Social Media and its Impact on Quality of Communication Management

Paul J. Thomas
Purdue University
pjosekut@purdue.edu

Kevin C. Dittman
Purdue University
kcdittman@purdue.edu

Abstract

Social media has become incredibly pervasive. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and a host of other social media applications are easily accessible from almost anywhere where there is Internet connectivity. Social media encompasses not just the applications mentioned earlier – which are examples of social networking sites; but also collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, virtual game worlds, and social virtual worlds. The Internet and social media have made the world more connected than ever before. But the result of this has often been the poor quality of communication between the users of said applications. The paper will examine how the use of social media has introduced ambiguity into channels of communication and its impact on organizations. The paper will also discuss the implications of the prevalence of social media and discuss the effects it has had on the quality of organizational communication management. The paper will also cover the opportunities and challenges of using social media effectively and provide suggestions and guidelines on how to use social media effectively.

Communication in Today's World
Oxford dictionaries define social networking as "the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own." With the pervasiveness of the internet and emergence of smartphones, the amount of communication happening today using texts, tweets, Facebook posts, Snapchat posts, etc. is increasing. Social media has continued to have a dramatic effect on our society and the way that people communicate, interact, and define relationships by encouraging users to co-create and share information with others. With all these social technologies so readily available, quantitatively we are more connected than ever before in history but at the same time, we are also potentially more disconnected than ever before. As human beings, our only real method of connection is through authentic communication. Studies show that only about 7% of communication is based on the written or verbal words, and the rest relies on nonverbal body language. [14]

Even in the realm of corporations, the trend has been for using electronic communication using email or instant messengers like Lync instead of face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication. [14] This trend has been driven by the geographic dispersion of business and the emergence of virtual teams.

It is predicted that by 2020, over 50% of the workforce will be populated by millennials – those born between 1980 and 2000; and millennials often prefer to use instant messaging or social media for communication as opposed to talking to someone directly. [14]
Social media has become a defining feature of modern culture and has become a central part of the way people communicate daily in both their social and professional relationships. [11]

Figure 1. Classification of Social Media

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Kaplan & Haenlein classified Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure yielding six different types of Social Media as shown in Figure 1. [7] Applications such as collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) and blogs score lowest, as they are often text-based and therefore allow for a comparatively simple exchange. On the next level are content communities (e.g., YouTube) and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) which, in addition to text-based communication, give an opportunity to share pictures, videos, and other forms of media. On the highest level are virtual game and social worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft, Second Life), which try to replicate all dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment. Regarding the classification which is done

based on the self-presentation and self-disclosure, blogs usually score higher than collaborative projects, as the latter tend to be focused on specific content domains. [8] Self-presentation refers to how in any social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them and self-disclosure is a critical step in the development of close relationships. Organizations should be aware of the challenges and opportunities that social media presents and the effect that each kind of social presence has on the quality of communication. With the growing prevalence of social media, organizational communication management strategies should integrate the use of blogs, social networking sites, and content communities to maximize their reach to different audiences. [8]

Organizational Impact of Social Media

As of 2009, the online social networking application Facebook had more than 175 million active users. At the same time, every minute, 10 hours of content were uploaded to YouTube and the image hosting site Flickr provided access to over 3 billion photographs. [7]

But such pervasiveness also comes at a cost to corporations because they trade ubiquity for losing control over the information about them on the Internet. Today, if an Internet user types the name of any leading brand into the Google search, what comes up among the top five results typically includes not only the corporate web page, but it also contains the corresponding entry in Wikipedia and Wikipedia forbids the participation of firms in its online community. [7] This results in users being able to post truthful yet negative information about corporations and their missteps. Historically, companies were able to control the information available about them through strategically placed press announcements and good public relations managers. Today, however, firms have been increasingly relegated to the sidelines as mere observers, having neither the knowledge nor the chance and in some cases even the right – as with Wikipedia; to alter publicly posted comments provided by their customers. [7]

Users are also free to air grievances on social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, etc. and post negatives reviews about products or services on websites like Amazon and Zomato. To maintain the integrity of the organization, the responses to such events must be strategic. Most organizations have systems and guidelines in place to deal with these kinds of scenarios. A common sight in Amazon and Newegg reviews is a customer service representative responding to a customer who posted a negative review. In social media services, users tend to generate unverified information – both true and false – and put forth ideas about organizations that can differ substantially from what they share with the public. [1]

