In the article titled "*What's Different about Social Media Networks? A Framework and Research Agenda*," the authors present a set of 10 research questions for social media network research. As reproduced in <Table 1>, the research questions examine how particular features of social ties, user profiles, and the use of social network structure information would affect user networking behavior in terms of the social homogeneity and the performance variation of the network.

The article is well grounded in the prior social

<Figure 1> The Structure of the Development of the Thesis

network research work, and successfully extends the work to identify issues that are peculiar to social media research. Given the quality, timeliness, and authority of the authors and the journal outlet of the work, the article is expected to guide, influence, and direct the future IS social media research for some time to come.

However, while the quality and value of the article being duly acknowledged, I find the article neither interesting nor stimulating. The phenomena they propose to explain (the social homogeneity or user performance variation), or the conceptual constructs and apparatus employed for the explanation (features of social ties, digital profiles, network structure information use, etc.), do not convince me if they are properly constituted to address the real and true effect of the social media technology on people and the society today.

In this essay, I develop this challenge. I problematize on the Kane et al. article (2014) and propose a thesis of an alternative conceptualization of the social media – the social media as a *technology-for-being*. To problematize is to take something that is commonly regarded as good or natural, and turn it into something problematic.[1] I content that social media is a technology that exert its effect at a deeper level of our existence and mold the nature and mode of being itself. Such conceptualization is a significant departure from the technical, functional view of social media prevailing in the present IS social media research.

<Figure 1> illustrates the structure of the development of the thesis of the essay. As shown in the figure, the essay proceeds as follows: In the next section, I *problematize* on the IS social media research with a critique on the Kane et al.'s work. (<Figure 1 (a)>); In Section 3, I explore the *qualities* of being on the social media, and discuss five such qualities that are to be characteristic of the being on the social media (<Figure 1 (b)>); In Section 4, I explore the

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1) See Section 4 (Problematics) for more discussion of what problematization is.

problematics of social media research, and discuss some six new research problematics that may be drawn from the thesis of the social media as a technology-for-being to guide the future social media research (<Figure 1 (c)>). In the last section, I conclude with a summary and suggestion for future research.

Ⅱ. Developing the Thesis of Social Media as a Technology-for-Being

In this section I problematize on the Kane et al. article (2014) to prepare a stage for developing a new thesis on social media as a technology-for-being. The Kane et al. article, as indicated above, exemplifies the present day IS social media research. By problematizing on the article, I present two challenges to the research. First of all, I challenge the conception of the social media technology. It is argued that the technology, as catapulted in the article, is wanting in both the scope and depth of its conception. Secondly, I challenge the structure of inquiry of the social media research. It is pointed out that most IS social media research today is inexorably hesitant to exploring alternative modes of inquiry but continues to adhere to the traditional positivistic <explanan>-<explanandum> dichotomous inquiry structure, thereby seriously hampering its relevance. I elaborate on the two challenges below.

2.1. On the Conception of Technology

I problematize on the Kane et al. article (2014) first in terms of the article's conception of technology. I find that the conception of social media technology in the article is extremely *technical* and *mechanical*, and as such, carries an unwarranted side effect for social media research. Consider for instance that the

article specifies the core features of the social media technology to be those of providing digital user profiles, user search mechanisms, relational ties, and network connection and viewing. These technical mechanical features no doubt provide critical functionalities of the technology. What is troubling, however, is that such emphasis on the technical mechanical features of the technology is likely to blindfold us to the rest of the technology. It is as if putting the features on the foreground, and shunting away the rest into the background. And as you illuminate what is on the foreground, you obscure what is on the background into greater darkness. This is perhaps why the technical mechanical features in the article seem to be presented not simply as *exemplary* features, but more as *essential* features – those which constitute the *whole* of the social media technology. I challenge that this conception of technology is fallible and dysfunctional and needs to be corrected.

My contention, first of all, is that the technical mechanical conception of the technology is quite removed from and out of touch with our everyday experience of the technology. From the early morning on to the late night, we chat on Tumbler, follow Tweets, post on the Facebook, pin up on the Pinterest, etc. Indeed we build our time and life on, around, and with the technology. As such, we conceive the technology rarely in terms of its features. The technical, mechanical features of the technology *per se* do not constitute our experience of it. Instead we experience the technology in the context of life. That is, the technology always comes *embedded* in our experience of life. McCarthy and Wright (2004) persuasively put forth such *technology as experience* perspective in the cases of on-line shopping, a pilot's interaction with procedures, and ambulance control, among others.

The present conception of the social media tech-

nology, I contend, thus removes all those innuendos of the technology. It rips the technology off the context of the technology - the life and being - which situate, nurture, and beget the technology. In their places, it puts a sterilized technology, reduced to its technical, mechanical functionality. No wonder such life ridden conception of technology fails to stir any excitement in the research community.[2]

Note, however, that the social media research may present a counter-argument to the challenge. It may argue that the technical mechanical features of the technology conceived in the article represent only an abstraction – a technical encapsulation - of what the research purports to investigate. In other words, they are not what the research is after to begin with. What the research is really after instead is what underlie and effectuate those technical mechanical features of the technology on the surface. Thus one should not be misled, it argues, to regard that it is only the technical mechanical abstraction on the surface that the research is concerned with. However, if it is indeed the case, I argue that such abstraction on the social media technology is misplaced. If an abstraction is to be done at all, it needs to be done in different realms, at different levels, and with different motives, as I will discuss later. (See "The Essay Put in Perspective," in the Conclusion section.)

The challenge on the conception of the social media technology thus can be paraphrased as: If our life and being is so intimately woven with the technology, as we have noted above, why should the technology be conceived only as a *technology-for-function*, as in

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2) It should be noted, however, that this objection to the technical mechanical conception of the social media technology as in the Kane et al. article is not a total rejection of the value of such conception. Eliciting some essential technical and mechanical features of the social media technology is undoubtedly a legitimate, necessary and useful effort for a successful design of the technology.

the Kane et al. article? Don't our experience and observations tell otherwise that the technology need be conceptualized as a *technology-for-being* – one that operates at a deeper level and on a wider range of our existence, and thus molds and shapes the very modes of being itself?

2.2. On the Structure of Inquiry

But what exactly do I mean when I say social media is a *technology-for-being*? I will address this question in the context of the second challenge I put forth for the Kane et al. article. And it is a challenge on the <explanan>-<explanandum> conceptual dichotomy structure of inquiry in the article.

