

Making Sense of Organizational Social Media – A Longitudinal Study of an International Hotel Chain and their Employees

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Abstract

When new Information Technologies (IT) are implemented in an organization, this creates new situations that need to be understood and made sense of. Sensemaking processes are vital when trying to identify the meaning users give when interacting with the new IT. The purpose of this study is to identify how hotel employees make sense of organizational social media over time. The empirical data was gathered over four years in seven European countries and 14 hotels within an international hotel chain. In total, 37 interviews with 28 hotel employees were conducted. The findings explain how the hotel employees' daily work routines are disrupted due to the social media implementation, but also what meanings the employees ascribe to social media in an organizational context. The study contributes to existing literature by providing illustrations about how users' sensemaking process concerning organizational social media influences their use over time.

Keywords: organizational social media, sensemaking process, socio-cognitive, hotel employees

1. Introduction

In the last decade, social media platforms have become omnipresent and indispensable in the workplace and have transformed how individuals and organizations interact with each other regarding products and services. Social media platforms were initially designed as social networks for individual use and not to function as organizational tools [1]. However, due to external pressure and a worldwide use of social media, organizations are also starting to use these social platforms in order to meet competitive challenges and to interact with customers [2]. Although the use of social media is expected to create organizational benefits such as competitive advantages, it also involves organizational changes and challenges.

Earlier research has to a large extent focused on social media use from the customer's perspective and hence the challenge and organizational changes related to using social media in the workplace has been emphasized as an important research venue that needs further investigation [3]. Earlier studies on social media use in organizational contexts (e.g., [4][1]) have mainly focused on fragmented use of social media such as Social Media Marketing (SMM) or Enterprise Social Media (ESM) (e.g., [4][5]). Therefore, even though there is an increased use of social media in organizations there is still a research gap regarding how social media platforms are used in organizational contexts, and how employees make sense of them in their day-to-day work practices over time [3][1]. The hotel industry, which is the empirical setting of the present study, has gone through rapid changes due to digitalization and the introduction of social media. Earlier research has also focused on fragmented use of social media in hotel organizations such as online reviews, service innovation and marketing. Therefore a more overall perspective and study of organizational social media use is needed [6] [7][10][8].

Many studies of Information Technology (IT) use in organizations have highlighted that employees create perceptions and make sense of IT when they use it at work. [9]. The process of making sense of IT involves social interaction with other employees, identity construction and evaluation of the usefulness of the IT [1]. Earlier research has acknowledged that when individuals use and make sense of new technology they use cognitive structures [11]. Previous studies provide fragmented evidence of social media use in the hotel organizations. However, they do not explain how social media becomes embedded in the hotels' everyday work practices and organizational routines as a part of the employees' sensemaking process [6]. This paper seeks to investigate the sensemaking processes of organizational social media, both in the initial phase of the implementation and in the post-implementation phase. This is in response to recent calls for researchers to focus their investigations on the use and sensemaking processes of social media

in organizations over time, not just snapshots in time [3]. The following research question is asked: *How do hotel employees make sense of organizational social media in their daily work practices?* Weick's [12] theory of sensemaking is used in order to understand the employees' sensemaking processes of organizational social media in the hotel organizations over time. The study illustrates how employees rely on their existing occupational identities and daily organizational routines and do not embed social media in their daily work practices. The study contributes theoretically by analyzing and explaining the integration of the new IT, in this case social media, and daily work activities and the employees' ongoing sensemaking processes related to the use of social media. Furthermore, the study contributes to Information Systems research in the hotel industry by analyzing how organizational social media become enacted as part of the hotel employees' sensemaking process.

2. Organizational Social Media

Social media is often defined as a group of Internet-based applications that gives users the possibility of creating and content [2]. Unlike the IT employees may meet in an organizational context, social media has thrived outside organizational contexts prior to being introduced to the workplace [1]. Hence, both practitioners and researchers have described social media as a disruptive force that has had impact on many parts of organizational work such as marketing, knowledge management and innovation [3]. Furthermore, the features of social media are expected to generate changes in communication and interactions both within and beyond organizational boundaries [7]. Earlier research on social media use in organizational contexts has mainly focused on the use of specific social media platforms [8]. Earlier research has also made distinctions between social media used for internal or public use [7]. Internal use of social media is often referred to as Enterprise Social Media (ESM), and emphasizes social media use for inter-organizational use, for example internal communication or knowledge sharing [1]. In contrast, social media used by organizations for external communication often goes under the term Public Social Media and refers to external communication, for example Social Media Marketing (SMM) [6]. These fragmented studies of social media use in organizations have been questioned however by researchers who argue that research must look at more general use of social media in organizational contexts [3][8]. For example, Van Osch and Coursaris [7] emphasized the need for a more general perspective and research on

social media used by organizations and argue that a broader definition of social media used by and in organizations are needed. They suggest that the use of social media in and by organizations can be referred to as Organizational Social Media (OSM). Van Osch and Coursaris [7, p. 54] define Organizational Social Media (OSM) as:

technology artefacts, both material and virtual, that support various intra- and extra-organizational actors—including management, employees and external stakeholders—in a multiplicity of organizational communication activities for producing user-generated content, developing and maintaining social relationships, or enabling other computer-mediated interactions and collaborations in the context of a specific organization and its environment.