Social Media and Communication Management

Communications management is the systematic planning, implementation, monitoring, and revision of all the channels of communication within an organization, and between an organization and other organizations or customers. [17] The organizational communication looks at communication and organizational behavior and is concerned with the symbolic use

of language, how organizations function, and what their goals are. The discipline of organizational communication focuses organizations and their communication processes which are used to both "describe and explain an organization" and an approach to "communication as a phenomenon" in organizations. [17]

According to Koontz, H. & Weihrich, H. the guidelines for effective communication [10] are as follows:
1. Senders of the message must be clear as to what they want to communicate.
2. Planning of the communication should not be done in a vacuum. Other people should be consulted and encouraged to participate.
3. The function of communication is more than transmitting information. It deals with emotions that are important in interpersonal relationships between superiors, colleagues, and subordinates in an organization.
4. Effective communication is also a responsibility of the receiver.

Social media has had a tremendous impact on the quality of communication. Most business communication is now done via e-mails, texts, instant messaging, intranets, blogs, websites and other technology-enabled media. [18] The common aspect for all of these means of communication is that none of them convey body language and the potential for misinterpretation is massive. Employees amidst their rush and stress often do not take the time to consider the nuances of their writing. Conflicts may arise over the tone of an e-mail, or the recipients marked in the cc: list. [14] Conveying emotions is the Achilles heel of communication across social media.

When using instant messaging services, does the use of all capital letters indicate that the person is yelling? Are one and two-word responses an indication of the person's reluctance to communicate with you? Does a smiley face convey agreement? Social media introduces a significant degree of ambiguity to communication, and false conclusions may be drawn from these. [14]

Considering the aforementioned points, we can conclude that social media is a very weak form of communication. Weak communication is often a result of lack of planning, unclarified assumptions, semantic distortion, poorly expressed messages, communication barriers in international environments, poor listening, premature evaluation, impersonal communication, distrust, fear, insufficient period for adjustment to change and information overload. [10] Social media leaves significant room for all these factors to interfere with effective communication. [14]

Opportunities of Social Media

Social media has become an essential part of integrated organizational communication strategies, mainly due to its inexpensive and intuitive means of sharing user-generated material. [5] The use of social media within an organization can have a positive impact on the consumer's experience because of its dynamic capability, allowing for adjustment according to their needs which change over time. When the exchange becomes more relational, the emotional bonds become stronger, and customers become advocates for sellers

in interactions with other customers and non-customers. Unlike traditional marketing techniques, this exchange of information between consumers and user-generated content has increased both satisfaction and advocacy, and built stronger customer engagement for organizations that have adopted the use of social media as a marketing strategy. [13] The best examples of this are customer reviews and other content like pictures and videos shared online about various products and services.

The use of social media has given consumers the expectation that they will engage as active participants in the organization. [11] To be successful in their social media strategies, organizations need to remember that consumers are in control of their online experiences. Therefore, organizations must give consumers a valid reason to engage electronically by providing them with a unique and customizable experience. To do so, organizations must first consider consumer motivations to use social media. Organizations should generate a social media marketing strategy that aims to bring consumers' experiences to the front. [11]

Social media affords organizations an opportunity build brand awareness. Organizations should strive to improve their reputation using social media to make their brand resonate more with their consumers and the public, and also to give their consumers a reason to build a deeper connection with the organization. [11]
The American Red Cross makes use of Twitter and Facebook to find out what areas of the organization require improvement. The aim being the use of social media to develop and build relationships with a variety of audiences including volunteers, media, students and communities, with some of whom they already have established relationships. [2]

Many organizations run competitions on Youtube, Facebook, Flickr, etc. as a means to drum up interest in one of their products or services. For example, in 2007, Procter & Gamble organized a contest for its over-the-counter drug Pepto-Bismol, whereby users were encouraged to upload to YouTube 1-minute videos of them singing about the ailments Pepto-Bismol counteracts, including heartburn and nausea. [8]

Social tools can make the "process of process management" more efficient, by delivering information to process participants about improvements needed for operational processes. [12] If for example, there is a quality issue in goods received, immediate online communication between customer and supplier in response to a blog or other online post can enable a discussion about how best to address the problem and improve the process. [12] Social media can also be an excellent tool for bridging the gap between external networking and internal integration. [9] Organizations' IT departments can use social media to communicate with the engineering department as it works on new products, often creating a tighter feedback loop than previously existed. [12]

Implications of Social Media

The rise of social media has had implications on several aspects of organizational communication. The first being the tendency of personal social accounts to be used for professional reasons. [19] In addition to utilizing their personal social media accounts to advocate for their organizations amongst their personal contacts, sometimes use of social

media has ultimately benefited the organization. [19] For example, employees of certain games companies put teasers and other related content of upcoming games on their personal Twitter accounts as means of promotion along with the purpose of gathering responses and feedback.