But before I begin, I need to clarify the nature of technology effect on the making of being. Although I propose to develop the thesis of social media as a technology that shape the being, and may state so in a direct cause-effect manner, I don't intend it to mean *technological determinism*. That is, technology is never a sole agent, nor should it be necessarily a most powerful one at that, that operates in the shaping of being. Instead, I develop the thesis with the Science and Technology Studies (STS) perspective in that any technology phenomenon, the making of being on social media included, is always a consequence of multiple social and technical operators in action, the effects of which to be moderated by a hoard of factors. Social media, the way I see it, therefore is more of a facilitative participant than an immediate and direct causal agent in the shaping of being.

The research in the field of IS employs a rather straightforward <explanan>-<explanandum> structure. Technology is always a prima facie explanan, with which the research explains some selected Human Behaviors - the explanandum - such as communica-

tion and networking in the Kane et al. article. Latour (1999), however, challenges this <explanan>-<explanandum> dichotomy structure. As anthropologist-turned-philosopher-of-science, Latour's thesis is that the Technology-Human relationship cannot be properly framed in the <explanan>-<explanandum> inquiry structure.

Consider as an example a man who is given a knife. The conventional technological effect study with the <explanan>-<explanandum> inquiry structure would investigate the knife-man relationships in terms of how the knife as a technology would effect a change on the man's behavior, such as his cutting style. What Latour points out, however, is that this inquiry is essentially spurious. According to him, what matters is not how the man cuts, but what he cuts: does the man cut a lettuce or a human body? Of course it depends upon if the man is a chef or a serial killer. But that is exactly the point. What Latour is arguing is: What kind of man has the man become when he was given a technology? Would a technology turn the man into something he was not before, creating a new subjectivity? Do we ask this subjectivity question at all when we study technology?

Latour argues that this man-with-a-knife is a new ontological entity that is reducible neither to the knife alone nor to the man before the knife. In fact, the entity, which he terms an Actor, is such a heterogeneous ensemble that it can only be explained by itself as a whole. Any study on the Technology-Human relationship, therefore, is only a matter of *following* this actor – to describe how this newly created actor may come into being, how it may practice its being, how it may continue to reinforce and expand its being, and so forth. Latour calls this the Network(ing) of the Actor. Thus the highly acclaimed Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and its maxim,

"Follow the Actor," is borne into the world (Latour, 2005).

What is intriguing about the Actor-Network Theory is that the theory practically annihilates the <explanan>-<explanandum> dichotomy. In the man-with-a-knife example, the knife no longer maintains its <explanan> role, for it alone is not sufficient to account for the man-with-the-knife's behavior. Nor should the man remain as <explanandum>, as he does not provide the behavior to be explained by himself. The Actor-Network Theory simply throws away the <explanan>-<explanandum> dichotomy, and in its place, puts a new hybrid ontological entity to follow around.

I propose the thesis of social media as a technology-for-being exactly in this ANT sense of the term. Man and the social media together create a new ontological entity – A *Social Media Being*. And the being is neither reducible to the technology alone nor to the man before the technology. The conventional conception of the social media technology in the field of IS is painfully shortsighted to this alternative perspective on the technology.

Ⅲ. Exploring Social Media as a Technology for Being – The Qualities of Being on the Social Media

The field of IS puts on multiple epistemological hats in its inquiry. In system development, it wears a software engineer's hat. In data modeling, it wears a pseudo-ontologist's hat. In organizational impact studies of IS, it wears an economist's and a sociologist's hats. Now to this closet full of different epistemological hats, I may add yet another one – that of an *anthropologist's*. That is what seems to be needed if we explore social media as a technology for being.

As discussed above, the Actor-Network-Theoretic conception of the technology commands the forming of a new hybrid ontological entity. Perhaps such a new entity is a different tribe, or a culture, or a generation, or even a species. Whatever it is, I suspect it cannot be explained away mechanically by the conventional positivistic <explanan>-<explanandum> structure of inquiry. Rather, an anthropologist's acumen may be needed, with some strong ethno-methodological dispositions (Garfinkel, 1967). The field of IS, of course, is unabashedly ill-prepared for that.

In this essay, I nevertheless take a step toward the exploration of this new ontological entity – the being on the social media. As a heterogeneous ensemble of technology and human, this social media being is expected to display some distinct qualities of being. I explore some of those qualities of being below.

The mode of exploration, however, is not positivistic. I take on, say, an anthropologist's hat, and look for stories and narratives in the literature about the social media being. These stories and narratives, I have to admit, are only anecdotes and fragments, never a full exposition. But they provide a glimpse of what the social media being is, which the future social media research may build upon and expand.

The stories and narratives below do not come from the IS literature. Instead they come mostly from the fields of Sociology, Literature, Culture, Linguistics, and Philosophy, among others. This excursion into the fields beyond the disciplinary boundary of the field of IS is both a risky and rewarding effort. On the one hand, I run the risk of being embarrassingly misinformed and irrecoverably unbalanced in the search. On the other hand, I may reap the reward of liberating myself from the stifling positivistic framework of the field of IS, and may feast on the ideas and insights that traverse far beyond what the field of IS has to offer. Indeed these fields already have a long history of contemplating on the issue of the new forms of being, under the rubric of the modernity and post-modernity dialectics, since the 18th century enlightenment days and on. In the following, I thus willingly take the risk to exploit the reward of the excursion. I explore five qualities of being on the social media, starting with the virtuality of being.

3.1. The Virtuality of Being

I begin the discourse on the quality of being with that of *Virtuality*. As I stay connected on-line, and spend a big chunk of time there for work and play, my being is as *virtual* as it is otherwise. Virtuality, as such, is undoubtedly the most immediate and direct effect of the social media technology on today's social media being.

What I notice about the virtuality of being with the social media, however, is not so much the ubiquity of the platform I stay on or the versatility of the technology that provides the platform. It is rather about what the social media technology lures us to do with the being itself. That is, with the technology, we are lured to create, mold, and play a *virtual being* on the platform.

The virtual beings I play are not just a virtual reproduction of the real life being. The virtual beings do not inherit the physicality - sex, age, look, occupation, etc. - or the sociality – a particular collection of social ties and relations that I develop over time in life – of the real life being. The virtual being, on the contrary, seduces us to *imagine* a being, and then to live it out, on the virtual platform. As such, the virtuality of being represents as much an onto-

logical quality, as it is a functional quality, of being.

