

Practice Digest:How Can Organizations utilize Social Media for Official Messaging?

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## How Can Organizations Utilize Social Media for Official Messaging?

Social Media, like it or not, is here to stay. The genie is out of the bottle and refuses to go back in. Whether used during a natural disaster to steer people towards safety and resources, or to announce new products and services, organizations are turning toward social media platforms such as Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook to spread their news. In December, 2016, Apple Inc. joined the ranks of companies that utilize social media when it used Twitter to promote the launch of the iPhone 7 (Leswing, 2016). A brief search of Google reveals myriad corporate accounts for various social media platforms. With social media still in the early stages, at least as far as official organizational communication is concerned, there are still many questions regarding its use.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as it has become to be known, encompasses a wide array of social media and communication technologies (Bretschneider & Parker, 2016). ICT includes social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, as well as video oriented sites like Youtube and Vimeo. The value of these sites is that they are free to get started and anyone with an internet connection can create content.

This rapid evidence assessment (REA) will explore best practices related to organizational uses of social media and how social media impacts official messaging. In order to do so, this REA will seek to answer the research question, *What factors impact an organization's ability to effectively communicate through social media?*

## Method

### Search Strategy

In order to address the research question and thoroughly analyze social media as a mechanism for organizational communication an initial search of the UMUC research databases was conducted. The databases included Business Source Complete and Academic Search Complete. The initial search string included the subject terms: Organizational Communication, and Social Media. Additionally, the full text search for innovation management was included. This initial search revealed 71 studies that related to social media and organizational communication and included innovation management. This list of studies was further reduced to 17 by limiting the search to full text and scholarly peer reviewed studies. These studies were manually reviewed to find studies that focused specifically on organizational uses of social media. Studies that included social media, but were not related to organizational uses were excluded. In order to insure that an ample collection of studies was included, a secondary search was conducted of the same databases using the search terms: Organizational Communication (SU) + Social Media (SU) + Strategy (SU). This search resulted in an additional 11 studies that related to social media and organizational communication. These studies were manually reviewed using the same inclusion/exclusion criteria. Due to the rapid nature of this practice digest, six studies were chosen for inclusion in this paper (see Appendix A for Prisma diagram).

### **Quality Appraisal**

When reviewing research systematically, the assessment of the quality of research is paramount. Research must be appraised to determine the fitness of purpose for each study included. For this paper, research was evaluated based on the quality standards of TAPUPAS (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, Long, & Barnes, 2003). For this review, each study has been graded on a four-point scale, in each of the seven categories (4=highest rating, 1=lowest rating): (1)

transparency- is it open to scrutiny?; (2) accuracy- is it well grounded?; (3) purposivity- is it fit for purpose?; (4) utility- is it fit for use?; (5) propriety- is it legal and ethical?; (6) accessibility- is it intelligible?; (7) specificity- does it meet source-specific standards? (p. 2). Utilizing the generic standards defined by Pawson et al. (2003, p. 9) each article was evaluated in each category. A four-point scale based on these generic standards was used (see Appendix A).

## **Results**

### **Best Practices**

In response to competition, organizations have increased their use of technology, such that innovation management has become a primary function of management (Flynn, 2015). Organizational communication has, in some cases, organically adopted the use of social media to engage with stakeholders, disseminate official messages, and coordinate resources. As is the case with any technology, convincing stakeholders to employ social media is complex and challenging. Interestingly, technologies that are widely used for personal use, such as social networking sites, are not as easily adopted on the organizational level (Bretschneider & Parker, 2016).

The adoption of social media as an official mechanism for organizational communication has ranged from organizations that completely prohibit its use, to organizations that foster social media communication throughout all of their constituencies and with all stakeholders. The following list of best practices will enable innovation managers to approach the use of social media within the organization with intentionality and strategy. These practices have been identified through rapid evidence assessment, and represent the current paradigm.

**Clearly stated and easily understood rules regarding ICT enable users (both internal and external stakeholders)**

Organizations that clearly define the parameters for use see higher usage and greater innovation. Starting with rules regarding personal use of email, Bretschneider & Parker (2016) found that organizations who allowed, with restrictions, internal stakeholders to utilize personal accounts, sped up the “diffusion and use for specific organizational functions” (p. 614). Rules regarding social media use might be formal and documented, or self directed and implied. In either case, when users understand the rules, they are more likely to participate in the conversation (p. 622). Additionally, standardized communication through social media channels enables stakeholders to trust the accuracy and timeliness of information. This is particularly important when social media is used to disseminate information during crisis (Roshon, Warren, & Carr, 2016).