Social media also serves to connect professionals with one another. The prime example of this is LinkedIn, which is the professional social network. LinkedIn currently has over 433 million users who use the service to connect with other professionals. [20] The purposes of these interactions and connections could be to share knowledge, pitch business prospects or create partnerships. [11]

Some users have found that having the extra connection outside of work through social media enables them to establish a good rapport with their employees or co-workers. [11] Often participants felt that utilizing this form of communication would give them a more rounded perspective of who somebody is and extend the relationship they have already established within the workplace. [11]

Challenges of Social Media

Despite evidence suggesting that organizations need to adapt better to this new system of communication, research shows that most organizations are still engaging in one-way communication, and responding minimally to consumers through social media [16]. This lack of control and one-way interactions can make an organization susceptible to sometimes misguided actions of some social media users. Organizations often find it difficult to accept the lack of control that comes with social media. They can't control what people may post. [4] Therefore, to maintain as much regulation as possible, it is imperative that organizations consistently participate in these ongoing interactions so that they may avoid both internal and external negative consequences. [11]

The greatest challenge of implementing social media within an organization is finding an effective strategy to maintain it. [11] Many organizations have found it to be difficult to be proactive as opposed to reactive with social media due to the ever changing algorithms of each medium. [11] Social media also has a notoriously low engagement rate because users are bombarded with a clutter of information from different media. [18] So an organization has to be careful in selecting multiple social media outlets and not managing any of them correctly or effectively. [21] Facebook "likes" don't equate to users who are actually engaged with an organization's content. Frequent comments, retweets and being tagged in comments are some of the indicators of real engagement. [11]

Although social media serves as a platform for sharing ideas and knowledge [11], obtaining knowledge via social media has its pitfalls. The information shared can be misleading or controversial because the sources are rarely cited and often opinions can be put forward as facts. [3]

Social media has also given people a power like they have never had before in that they can voice their opinions on companies effortlessly, and it doesn't take a lot for a seemingly

harmless tweet or Facebook post to snowball out of control and become viral. [11] Users expect immediate gratification and organizations have to be on their toes to quell any fires before they get out of control. [11] Also, Introducing social media into a highly regulated industry such as that of banking has proven difficult due to security, compliance, and risks reasons. [8]

Recommendations for Effective Use of Social Media

Every organization should have a clear and well-defined social media policy which should cover what employees are allowed to post on social media which may or may not be related to the organization. [15] Any content posted – text, photos, audio or video; must be in-line with overall communication strategy and must bring value to the discussion. When posting content, the audience must be engaged directly either by asking questions or soliciting feedback. The 80/20 rule helps greatly in achieving this – show the audience what they want to see 80% of the time and 20% of the time show them what you want them to see. [15]

Managers must advise employees to double-check any piece of communication before it is sent out and must encourage direct communication either through phone calls or face-to-face conversations to resolve any ambiguous communication. [9] Communication is always two-way, so it is also the responsibility of the sender to ensure that the message was understood as received. [10] When dealing with teams composed of people from different generations or with virtual teams spread out across the globe, it is important to understand what the preferred mode of communication is for the individual – baby boomers tend to prefer direct face-to-face communication or phone calls and Millennials tend to prefer electronic communication. [14] Cultural boundaries also need to be respected – what's an accepted tone for electronic communication in one country could be deemed as rude in another. [10]

Conclusion

As social media becomes ever more mainstream, it leaves a significant impact on how individuals and organizations communicate. Social media can be a very effective tool in building and sustaining relationships with customers or a fan-base. Social media allow organizations to engage with end-consumers directly in an inexpensive and efficient manner when compared to traditional communication tools. Therefore, it is essential for organizations of any size to embrace social media and make it an integral part of their communication management strategy. Traditionally, corporations held a great degree of control over the information available about them and their communication management strategies revolved around strategic press announcements and employing public relations managers. The rapid adoption of social media has resulted in a paradigm shift where customers hold just as much if not more power than the corporations about their perceived brand image. Consequently, communication management strategies have had to incorporate steps to quickly deal with negative customer reactions on social media before it evolves into a full-blown public relations nightmare. Social media is not a panacea for the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy, and it is not without faults. Social media strips away emotion and body language from communication resulting in the introduction of ambiguity to communication. This ambiguity can lead to misinterpretation of messages, which in turn

causes conflicts or errors. Managers must be willing to tailor communication channels based on the composition of his or her teams and if geographically dispersed virtual teams are involved, he or she be privy to the different kinds of communication etiquette that is expected by different cultures. Despite the pervasiveness of social media, it is still as important as ever to connect with people as human beings and engage with them in direct communication which convey emotion and body language because it is still the most effective form of communication. It would be valuable for future research to explore quantifying the monetary impact of social media on an organization – determining how organizational communication management changes due to the adoption of social media affected revenues and profits.