The virtuality also is an epistemological quality of being. It specifies a particular way of living for the virtual being. Scott Lash, a prominent contemporary sociologist on the philosophy of information, terms today's such a virtual way of living *technological forms of life*, and presents some persuasive narratives about it (2001, 2002). According to him, the technological forms of life we live today exist only on the *interfaces* between technological systems and the world the systems provide connections to. And when we are removed of those interfaces, we cannot sustain our being, neither the sociality nor the physicality of it. Hence we make remarks such as: I cannot function without my mobile phones; I cannot live without my car; I cannot imagine a world without Amazon, or my cable TV channels; etc. Lash further points out that, with the technological forms of life, life gets flattened, becomes non-linear, and lifted-out. I cannot go over the details of his argument here. But some major aspects of the technological forms of life include: The vertical knowledge within is now externalized to be stored as flat information without; A simple communication substitutes deep sense-making; The meaning becomes compressed and non-linear, as the unit of information is amputated into a sign, a symbol, an abbreviation, etc.; Life thus becomes too fast for linearity, reflection, and reflexivity; The being ultimately is to be colonized by Information; just to mention a few. As we will see below, many of these themes of the technological forms of life recur in other aspects of the quality of being on the social media.

3.2. The Materiality of Being

The social media being is also a *material* being. By this I mean the being is put in materials and exists in materials. Think of the digitization technology. With the technology, we capture things and moments of life, precious as well as trivial, and turn them into pictures, images, and movie clips, most likely powdered with texts and emoticons. As we produce more and more of such digital materials on social media today, it is with those materials that we announce, publicize, confirm and expand our being. That is, on social media, we exist both in and as the materials we produce and post on the virtual space.

The materiality of being contrasts to the virtuality of being. Virtualization nullifies the ontological boundary of being. Materialization, on the other hand, reinstates the boundary by encoding the being with digitization.

The materiality of being, however, is not merely a technology event. That people are so diligently and arduously involved in the digitization of life today cannot be explained only in terms a hobby, habits, gizmo marketing, advertising plethora, or plain work needs. Instead, as we have done with the virtuality of being, we need to take a notice of what the technology does to the being itself.

The digitization technology certainly produces things. But more importantly it produces a being with a particular mode of existence. In other words, the materiality essentially represents a shift in the mode of being you succumb to. And you make this shift public. You declare to others that you are what you digitize, that you will manifest and materialize your being in the digital content you produce, and that you will from this point on interact and level with others on this material base.

When the being is thus constituted in materials, it robes an interesting ontological quality to being. That is, it renders being to become *becoming*. As a work of digital production, being is not fixed, and

never to be completed. Rather it becomes a continuous process of becoming - to grow and expand - as the being accumulates more digital contents on social media. What is more, the being practically deceases if it stops this becoming. For a material being, whose contents not expanded, updated or modified regularly, cannot be considered to be alive any more. In the social media world, we call such a site *dead*.

The quality of materiality further poses some epistemological questions about the *subjectivity* of being. The questions are: First of all, would the materials on the social media, as they are piled up rather unwittingly and haphazardly, produce a consistent, coherent being? And secondly, how might the material being achieve an integral subjectivity of being?

The questions can be answered from, among others, a Linguistics point of view. Consider for instance a chat on social media. The things I say on Tumbler – verbal remarks, emotive icons, etc. - pile up to make up the material being. In other words, a material being is a structure of symbols – a *text* in the Linguistics term - and as such is also a textual being.

The classic Saussurean Linguistics suggests that a textual being, as a structure of symbols, constitute a consistent, coherent being. This is because a structure of symbols such as language is itself a consistent and coherent entity. In such a structure of symbols, the meaning of a word, say, "fish", comes only from within, not from without. That is, the word "fish" conveys its meaning not because it refers to the real fish creature in the sea, but because it takes a position in the structure of the symbols that differentiates it from the symbols of "dog," "cat," "whale," etc. The material being as a symbol of structure, thus it can be drawn, effectively generates and maintains some internal consistency and coherence of a being.

Jacques Derrida (1978), however, provides a slight-

ly different angle on addressing the questions. Derrida, undoubtedly one of the most influential thinkers in the 20th century philosophy, proposes that meaning is determined by a difference, but this difference is deferred, always to be newly formed by the context that unfolds. In other words, meaning is never fixed nor constant, but is in the continual process of becoming, the idea of which Derrida captures with the term, *différance*. Now this resonates well with the material quality of being and becoming discussed above. And from the Derrida's point of view, the subjectivity of the textual being on social media, as a structure of symbols that builds up and expands on itself, cannot be fully determined but always to be deferred.

But then does this mean the being on the social media may never assume a subjectivity? To this question, Robert Musil provides a most intriguing response. Musil is an Austrian writer who worked in the first half of the 20th century. And in his post-humus masterpiece – *The Man without Qualities*, he depicts a form of subjectivity most illuminative of the modern consciousness (Musil, 1995). The subjectivity he describes is a plot-less one. The events in life, according to Musil, do not take place with a plot in advance. Rather the plot comes only after-the-fact. It is a series of events taking place in search of a plot. And people engage in an incessant search for some unifying meaning or identity for the haphazard piling up of events in life, with no guarantee that it will ever come forward indeed. In the place of a plot, an interesting practice of thinking, what Musil may call a novelistic "*essayism*", appears to continue the stories of life. A good introductory piece on The New Republic about Musil's writing describes how Musil's novel itself practices this *plot-less, essayistic* subjectivity:

"….To an extent unprecedented in Western liter-

ature, large stretches of the book (The Man Without Qualities) contains neither forward-moving action nor inward character development. In their places, we are often given extended sections of pure intellectual-moral speculation, essayistic reflections that exist less to illuminate the private passions of a character than to follow the inner logic of a concept with its own independent claims on our attention. This is a new kind of "essayism"⋯the unique and unalterable form assumed by a man's inner life in a decisive thought⋯" (Bernstein, 1995)

Again I note that Musil's *plotless*, *essayistic* subjectivity perhaps is a most intriguing, illuminative depiction of the nature of subjectivity we find in today's material being. It suggests we may not assume any pre-existing plot for the material being. But the being at the same time may occasionally exhibit surprising *essayistic* intelligence, as we see in some power blogs.