**Recognition and adoption of the two-way nature of social media**

The power of social media lies in its broad reach and two-way communication. For the first time, feedback regarding products and services is readily available without the need of research and development efforts. Sales departments can monitor buying trends and buyer preferences directly from customers themselves (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012). “The power has shifted to the customer in terms of the way that the relationship is managed and therefore, it becomes much more about trust than persuasion” (p. 354). Organizations engaged in customer relationship management (CRM) have found that social media enables effective and reliable communication between the organization and its customers, customers and the sales force, and the organization and its sales force (Trainor, 2012).

### **Empowerment of stakeholders to participate with the organization through social media**

Formal and informal uses of social media are intricately linked (Kurkela, 2011; Bretschneider, Parker, 2016; Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012). Informal use of social media by salespeople frequently leads to the formal adoption of social media as a selling tool (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012). Social media enables collaboration between constituencies that helps spread information to the salesforce, the customer base, and back to the organization (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012; Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016; Thornton, & Holloway, 2016; Trainor, 2012). While marketing has been one of the main areas of focus for social media, salespeople have found the ability to engage with clients to be one of the greatest benefits (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012).

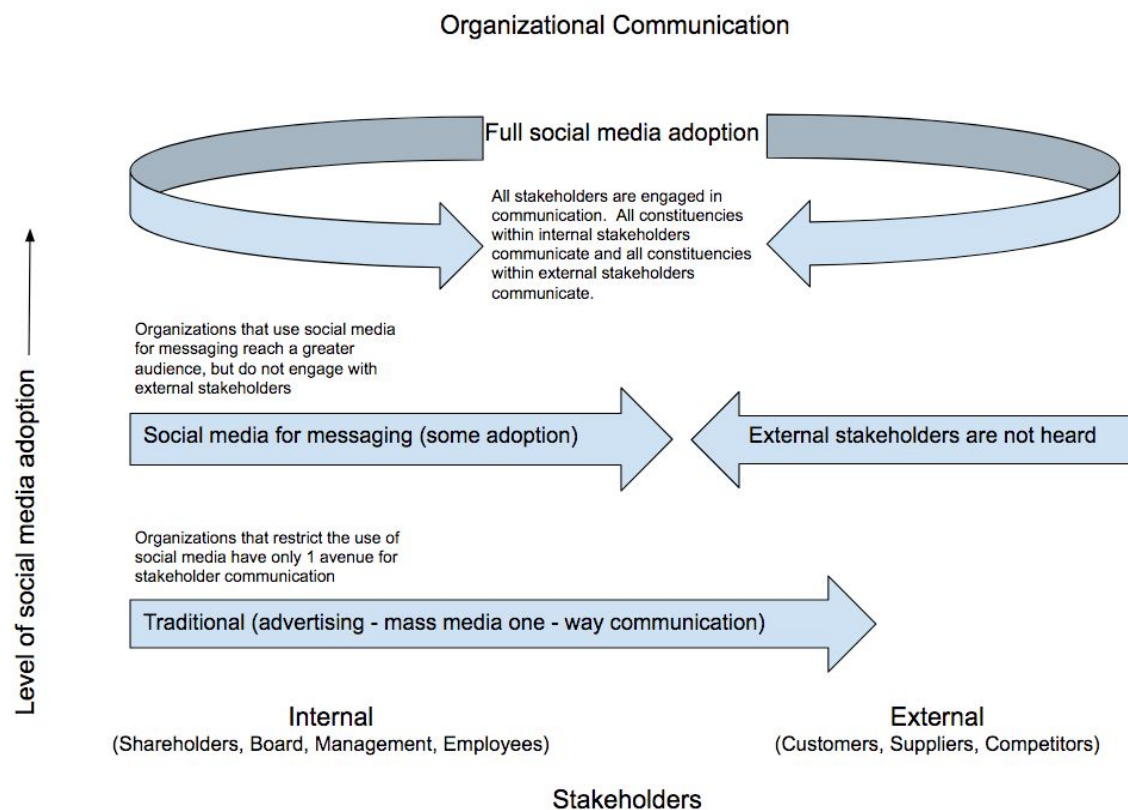
### **Social media messaging is more powerful than traditional messaging/advertising**

“Nobody will trust the branding from the company, but they will trust somebody that they’ve never met who maybe had a negative experience and now says on some blog” (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012, p 357). Customers researching a purchase, now turn to social media to determine whether the company and their products are reliable (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012; Thornton & Holloway, 2016). Likewise, customers research salespeople themselves through Facebook and LinkedIn, to determine how long they have been with the firm and what roles they have had (p. 354). The ability to access and utilize customer to customer information is vital to the organization (Trainor, 2012). Similarly, when students engaged with one another through a social media learning environment, they were more likely to retain information than when they engaged directly with instructors (Kurkela, 2011).