References

[1]   Aula, P. (2010). Social media, reputation risk and ambient publicity management. Retrieved from:
http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/10878571011088069

[2]   Briones, R. L., Kuch, B. Liu, B. F. & Jin, Y. (2010). Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to build relationships. Retrieved from: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811110001335

[3]   Creech, S. (2010, December 3) Quality Communication in Social Media. Retrieved from: http://tobyelwin.com/quality-communication-in-social-media/

[4]   DiStaso, M. W., McCorkindale, T., & Wright, D. K. (2011). How public relations executives perceive and measure the impact of social media in their organizations. Public Relations Review, 37, 325-328. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.06.005

[5]   Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2011). Social interactions via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior. Journal of Business Venturing, 26, 1-18.

[6]   Grunig, J. E. (2013) Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management. New York, NY: Routledge

[7]   Kaplan, M. A. & Haenlein, M. (2009) Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. Retrieved from:
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681309001232,

[8]   Kirakosyan, K. (2014, March 20) Communication Management in Electronic Banking. Better Communication for Better Relationship. Retrieved from:
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S187704281402045X

[9]   Kliem, R.L. (2007) Effective Communications for Project Management. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press Business and Economics.

[10]   Koontz, H. & Weihrich, H. (2006) Essentials of Management. New York, NY : Tata McGraw-Hill Education

[11]   Langer, E. (2014) What's Trending? Social Media and its Effects on Organizational Communication. Retrieved from: http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/PDF/2014/Langer.Emily.CST.pdf

[12]   Pearson, M. (2013) Social Media Can Play a Role in Business Process Management. Retrieved from: https://hbr.org/2013/01/social-media-can-play-a-role

[13]   Sashi, C. M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. Management Decision, 50(2), 253-272. d.o.i. 10.1108/00251741211203551

[14]   Tardanico, S. (2012) Is Social Media Sabotaging Real Communication? Retrieved from: http://www.forbes.com/sites/susantardanico/2012/04/30/is-social-media-sabotaging-real-communication/#48719bc74fd8

[15]   The College of New Jersey (n.d.) Creating a Social Media Presence. Retrieved from: http://communications.pages.tcnj.edu/about/media-relations-and-marketing/use-social-media/

[16]   Waters, R. D. & Williams, J. M. (2011). Squawking, tweeting, cooing, and hooting: Analyzing the communication patterns of government agencies on Twitter. Journal of Public Affairs, 11(4), 353-363. doi: 10.1002/pa.385

[17]   Welch, M. & Jackson, P. R. (2007) Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder
        approach. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 12 Iss: 2,
        pp.177 – 198
[18]   Marom, S. (2014) Project Communication and Social Networking. Retrieved from:
        http://quantmleap.com/blog/2010/02/project-communication-and-social-networking/
[19]   Queens University of Charlotte (n.d.) Managing Personal vs. Professional Identity on
        Social Media. Retrieved from: http://online.queens.edu/masters-in-
        communication/resource/managing-personal-vs-professional-identity-on-social-media
[20]   LinkedIn (n.d.) About LinkedIn. Retrieved from: https://press.linkedin.com/about-
        linkedin
[21]   Evans, D. (2010) Social Media Marketing: The Next Generation of Business
        Engagement. Hoboken, NJ : John Wiley & Sons

Biographical Information

PAUL J. THOMAS is a graduate student at Purdue University working under the mentorship of Professor Kevin C. Dittman. His graduate study focus is IT project and quality management. Mr. Thomas may be reached at pjosekut@purdue.edu.

KEVIN C. DITTMAN is an Associate Professor of Computer Information Systems and Technology at Purdue University. Professor Dittman specializes in information systems business analysis, requirements engineering, quality management and project management. He has co-authored leading textbooks on systems analysis and design, and project management, plus he has published several other scholarly papers and journal articles. Professor Dittman has over thirty one years of industrial and consulting experience in the information technology arena with top corporations such as Cook Medical Corporation, Lockheed Martin, Caterpillar, and Cummins Engine. Professor Dittman may be reached at kcdittman@purdue.edu.