3.3. The Externality of Being

The third quality of being for the social media being is the *externality* of being. By this I mean being is internally empty and externally full. Perhaps the best narration to illustrate this externalization of being is a quote from Fernando Pessoa, an early 20th century Portuguese writer, who wrote:

> "⋯I have created various personalities within. I constantly create personalities. Each of my dreams, as soon as I start dreaming it, is immediately incarnated in another person, who is then the one dreaming it, and not I. To create, I've destroyed myself. I've so externalized myself on the inside that I don't exist there except externally. I'm the empty stage where various actors act out various plays." (*The Book of Disquiet*, Text 299) (Pessoa, 1998)

It is astonishing that almost 100 years ago, Pessoa has elucidated so perceptively the nature of being today. As I have discussed above with the virtuality and the materiality of being, I create multiple virtual material beings externally on social media, and faithfully live them out. However, as I live more externally, I exist less internally. And as Pessoa lucidly puts it, I am the empty stage lent out for the beings I create to play on.

Indeed Pessoa's passages are one of the writings that have motivated the inquiry of this essay. The sensibility of the writing, if I may say, is in such a stark contrast with, and thus a piercing counter-blow to, say, the vulgarity of the approach found in the field of IS towards an understanding of man with technology, as pointed out in the discussion of the Kane et al.'s writing.

This externalization of being, in Pessoa's time, was a rare venture. There simply was not available much of the means for living externally, except in *writing*, as Pessoa did. The social media technology today, however, with its technological versatility for virtualization and materialization of being, provides the very means for living externally. And increasingly more people are allured into this mind empty externalized existence on the social media.

3.4. The Liquidity of Being

The fourth quality of being I discuss is the *liquidity* of being. Zygmunt Bauman, a provocative diagnostician of the today's modern society, proclaims that liquidity is what characterizes the modernity we live today. The weighty, bulky, rooted, immobile, stable, and solid modernity of the 20th century western industrial society, according to Bauman, has melt into the light, mobile, effervescent, never stable, liquid modernity of the new millennium (Bauman, 2000).

It indeed is such an epochal transformation of the society.

What liquid modernity today is may be best understood by looking at what it is not, i.e., by contrasting it to the old solid modernity of the past centuries. The *solid* modernity, which has had a reign over the society since the enlightenment era of the 18th century, was a modernity based upon the belief that the society is something we centrally plan, manage, and manipulate. With the repetitive, routinized, differentiated time and function of the Fordism factory and the Panopticon surveillance model of the disciplinary society, the solid modernity has fostered settled identities, believed in bureaucratic organization and the steering power of the state, and at its most sinister, reduced reason to bureaucratic instrumental rationality, all of which ultimately led to and begot the Holocaust. (Jay, 2010)

The liquid modernity, therefore, is such a leap away from the solid modernity. In the liquid society, we are nomadic, diasporic wanderers, uprooted and dis-embedded from the home and community. Jay (2010) recapitulates the liquid modernity and a mode of living it as:

> "···We live in a world of precarious uncertainties, short-term planning, instant gratification, the weakening of institutions, ephemeral relationships, struggles to manage risk, volatile consumeristic identities, and the collapse of viable communities (and solidarities)··· Liquidization now extends from the system to personal life experiences, from the macro to the micro level, and there is no real possibility for a collective response that might subvert the whole···(We) restlessly transgress the increasingly porous boundaries left by solid modernity. We have learned to value transience over duration, and cope···with the erosion of even our sense of enduring individual selves···" (pp. 98-99)

The liquid quality of being that Bauman thus has captured is as apt a description of the social media being as any available in the literature. Slezkine (2004) rebounds Bauman's liquidity concept with one of his own, the concept of a Mercurian culture. The Mercurians are modelled after the Jewish culture. And they share much of the liquid quality of being, that they are nomadic, diasporic, restless, unsettled, with a strong value on cleverness, wit, and high skills in the use of concepts and symbols. Slezkine suggests that such Mercurians shall emerge as the dominant type of modern life.

3.5. The Hybridity of Being

The last quality of being I discuss is the *hybridity* of being. As we have noted at the beginning of the discussion, technology and human come together to produce a hybridized entity. In other words, the being on social media is no longer homogeneous in its constitution. Instead it is an amalgam of heterogeneous elements - some human, some technological, some virtual, some material, etc. The being is also historic and singular in that the heterogeneous elements accumulate in and over time. Such a being is no longer to be approached from the dichotomous "Human versus Technology" perspective, as indicated in the previous section.

It should be pointed out, however, that the hybridity of being is not just a matter of homogeneity versus heterogeneity of its constituents. It is more about where the subjectivity of being resides. That is, subjectivity is no longer assigned to the human alone, but to the whole collective comprised of humans and non-humans. As Latour says, a man-with-a-knife forms a distinct being, not reducible to either the man or the knife alone.

Such hybridization of being gives a birth to

monsters. Behind most of the disasters occurring in the society, such as ship wrecks, plane crashes, nuclear accidents, etc. we may detect the presence and working of such monstrous beings. Take as an example the tragic incident of Sewal shipwreck, which took place just a few miles from the coast line of Korea, April, 2014. More than 300 people, two thirds of them high school students, lost their lives in the accident. The ship, as found out later, was overload with cargo and with an abrupt 90-degree turn lost its balance to sink fast on its side, disappearing below the water in just a matter of a few hours.

What is most striking about the tragedy, however, was not so much what caused the shipwreck - all the illegal, malevolent, negligent misconducts that the government investigation has later found to have led to the accident, as what happened afterwards in the rescue process. To everyone's total shock and disbelief, the massive rescue efforts that ensued with hundreds of divers and tons of rescue machines and equipment, were not able to save one single life from the ship after it sunk down. How could this be possible? What happened in the name of the world? How could we exhibit such total incapacity and incompetence in the rescue mission?

The monstrosity of the hybrid being created in the situation provides a possible explanation. First of all, the ship, when it sunk down 90-degrees sideway, became a completely different entity. That is, the structural features of the ship initially designed to hold and protect people from the sea - the walls, room layouts, exit doors and routes, stairways, wall attachments, etc. – were now put together to produce a terrifying structure of entrapment that practically lock people up inside and not allow their escape. Couple this completely unexpected deformation of the structure with the unusually treacherous tide of the water in the region, we had a dreadful monstrous

being created, which we were totally incapable of coping with.

Perhaps the best way to conclude the discussion of the qualities of being is Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Indeed it is more than fortunate that we have their work, for the idea of desiring-machine and *rhizome* they provide for the philosophy of being is perhaps the closest an elucidation we can expect to have to capture the essential quality of being on the social media.

