SOCIAL MEDIA
AND ITS ORIGINS
This review was predicated on two elements: first, it was a cultural review; second, it examined the issue of social media and Defence. This section of the report explores both concepts.

1.1 WHAT IS CULTURE?

The word ‘culture’ is commonly used to denote many varied aspects of society, sometimes without much thought about the meaning of the term. Definitions developed by researchers give some insight into what ‘culture’ might mean for an entire society, or groups within that society, such as Defence.

The published research of Geert Hofstede, who surveyed the cultural attitudes of more than 116,000 IBM employees in 50 countries and three regions, is regarded as seminal, particularly when scholars assess how national culture affects workplace culture (Mead 2002:39). The principal purpose of his analysis was to differentiate between the assumed ‘shared’ values held in organisations and the ‘unique’ values that could be identified as belonging, instead, to national cultures (Mwaura et al. 1998:214).

Hofstede argued that culture can be regarded as ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another’ (1984:21). Later, he added that culture can be ‘mental programming … patterns of thinking and feeling and potential acting’ (Hofstede 1991:4).

Many others have also provided definitions of ‘culture’. For example, Hoebel and Frost say culture is an ‘integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance’ (1976:6). Ferraro (2002:19) argues that it is ‘everything that people have, think, and do as members of society’. Samovar and Porter (1991:51) describe culture:

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\text{as the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.}
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Hill (2003) sees culture as being ‘social structure, political system, economic philosophy, religion, language and education’.

One striking difference between these definitions is that the last two describe what might be seen as the constituent parts of a culture, whereas the others attempt to define the term.
Dwyer (2009:36) argues that culture operates at three levels. At the first level it is visible, and can be defined as obvious patterns and behaviours, along with technology, buildings and artefacts. The second level is less visible and involves cultural communication; that is, how people communicate both verbally and nonverbally. At the third level it is made up of the ‘ideas, basic assumptions, values and beliefs held by a society’ and is almost invisible.

If communication can be divided into three realms of words, material things and behaviour (Hall & Hall 1990:3), then social media provide an interesting and complex challenge, as they bridge the three levels of culture and communication.

Jones (2007:3) argues validly that culture is not easily acquired and is a slow developing process, supporting the argument that it is a type of ‘programming’. Not surprisingly, cultural attitudes need to be taken into account because of their great resilience, fuelled by their origins and inherent reinforcing dynamics (Peterson 2007:372). If culture is slow to develop and integral to the society and its members, that also means that it is resistant to change.

By extension, Defence personnel generally reflect the cultural attitudes of the society from which they emerge. Of course, organisations develop their own cultures, which influence those who work with or within them. The individuals then negotiate for themselves those aspects of the organisational culture that they can accept within their value and belief systems and those they cannot. Whether an organisation is a local social club, a business, a government department or a defence force, it will develop accepted cultural views that inform the behaviour of its members.

Defence’s organisational culture is born of need, tradition, the armed forces’ position in society and their unusual work.

General Australian cultural attitudes and those values and attitudes specific to Defence must both affect attitudes to the use of social media. For obvious reasons, this can create conflict from time to time. The conflict will be exacerbated by generational differences, particularly as technology changes the way people communicate and interact with one another, and perhaps also by regional or other differences. In addition, users of social media participate in an online culture that is still developing.

Those inducted into the Defence organisation need to negotiate cultural values at all these levels.
1.2 What are social media?

The rapid development of both technology and the skills and knowledge of social media users means that what makes up ‘social media’ continues to change at a rapid rate, as new websites and online content appear each day. As Jacka and Scott (2011:5) argue, ‘there is no single recognized definition of social media.’

For many people, well-known social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter typify social media. The sites have become enormously popular across demographics of race, age and gender, and have hundreds of millions of users.

Jacka and Scott (2011:5) contend that it ‘can be said that social media is the set of Web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers’. The Oxford Dictionary (2011a) defines social media as ‘websites and applications used for social networking’. In turn, social networking is defined as ‘the use of dedicated websites and applications to communicate with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one’s own’ (Oxford Dictionary 2011b). For many this will intuitively make sense, based on their personal experience, the experience of others around them, or what they have heard or seen in the media. However, social media have evolved to include other tools and practices that were not conceived of only a few years or even a few months ago.

The ABC (2011) has produced a Technology Explained website, where definitions and explanations are provided for modern technical and online terms. The website comments that:

‘Social media encapsulates digital tools and activities that enable communication and sharing across the net ... Social media is used prolifically by all areas of society; business, politics, media, advertising, police and emergency services. It has also become a key tool for provoking thought, dialogue and action around particular social issues’.