## Implications for innovation management

Consumers are no longer passive receivers of messaging, but rather active participants creating and sharing information (Trainor, 2012). This paradigm shift in marketing has grown to include internal as well as external stakeholders. Innovation managers, or those concerned with the strategic direction of the organization must approach social media with intention and purpose. This REA practice digest has shown that social media has shifted the messaging focus from the organization to the consumer. Organizations that ignore this shift will not only miss the opportunity to engage with customers, but will likely fall victim to a message for which they are wholly unprepared to address.

## Conceptual Model



### **Concept Narrative**

Traditional marketing has been one directional, from the organization to the customer. Organizations, through traditional media like newspapers, radio, television advertising, and print media, have attempted to control messaging related to the organization. As new sources of messaging have been developed, such as Consumer Reports or other product review services, stakeholders have attempted to engage with organizations. As social media technologies have grown, organizations have seen the value in the broad reach of social media. Early adopters began broadcasting messages through social media. External stakeholders, however, who attempted to engage with organizations were being ignored, in many cases at the organization's peril. Many organizations have fully embraced both the opportunities and challenges of social media, and are now fully engaging with all stakeholders. One primary benefit of full engagement is that internal stakeholders who feel trusted and valued by the organization will come to the defense of the organization during crises (Roshan, Warren & Carr, 2016). External stakeholders have been found to put more trust in messaging that originates from internal stakeholders as opposed to official messaging from the organization (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012)

### **Conclusion**

This REA practice digest sought to identify practices that could enable managers to address the use of social media as a mechanism for official communication. Social media has shifted the focus of organizational messaging from the organization to the consumer. This shift



has meant that both internal and external stakeholders have become part of official messaging. Organizations concerned with messaging must adopt policies that monitor, include, and engage with messaging from all constituencies. Organizations must empower employees to engage with one another, and with customers through social media. The concept of official messaging has changed to include more participants. Customers put more trust in messages that come from internal stakeholders and other customers, rather than the organization itself. Organizations must, therefore, encourage and empower their stakeholders to participate in messaging in order to steer it in an organizationally positive direction.

This paper investigated the research question: *What factors impact an organization's ability to effectively communicate through social media?* While there are many factors that impact an organization's ability to effectively communicate through social media, none perhaps are more important than the organization's willingness to accept the paradigm shift in communication that social media imposes. Whether or not the organization accepts this change is immaterial in the eyes of the social media beholder - because accept or not, social media messaging will impact the organization.