Being is a rhizome. That is what Deleuze and Guattari proposes. It is not a tree. For a tree has a root, the center of being, to which being converges, whether be it Self, God, the Other, etc. And everything about the tree can be explicated by this center of being. Rhizome, on the contrary, is a different kind of being. There is no root, no single center of being, in the Rhizome. Being is in multiplicity. And each being is singular in the sense that it cannot be reduced to or absorbed by another being. Latour's irreducibility thesis discussed above exactly echoes this.

The rhizomic hybridity of being, with the monstrosity that often accompanies it, is one of the acumens we need to bring to for an understanding of and dealing with the social media being. As will be discussed in the next section, such hybridity and monstrosity, along with other qualities of being discussed above, will call for different problematics for the social media research.

3.6. Summary

Five qualities of being are discussed in this section for the social media being. The qualities of being each tell a unique tale about the social media being. And the tales are each told from different angles, with different vocabularies and grammars. Together, they make a rich storybook about the being on the

social media. Musil's novel quoted above, *The Man Without Qualities*, can be an interesting antinomy here.

The five qualities of being above are not claimed to be diagonal nor complete. That is, I don't suggest they form a set that would mutually exclude, collectively exhaust, the whole quality of being on the social media. On the contrary, they seem to be at a slightly oblique angle with one another, with each capturing a distinct aspect of being, but at the same time, drawing upon others to further develop the aspect. For instance, the quality of materiality draws upon the quality of externality, which draws upon the quality of virtuality, which draws upon the quality of hybridity, etc. The future study may reveal their specific relationships.

The future study may also reveal how the social media being, complex with such peculiar qualities of being, may be situated in the context of the realm of existence today. For instance, would the externality of being, i.e., the vaporization of the internal being onto the external realm, explain the society's various maladies and mishaps, such as the alienation of being, the fatigue and anxiety of being, the dehumanization of being, the colonization of being, etc., or such behavioral, psychological, social disorder as depression, suicide, casual crime, work addict? (e.g., Han, 2015).

The qualities of being, as brushed together on a canvas, paint a stunning picture of a social media being. The painting, I should say, is like a Frida Kahlo painting; it is so enchanting and disheartening, simultaneously. We see the colors dazzle, images rage, hopes soar, and fears loom over on the canvas. And like Kahlo, it is unfathomable. The complexion of the social media being, as portrayed in the lengthy discussions of the qualities of being in this essay, is complex and multifarious, disorderly and disconcerting. But Kahlo once said: "I do not paint

dreams. I paint the reality as I know it." Perhaps I should say the same. What we are painting with the qualities of being is no dreams. It is the reality of the social media being as we come to know it.

Ⅳ. Searching for the New Problematics of Social Media Research

I propose that, to finalize the development of the thesis of social media as a technology-for-being, we need a new set of problematics for the social media research. The old problematics of the social media as a technology-for-function may not work for the social media as a technology-for-being.

In this section, I search for a new set of *problematics* for the social media research. By problematics, I refer not to the actual, specific problems on the *surface* of research. Rather, with the term, I intend to mean the *deep structure* of the research. That is, the set of ontological, epistemological, ethical, or methodological dispositions that would underlie and generate the surface problems of the research. It thus would include things like worldviews, assumptions and premises of knowledge, biases and presuppositions of behavior, and the values, purposes, and objectives of ethics, among others. The search for the problematics, so conceptualized, therefore, is not so much concerned with the actual derivation and specification of the problems of the social media research. Rather the search looks to reveal the deep structure to understand why we define the problems to be problems in the first place.

I discuss six problematics of the social media research below. They draw upon the discussions in the previous sections, and guide and direct the generation of questions and problems of the research.

The first two, *Problematize-the-Natural* and *Follow-the-Actor*, discusses the general directions for conducting the social media research in terms of how we may concoct research problems and how we may inquire about them. The *Welcome-the-Frankenstein* discusses the monstrous nature of the world we deal with in the research. The next three problematics – Weber-meet-Frankenstein, Freud-meet-Frankenstein, and Marx-meet-Frankenstein – address the three realms of the social media research, as the Social, Psychological, and Business and Economics domains, respectively, wherein to delineate and specify particular research issues and problems.

4.1. Problematize-the-Natural

Let me begin the discussion with the concept of *problematization*. Sanberg et al. (2011) expanding on Foucault (1985), conceptualizes problematization as follows:

> "...A central goal in problematization is to try to disrupt the reproduction and continuation of an institutionalized line of reasoning. It means taking something that is commonly seen as good or natural, and turning it into something problematic. Specifically (it) aims to question the assumptions underlying existing theory in some significant ways…and based on that, being able to formulate more informed and novel research questions…" (2011: 32)

Sanberg et al. (2011) proposes that problematization as such is an alternative, superior research practice to the conventional *gap-spotting* research process. The gap-spotting research generates research questions by spotting gaps in the existing research, in terms of competing explanations, overlooked or under-researched research areas, research that lack

empirical support, and so forth. As such it is inherently bound to the existing body of research. Problematization, on the other hand, refuses to be so bound. As described above, by problematizing on the good and natural, it opens the chance to create more interesting research questions and theories than the gap-spotting may provide. Mitroff et al., for instance, reports on strategy policy analysis cases to demonstrate the effect of problematization (Mitroff and Emshoff, 1979; Mitroff and Mason, 1980a; Mitroff and Mason,1980b; Mitroff et al., 1982; Toulmin, 1958; Toulmin et al., 1979). Critical Management Studies (CMS), which calls for the denaturalization, self-reflexivity, and anti-performativity in the management studies, also resonate with the problematization (Adler, 2002; Fourier and Grey, 2000). Research in Critical Realism, although in a slightly different vein, also provides insightful support for the problematization practice (Archer, et. al., 1998; Bhaskar, 1978; Fleetwood, 2005). Problematization, however, is rarely adopted in the practice, for most research institutions – such as journal review systems – are *formatted* after the gap-spotting research process (Sanberg et al., 2011).

This essay itself represents a problematization effort. As we see in the previous sections, this essay problematizes on an exemplary social media research in the field of IS – the Kane et al.'s work – and refutes its conception of the technology and its <explanan>-<explanandum> dichotomy inquiry structure to present an alternative conceptualization of the social media as a technology-for-being. The problematization effort of this kind is often called for, but not frequently practiced in the field of IS (Juhn, 2012; Smith, 2006; Straub and Ang, 2011; Weber, 1987).