The Social Media Guide website (2011) has listed some 50 definitions that it says it has collected from various other websites. In its terms, 'social media is user generated content that is shared over the internet via technologies that promote engagement, sharing and collaboration.'

Kaplan and Haenlein contend that social media as we know it today can probably be traced back more than two decades. While it was unsophisticated by today’s standards, users could post public messages on sites such as Usenet. Not surprisingly, the advent and availability of high-speed internet access has led to a proliferation of sites and an explosion in their popularity (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:60).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) developed their own technical definition of social media:

‘Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.’
Web 2.0 is described ‘as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion’, so Web 2.0 might be seen as the ideological and technological foundation of social media. The mere publishing of content is less interactive and belongs to the earlier Web 1.0 era; collaborative projects, starting with blogs, belong to Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:61).

User-generated content (UGC) describes the various forms of media content that are created by and available to users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) go further and adopt the view of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that content must meet three basic requirements to qualify as UGC:

- It must be published to all Web users or to a select group (which might exclude emails or instant messages).
- It should demonstrate some creative effort and not simply replicate the work of another.
- It must be created outside of professional routines and practices and not for a commercial market.

Although UGC was available before Web 2.0 emerged, the combination of technology, economics (wider access to the tools of creation) and social influences (the rise of a generation of ‘digital natives’ and ‘screenagers’) has driven its development (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:61).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) further argue that the development of a systematic classification scheme for social media can be difficult, as new sites appear every day. They rely on the field of media research and have decided that social media have two key elements that can be used to classify them to some extent: social presence / media richness on the one hand, and self-presentation / self-disclosure on the other. To demonstrate, they have combined the two classifications into a table that illustrates their arguments (Table 1.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social presence / Media richness</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blogs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative projects</strong> (e.g. Wikipedia)</td>
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Table 1.1: Clarifying goals for social media
(Source: Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:62)
The table shows how different types of social media involve different commitments from the user. For example, a person who wishes to become a fully involved user in a virtual social world, rather than merely adding daily textual additions to their blog, would in a general sense disclose more about themself (whether consciously or not), and their online presence would necessarily require a more involved use of media tools.

Kaplan and Haenlein’s categorisation of social media is adopted here to enable discussion about the various types:

- **Collaborative projects** enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many users. Examples include various ‘wikis’, such as Wikipedia. Some of these sites allow users to add, remove and change content; others are a form of ‘social bookmarking’, in that they allow the group-based collection and rating of internet links or media content.

- **Blogs** – the earliest form of social media – grew from personal web pages and usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order. Text-based varieties are still very popular.

- **Content communities** have as their main purpose the sharing of media content between users, including text (e.g. Bookcrossing), photographs (Flickr), videos (YouTube) and PowerPoint presentations (SlideShare). Users are not usually required to create a personal profile page.

- **Social networking sites** allow users to connect by creating personal information profiles and inviting friends and colleagues to have access to the profile and to send emails and instant messages. Profiles usually include photographs, videos, audio files, blogs and so on. Facebook and Myspace are examples of social networking sites.

- **Virtual game worlds** are platforms that replicate a three-dimensional environment in which users appear in the form of personalised avatars and interact according to the rules of the game. They have gained popularity with the support of devices such as Microsoft’s XBox and Sony’s PlayStation. An example is World of Warcraft.

- **Virtual social worlds** allow inhabitants to choose behaviour more freely and to live (in the form of avatars) in a virtual world similar to their real life. An example is Second Life.

This review concentrates on the first four categories and not the two types of virtual world. It is likely that the common experience of most Australians, including Defence personnel, in social media is in the first four categories and, in any case, the lessons to be learned from the first four can be extrapolated in many ways to apply to the latter two groups. In addition, the virtual game and social worlds are very specialist and large in scope and would require their own specific examination.
Much of the time spent in social media by Australians is on social networking sites (see, for example, the discussion about Facebook use in Section 2.1). A definition by Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) expands on the definition of social networking sites given above:

‘... web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.’

They go on to say that what makes the sites unique is not that people can meet strangers, but that they will have a visible social network, which can result in connections with strangers, although that is not often the goal. The sites allow someone to display a public profile, which may show a network of ‘friends’ with whom they have made a connection. The user is able to publish text, comments, photographs and multimedia content to that profile. Sites vary with the security settings users set for their profiles, which variously allow others to access the profile and the material they have posted to the site.

Social networking sites might seem a recent innovation, but there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. Section 2.1 includes a timeline that supports the view that there is a cycle of popularity for these sites, as new ones with new features come online.

Social media will continue to evolve by adapting to the demands of users, making any attempt to fully define the term problematic. However, they are likely to become even more all-encompassing and be embraced more strongly by generations to come.