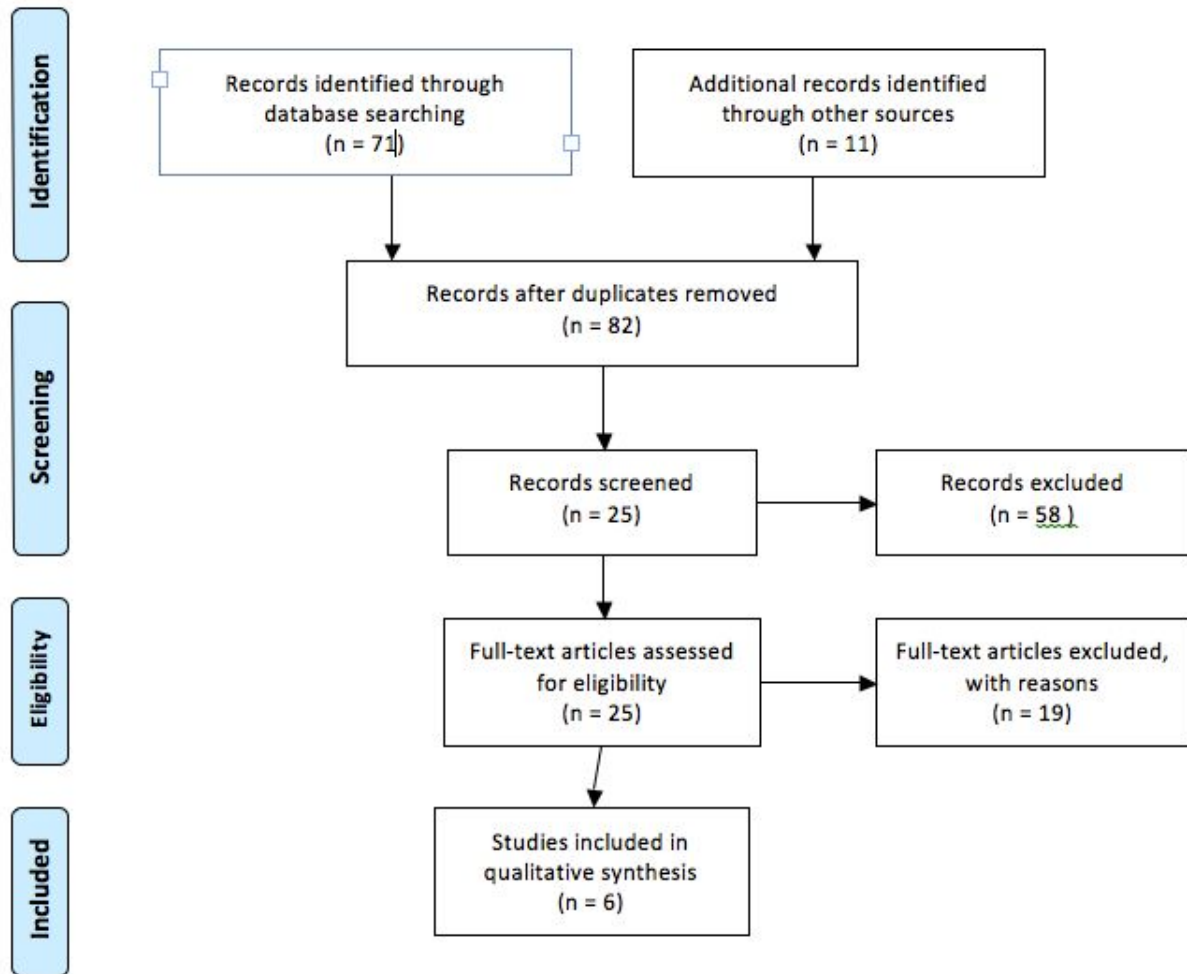
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## Appendix A

Prisma Diagram of inclusion/exclusion criteria for article studies



PRISMA. (2017)

## Appendix B

*Article Evaluation Using TAPUPAS (Pawson et al. 2003)*

Article #	1	2	3	4	5	6
Transparency	3	2	3	3	3	3
Accuracy	3	3	3	3	3	3
Purposivity	4	2	4	2	2	3
Utility	3	3	3	3	3	3
Propriety	3	3	3	3	3	3
Accessibility	3	3	3	3	3	3
Specificity	3	2	3	3	2	3

Rating Scale: 4= Exceeds standard, 3= Meets standard, 2= Below standard, 1=Does not qualify

### Appendix C

#### *Article List (Alphabetized by primary author)*

Article #	Author(s) Year	Title	Evaluation Notes
1	Bretschneider, S., & Parker, M. (2016).	Organization formalization, sector and social media: Does increased standardization of policy broaden and deepen social media use in organizations?	This study was included because it closely matches the research aims of this REA. The study looks closely at social media use in the organization and how the adoption of rules impacts its use. The study was published in 2016, so it is quite relevant. The study also defines seven hypotheses, that are carefully tested through surveys. Limitations and findings are clearly stated and discussed.
2	Kurkela, L. (2011)	Systemic Approach to Learning Paradigms and the Use of Social Media in Higher Education	This study was included because it offers alternate uses of social media. Since this study examines the use of social media in an educational setting it has the potential to offer new ways for business organizations to adopt the use of social media.
3	Marshall, G. W., Moncrief, W. C., Rudd, J. M., & Lee, N. (2012)	Revolution in Sales: The Impact of Social Media and Related Technology on the Selling Environment	This study looks closely at social media adoption by salespeople as both a tool for messaging and for sales. This article provides excellent context in how individuals within sales have driven the use of social media through necessity and competition.
4	Roshan, M., Warren, M., & Carr, R. (2016)	Understanding the use of social media by organisations for crisis communication	This study was included because its focus is on organizational communication through social media. This study looks at how organizations use social media to disseminate information during crisis. This article provides context on the challenges organizations have faced in creating communication policies regarding social media.
5	Thornton, D., & Holloway, M. (2016)	The Impact of Social Media on Collaboration in Global Organizations	This article was included because it offers perspective on how global organizations have used social media to communicate both organizationally and with customers. This article offers perspective on how social media contributes to the ability to collaborate through multiple time zones.

6	Trainor, K. J. (2012)	Relating Social Media Technologies to Performance: A Capabilities-Based Perspective	This study was included because it offers perspective on social media's role in customer relationship management. This article discusses how social media has altered the organization/customer relationship and how organizations must change as well.
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