



# Is WOM a Form of Social Media?

**Paper Five in an Ongoing Series**

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## **In this paper:**

- > A summary of social computing and marketing expert Peter Kim's framework for measuring social media
  
- > An analysis of WOM within Kim's framework
  
- > A "Social Media Scorecard" for brand marketers

## > INTRODUCTION

Social media is the fastest growing and most influential brand marketing tool. In fact, according to Forrester Research, 40% of marketers plan to increase social media spending despite the economic downturn. Most observers agree that the practice has evolved beyond one-dimensional “friend my brand” pages, yet the lack of standard metrics threatens to stall growth.

This hurdle, however, may soon be overcome. In a September 26, 2008 post on his [Being Peter Kim](http://www.beingpeterkim.com) (www.beingpeterkim.com) blog, marketing expert Peter Kim proposes a simple framework for measuring social media. This paper aims to apply Kim’s innovative framework to the most fundamental of all social marketing techniques – word of mouth (WOM) – to determine if WOM is a form of social media.

## > THE FRAMEWORK

Kim’s framework is comprised of four components – *Attention*, *Participation*, *Authority*, *Influence* – and, if widely adopted, would provide marketers with a much-needed standardized measurement protocol. Let’s take a look at WOM within Kim’s model to determine if WOM meets the criteria for social media.

### Attention

In the context of WOM, *Attention* can be measured by the amount of time a consumer spends engaged with a brand. *Attention* metrics include experiencing a product, reviewing materials related to the item, conversing with others, and participating in a dialogue with brand representatives. As with several of the more effective social media techniques, *Attention* in WOM campaigns should be measured in minutes – and periodically hours – not seconds (the norm in traditional media).

#### Kim’s Definition of Attention:

The amount of traffic to your content for a given period of time

#### Does it apply to WOM?

Directly  Indirectly  Not at all

### Participation

In online social media, *Participation* is calculated in units of comments and posts. In conversational marketing, *Participation* can be assessed by tracking the frequency of brand-related discussions and measuring number of consumers reached by those

recommendations. While off-line recommendations cannot be tracked using Web/blog search engines, progress is being made by research firms such as The Keller Fay Group to monitor what brands consumers are discussing in person.

#### Kim’s Definition of Participation:

The extent to which users engage with your content in a channel

#### Does it apply to WOM?

Directly  Indirectly  Not at all



## Authority

*Authority*, as a social media term, is another word for “trust,” and trust is the cornerstone for all effective WOM. In typical online environments, *Authority* is granted by third-parties, such as Technorati. In face-to-face

interactions, however, the “talker’s” *Authority* is determined by the nature of the interpersonal relationship. Given that trust and intimacy are directly proportional, it could be argued that WOM is more influential than online social media marketing programs conducted within relatively anonymous digital venues. However, because not all verbal recommendations are made by product “experts,” *Authority* has less relevance to WOM than Kim’s other three categories.

### Kim’s Definition of Authority:

The inbound links to your content

### Does it apply to WOM?

Directly  Indirectly  Not at all

## Influence

Of the four elements constituting Kim’s framework, *Influence* most clearly positions WOM within the social media sector. Just as marketers can track feed subscribers, social network “friends” and Twitter followers, so too can they count the number of consumers who volunteer to participate in a WOM marketing program. Regardless

of the medium, any consumer who expresses a desire to build a relationship with a particular company or product should be counted as an essential – and influential – member of that brand’s customer base.

### Kim’s Definition of Influence:

The size of the user base subscribed to your content

### Does it apply to WOM?

Directly  Indirectly  Not at all

## > CONCLUSION

WOM is undeniably part of the social media sector because “dialogue” is water that turns social media’s wheel. Although terminology may vary slightly among techniques, it is clear that Kim’s framework applies as directly to WOM as it does to other forms of social media.

What remains unclear is how the performance of WOM compares to alternative social media practices. To help jumpstart the conversation about the relative impact of social media techniques, on the following page is a “Social Media Scorecard.” Simply rank in order of impact each practice within Kim’s four-part framework, with “1” being the highest performing and “5” being the lowest.



## Social Media Scorecard

Rank in order of impact each practice within Kim's four-part framework ("1" indicates highest and "5" lowest)

	Attention	Participation	Authority	Influence
WOM				
BRAND PAGES				
WIDGETS				
BLOGS/VLOGS				
ONLINE COMMUNITIES				
NAME YOUR OWN _____				