4.2. Follow-the-Actor

The second problematics is the *Follow the Actor* maxim of the Actor Network Theory. As discussed in the previous sections, the social media being is an actor in the Actor-Network-Theoretic sense. It is a hybrid entity, a heterogeneous ensemble of humans and technologies. As such it is not reducible to any of the elements that constitute the actor. That it is not reducible means it is not going to be explained by anything other than itself. You cannot explain the behavior of actors in terms of, say, technology, society, culture, institutions, human conscience, or anything else. But you simply follow and describe the actor. Indeed, in the Actor-Network-Theory, the only possible explanatory acumen you have for research is to follow the actor (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1999; Latour 2005).

We therefore need to learn to follow the actor to study social media being. And what this means is that we more than anything else need to yield the positivistic model of inquiry – to give up the <explanan-explanandum>, <independent-dependent>, <predictor-criterion> inquiry structure we have held with for so long. It may feel unscientific, unnatural, as if being rid of our most cherished epistemological armor. But it is what we may need to learn to be doing for IS research (Juhn, 2012; Orlikowski, 2007, 1992; Sarker et al., 2006; Walsham, 1997).

4.3. Welcome-the-Frankenstein

The actors we follow on the social media are hybrid being, none of the kind we have yet encountered. As such, they are *monsters*. Hence I give the name *Frankenstein* to the being, with every connotation of the term. As warned against above, the monsters should not be *reduced* to anything we know of and are familiar with. Nor should they be treated as something to fend off. That is, as if they need to be *corrected* back to what we already know of and are familiar with. Monsters are monsters and need to be dealt with as monsters. The monsters are not of one kind. Frankenstein begets in varying forms. Han (2015) suggests that the today's society is no longer a disciplinary one. The immunological distinction of what is to be accepted and what is not is no longer effective for coping with the society today. And this is exactly what the world of social media being appears to be getting at. No immunology can work. Everything is possible and to be expected in the world of social media. We'd better be prepared to face every one of those Frankensteins without grimace.

But are we indeed prepared enough for the monstrosity of the world coming in our way? Now getting prepared means several things: First of all, we need to be willing to succumb to this state of no order and no discipline. This means we forsake the morals, values, and standards we cherish. And we search for a completely new set of those, with no guarantee that it would ever come. The liquidity of being we discussed above suggests it may not. And even if it comes, it may not stay for long. Hence we need to get accustomed to the nausea and numbness of living some novel technological forms of life on the unfamiliar dimensions.

As the research on social media deals with the world of Frankensteins, the numbers and kinds of which unbridled and unbound, some disciplinary dispositions may be needed to guide the research. Such dispositions will set the realms of inquiry and generate coherent sets of questions for the research. I suggest three such disciplinary dispositions – the Weberian, the Freudian, and the Marxian. They are so labeled after the great names of Max Weber,

Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx in the fields of Sociology, Psychology, and Political Economy, respectively. The Weberian disposition explores the *social* aspect of the social media being. The Freudian disposition explores the *psychic* aspect of the social media being. The Marxian disposition explores the social media being in the context of the today's *business and economic* structure aspect. The names are more symbolic than otherwise though. I don't suggest that we become Weber, Freud, or Marx specialists. Rather the names each represent that classic body of ideas we inherit from the past. We take those ideas to see if and how they need to be reinterpreted, reconstructed, or revamped in the social, psychic, and business and economic aspects, as they meet the new Frankenstein world of social media.

4.4. Weber-meet-Frankenstein

Will a collective of social media beings form a society? This is the question the Weber-meet-Frankenstein problematics poses for inquiry. That is, the problematics posits social media to be a *social* phenomenon, and thus sets 'social' to be its realm of inquiry. [3] The term social is used here as scale-free. It refers to a collective of any size at any level. Hence a society, a community, an organization, a group, etc., are all a social phenomenon. And once the realm of inquiry is set as social, a hoard of social questions sprouts for research. Examples include: Will there be citizenship developed for the members of the social media society?; Will the citizenship developed be such as

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3) Latour (2005) doesn't like the term Social. To him, it denotes an abstract structure, such as institutions, norms, and culture, etc., that sociologists bring in to explain an actor's behaviors. He abhors the reduction involved in such explanation, and proposes to use the term Association instead. In this essay, however, I maintain the common term Social, with Latour's interpretation.

to sustain the society?; And to what extent, if any, will the members exercise their rights and responsibilities of citizenship both on and off the social media society?; These questions each are interesting and important social questions for research. And they may be further expanded with the more general social problematics we find in the literature. (e.g., Merton, 1967; Smelser, 1995). Note again, however, that these social questions are an immediate and direct result of choosing the social problematics. That is, problematics can be quite generative of questions.

Let me begin with an observation on the state-of-affairs of the current social media society. First of all, at present, the social media society seems to be a tamed one. That is, to a considerable extent, it appears to be disciplined and under control. Social media beings are not springing out as much as expected. Their numbers and kinds seem limited. And those beings out on the social media appear to be decent, rule-abiding citizens.

The relatively decent state of the social media society today, however, is not necessarily a planned one. Nor is it a strictly enforced one. I rather think it is a spontaneous one. In other words, I suggest people may not yet have exercised their ontological freedom to its fullest extent. As discussed above, the virtualization of being provides people an unbridled ontological freedom to create social media being at his/her will and whim. People, at present, seem rather timid and reserved with the freedom. They are not very enthusiastic about creating the beings. And those they create are largely replicas of their being before and elsewhere. That is, the beings do not depart much from, and mostly revert back to and anchor upon, their real life being. As such, the beings on the social media are equally coherent, integrated and composed as their real life being.

It remains to be seen if this will continue. That

is, will people always stay around, and hesitate to break away from, their real life being? Whatever the answer is, it explains the current state of the society of the virtual. As Foucault might have said, the society of the virtual is as orderly, stable, predictable, disciplined and controlled, as the society of the physical - for none other reasons that its constituents are so.

However, it is not certain this state will continue. What if, we ask, an ontological revolt erupts as people suddenly realize and decide to exercise aggressively the ontological freedom they are granted on the virtual realm of existence? What if people start imagining beings not known or seen before? What if, as a result, new subjectivity and objectivity proliferate in the form of hybrids, monsters, parasites, multitudes, empires, commons, etc., which no previous ontology and epistemology of the world can account for? These are the questions we need to be prepared to deal with in the social aspect of the social media being research.

4.5. Freud-meet-Frankenstein

The next problematics to discuss is about the psychology of the social media being. In contrast to the social problematics above, this problematics sets psyche to be the realm of inquiry, and generates a hoard of psyche-related issues and problems.

Note first of all that the being we establish on the social media, as liberated from the real life being, is likely to be fragmented, multiple, split, imaginary, vulnerable and unpredictable, among others. Such being, put bluntly, is of a schizophrenic kind. At present the psychic pathology of the being and the society is not far-flung, but relatively contained, as indicated in the above discussion. Perhaps some petty misdemeanor and incongruous misconduct may

persist. But they stay within a certain, tolerable range, which can be managed with existing legal, behavioral, institutional measures of discipline and control.

However, I suspect the psychology of the virtual world may get bleaker. Think of the virtual world of social media as a gigantic screen. People project and play their virtual beings on the screen. Those beings tell their stories of minds. The stories may be magnificent and heroic, but more than likely, bizarre and derogatory. Indeed we may need to be prepared for some utterly uncanny ones to play out. We may watch scary unfolding of human minds, surfacing on the screen some deep hidden dark tales of being, with every distortion, aberration, abnormality, and irregularity there can be to it. Those pathological minds may join with one another to paint even a bleaker picture for the collective social psychology of the society.

What the above projection suggests is quite clear. It is that the criteria for normality, sanctity, and sanity of being and of the society are perhaps gone now. They no longer hold. And in their places a drastically different frame of reference need to be constructed. This new frame of reference shall incorporate different social psychological visions for the being and the society. However, as indicated above, this new frame of reference should not be approached from an immunological perspective, i.e., to fend off the anomaly. For, as the discussions on the liquidity, externality, hybridity of being have all indicated, the anomaly is not going to be substituted by normality. The anomaly is here to stay.

4.6. Marx-meet-Frankenstein

The last problematics I discuss is the business and economic aspect of the social media research. While the business and economic aspect may be

explored from a wide variety of perspectives, the perspective I choose is that of Marx. And once Marx is chosen, the problematics is largely set. For Marx signifies so much. His political economy provides one of the most powerful and captivating systems of concepts to explain the business and economic phenomena in the history of mankind.

Thus from the Marxian perspective, the social media research may face questions such as: how does the social media being would fare in the today's capitalist society?; Does the being represent a new category of social class, apart from the traditional Labor-Capital class dichotomy?; If so, what are the roles of the being in both the production and the consumption of the capital?; Is there any exploitation of the social media being going on in any stage of the capital cycle?; Does any of the fast-developing technology today, such as Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT), change any aspect of the business and economics today?; Will social media function as a political apparatus for mobilizing people towards a cause?

Among the questions above, alienation and exploitation of workers is persistently a critical issue. We inherit the gripping tales of alienation in Marx's treatise on the Capital. An alienated worker cannot identify with the work he/she does or the value he/she produces thereof. And his/her work is exploited in the surplus value the capitalist reap. We thus ask if the social media technology may be subject to or alter any of this classic struggle of alienating, exploitative social economic structure. This problematics then resonates with the ardent debate on the political ramification of the social media.

Research in Neo Marxism (e.g., Berardi, 2011; Holloway, 2010) and Cognitive Capitalism (e.g., Hart and Negri, 2000; Hart and Negri, 2004; Hart and Negri, 2009) addresses some of the questions above.

Unlike in the Marx's age, the authors suggest that the alienation of being with social media takes place insidiously in the vast cognitive infrastructure of the social media. As such Bifo (2011) calls those exploited Cognitariat.

4.7. Summary

In this section, I have discussed six problematics of the social media research. They are not the specific questions and problems to be addressed on the surface of the social media research. Rather they are the deep structure constructs that underlie and generate those surface issues. <Table 2> below provides a summary of these deep structure constructs for the problematics. The Problematize-the-Natural and Follow-the-Actor provide the general principles for conducting the social media research. The Welcome-the-Frankenstein warns about the monstrosity of the world of hybrid entities to be dealt with in the research. The next three problematics – Weber-meet-Frankenstein, Freud-meet-Frankenstein, and Marx-meet-Frankenstein – addresses three different aspects of the social media being we need to deal with, as the Social, Psychological, and Business and Economics domains, respectively.

Ⅴ. Conclusion

5.1. Recapitulation

This research develops a thesis on the new conceptualization of the social media as a technology-for-being. It is a refutation of the technical mechanical conception of the technology that prevails in the social research today. In the technical mechanical view of the social media technology, the technol-

<Table 2> Summary of the New Problematics of Social Media Research

New Problematics	Core Concepts and Constructs	Exemplary Research Questions induced by the Problematics
Problematize-the-Natural	- problematize	- What are the good and natural ideas in the social media research? - How can we problematize on them?
Follow-the-Actor	- hybridity of actor - irreducibility of actor - no dichotomous inquiry structure	- What are the actors in the social media? - How do the actors move? - How can we follow the actors?
Welcome-the-Frankenstein	- monstrosity of the social media being - no immunological reduction on the social media being	- What kinds of being emerge on the social media? - How unique and monstrous are the being? - How can we document the monstrosity of the social media being into structure? - Do we have the vocabularies and grammars to describe and follow the being with the monstrosity?
Weber-meet-Frankenstein	- sociality of social media - society of social media being - citizenship	- Will social media beings form a society? - Will there develop citizenship for the social media society? - Will social media beings practice the citizenship? - Will social media beings exercise their ontological freedom?
Freud-meet-Frankenstein	- psyche - schizophrenia - psychic pathology - collective psychology	- What kinds of psychics do social media beings display? - How do the social media beings play out their psychic? - How will the society deal with the psychic unfolding of social media beings?
Marx-meet-Frankenstein	- capitalism - class struggle - exploitation - alienation - political ramification of the social media	-How does the social media being would fare in the today's capitalist society? - Does the being represent a new category of social class, apart from the traditional Labor-Capital class dichotomy? - If so, what are the roles of the being in both the production and the consumption of the capital? - Is there any exploitation of the social media being going on in any stage of the capital cycle?; -Does any of the fast-developing technology today, such as Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT), change any aspect of the business and economics today? - Will social media function as a political apparatus for mobilizing people towards a cause?

ogy is regarded but a set of technical devices for conducting specific social functions such as personal communication, social networking, public posting, corporate advertising, etc. This essay proposes that such a functional conception of the technology renders social media research unduly limited and constrained in the scope, level, and direction of inquiry. Problematizing on some representative social media research efforts in the field of IS, this essay provides an alternative perspective – to view social media as a technology-for-being that exerts at a deeper level of our existence and molds the nature and mode of being itself. Such a technology-for-being perspective is rarely explored nor subscribed in the present IS social media research. Building upon the new conception of the social media as a technology-for-being, this essay explores the quality of being on the social media. Five such qualities are discussed

- virtuality, materiality, externality, liquidity, and hybridity. The essay also explores the deep structure problematics of research to guide the future social media research. Six such problematics are discussed - Problematize-the-Natural, Follow-the-Actor, Welcome-the-Frankenstein, Weber-meet-Frankenstein, Freud-meet-Frankenstein, and Marx-meet-Frankenstein. The problematics provide some general principles for conducting research as well as suggest some specific disciplinary dispositions dealing with the social, psychological, and business and economic aspects of the social media being.

5.2. The Essay Put in Perspective

The issue of conceiving social media as a technology for being, put in perspective, is more than anything else a matter of setting the realm of inquiry. And we can imagine two paths of inquiry for that. The first path leads to the realm of action and behavior where we investigate the effect of technology. Thus we may investigate how the social media technology may produce particular behaviors in select domains of action such as communication and networking to form particular social ties and networks. The Kane et al. line of research is a representative example of this path. The second path, contrastingly, leads to the realm of being where we explore how the technology operate in the forming and shaping of beings of particular kinds that produce those particular actions and behaviors. The present social media research in the field of IS almost always opts for the first path, and very rarely for the second.

Perhaps it is not fair to blame the field of IS for opting for the first path and not the second. The second path, the realm of being, is such an unfamiliar territory for us in the field of IS. Hence we just leaves the matter to those who can handle it better

- sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers, etc. And we hurry back to what we are familiar and comfortable with - i.e., the technology on the one hand as a prima facie explanans, and a select set of domains of behavior on the other hand as an explanandum, where the technology is projected to display its omni-present effects. By voluntarily delimiting both the explanans and explanandum of inquiry to what we know, we demarcate and territorialize a particular haven of research for the field of IS, wherein we nestle down with a disciplinary status and dignity. However, such delimiting of inquiry, I have contended in the essay, renders the research in the field of IS off-target, irrelevant, and oftentimes trivial. It seems as if we search for the lost where the light is, not where the lost has occurred.

I have to make yet another observation on the field of IS research. It is about why, as I have repeatedly made known in the essay, why the present IS social media research fails to stir interest and excitement. To paraphrase, it is about the epistemological stick we beat the bush around with. The epistemological stick we presently employ in IS research is one we inherit from the modernity, i.e. one based upon reason and rationality. In the name of scientific legitimacy and authenticity, the stick practically weeds out the exploratory efforts that do not meet the disciplinary rules and standards of the trade. Such modern stick of epistemology, however, kills the rabbit in the bush. For some rabbits are only to be captured by non-orthodox, more post-modern, epistemology, such as imagination rather than reason, non-rationality rather than rationality, non-method rather than method, emerging rather than determined, story rather than fact, and so forth. If I feel the present IS research is stifling and suffocating, it is perhaps because it leaves no room to espouse such alternative

epistemology.

In developing the thesis of social media as technology for being, I took two parallel expeditions. On the one hand, I started from the specifics - a select set of particular ontological motifs such as virtuality, materiality, etc. They are what can be conjectured to be relevant and operative in the molding and shaping of being as induced by the social media technology. On the other hand, I started from the generals – the deep structure problematics of the research that may be expected to guide the direction of inquiry into the nature of social media being.

The two expeditions are parallel in the sense that the one does not necessarily lead to or result from the other. No direct causal linkage is intended between the two expeditions. It is as if embarking on two independent inquiries concurrently, hoping that they merge into one along the way. The first expedition is in a sense like looking for the lost where the light is. That is, we beat around the bush with the stick of ontological motifs, which are shed extensive light on in the literature, to see if any being of technology would spring up. It is not the same beating around the bush as we presently do in the field of IS, however, in that the bush we beat around is in a different realm – the realm of being.

The second expedition, on the other hand, is like walking into the deep dark alley where we suspect the loss has occurred. I would wander around in the foggy realm of being, with a hope that I bump into what I look for. The chances to find the lost, i.e. the being of the social media technology, may be greater in the alley, but the light there is only dim.

5.3. What Needs to be Done

This essay is only a first attempt towards an understanding of social media as a technology-for-being. Further work need to be done. I suggest two tracks to expand on this work. First of all, I suggest we need to develop a perspective on exploring social media as a technology for being. This perspective should be one that is unique to the field of IS and yet open to and integrative of the perspectives in other fields of inquiry. As well demonstrated in the preceding sections, the literature, particularly in the non-IS fields, is already replete with discussions on the issue of the new forms of being in the face of modernity and post-modernity. The field of IS thus needs to catch up with those discussions. For at present, the discussion in the field of IS appears to be largely confined within itself. At the same time, the field needs to make a contribution to the discussions. The contribution may take different forms. But I suggest the best contribution is to develop and provide a perspective that is both unique and integrative, i.e., one that cuts across multiple disciplines but with a uniquely IS touch. The field of IS, of course, is still in the dark as to where and how it might begin this effort. Nevertheless, some promising paths emerge, such as the Actor-Network-Theory perspective. But again it is only a very cautious projection at this point.

Second of all, I suggest we expand on the problematics of social media research. I have roughly outlined six problematics in the essay and illustrated how they may underlie and concoct some deep structure social media research issues and problems. I suggest these issues and problems need to be transformed into specific research questions for the social media research, with a unique IS perspective as to be developed above. Perhaps Latour's Actor-Network-Theory and Flat Ontology, Deleuze and Guattari's Schizophrenic Psychology, Negri's Cognitive Capitalism may provide some points of departure in the social, psycho-

logical, and business and economic domains for expanding the social media research problematics. But again I may be biased on this.

This essay no doubt suffers a horde of limitations. From the gap-spotting research point of view, this essay is painfully limited in the width and depth of its coverage on the issues. Perhaps this is to be anticipated, as the essay treads on such a diverse area of research. It can be left for future research.

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