Although interest in organizational use of social media has risen in recent years, there is still a lack of research focusing on understanding the implications of analysis that considers more general use and effect of all these social media uses on the organization [3][8]. Van Osch and Coursaris [7] point out that social media research has “largely ignored the more general use of social media by and within organizations” (p. 703). Aral et al. [3] argue that due to lack of an empirical foundation, it is unclear how social media technology differs from existing technology used by organizations concerning their ability to produce new behavior. Furthermore, researchers have called for more research on the creation of sensemaking related to IT use in organizations such as social media, that happens not only within organizational boundaries, but also among companies and with stakeholders. Therefore, in this study we take the approach of using the perspective of organizational social media [7] in order to embrace a more general use of social media in an organizational context. [9]. By doing so, customers/user organizations, and other stakeholder groups become relevant social groups, whose sensemaking, actions, and interactions shape the sense users give to technological artefacts [13]. We therefore emphasize a more general use of organizational social media use including public social media and enterprise social media in order to examine sensemaking processes held by employees within the studied organizations.

2.1 Social media in hospitality

The development of social media has been particularly striking in the hotel industry, where hotels are using social media in order to increase their chance of survival and adapt to customer demands [13]. However, compared to other service industries, such as

the airline industry, the hotel industry has been restrictive in the adoption of social media. Researchers point out several factors that have caused this restraint, such as fear of the unknown, losing control over brand and its impacts, and lack of organizational readiness [8]. The relationship between social media and the hotel industry may be described as a synergistic interaction that has transformed the nature of the industry and its products, processes and competitiveness and hence changed how service is delivered and performed in hotels [17]. Compared to other industries, hotel chains have been late adopters of social media due to the risk of losing control over brand reputation, as some have argued [13]. Social media has also changed customers' pre- and post-travel behavior, and has also affected how the industry as a whole handles marketing, service, and customer complaints. It can therefore be argued that the hotel industry is going through a transformation where its organizational service context is expanded, since many of the service encounters take place online [6]. The empirical setting of hotel organizations is chosen due to these changes and because social media use is rapidly increasing in hotel organizations. Earlier research has also focused on specific use of social media in and by hotels, e.g. marketing activities [6], knowledge management and management of online reviews, hence a more general perspective and study of organizational social media use is needed [7]. With the introduction of social media the industry faces new challenges that call for research. Earlier research has focused to a great extent on *online reviews* and the importance of User Generated Content. For example, [14] investigated how hotels respond to online reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, while [15] revealed that hotel customers determined what hotel to book depending on ratings in online reviews. A broad stream of research has also focused on word-of-mouth and its implications for consumer decision-making (see e.g. [17]). From the supplier's point of view, research has focused to a great extent on the possibilities of market services and products with social media [18].

3. Theoretical framework: Sensemaking in organizations

The sensemaking process refers to the process through which individuals work to understand new, unexpected, or confusing happenings. When organizational members meet uncertainty, they try to find ways to clarify what is going on by "making sense" of what has happened. [20] [12] [21]. The idea of sensemaking [12] has been used to study how the interpretations of IT are created in everyday work

practices [22]. Weick's [12] theory on sensemaking refers to cognitive and social mechanisms when individuals are faced with unknown phenomena, such as social media in the workplace. When introducing new IT, or social media for that matter, into an organization, the everyday work of employees can change. For example, existing work activities and routines might be disrupted and employees might face new responsibilities. Hence, the introduction and use of the new IT can cause a "shock" and uncertainty among those employees involved in using the new IT [12]. The first question of sensemaking is, "What's going on here?" and the second is, "What do I do next?" [12]. Hence, the sensemaking process addresses cognitive and social mechanisms when handling unpredicted events, e.g. in a daily work situation where a high degree of uncertainty is present [12]. Sensemaking is relevant in IT implementation studies, which are often characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and construct the actual use of the IT [23]. IT is deeply embedded in the daily work practices of organizations [24] and new IT innovations are sometimes discussed in terms of being non-disruptive or disruptive. [25]. Hence, the new IT interrupts organizational members' familiar ways of working, their occupational identity, and how they interpret the world.

Sensemaking theory has been used to study how users create meaning about IT as social constructs that include "assumptions, knowledge, and expectations, expressed symbolically through language, visual images, metaphors, and stories" [11, p. 175]. Orlikowski and Gash's [11] study suggested that frames exist on individual and group levels, are flexible in structure and content, and may shift over time. Pinch and Bijker [27] emphasize that different individuals can hold dissimilar views of the purpose of technology, and that technology can be interpreted and used in different ways. Henfridsson [22] studied how IT artefacts are adapted and re-adapted by using the sensemaking perspective. His findings reveals that the IT adaptation process can be divided into two elementary phases, exploration and exploitation. The implementation of computer-mediated communication systems were studied by [41] who found that the users created the technology-in-practice by making sense of it, defining it, and regulating its use. Treem et al. [1] used sensemaking theory in order to analyze how individuals make sense of social media both in their private lives and in a workplace context.

In order to meet the call for further research on organization social media, we study how hotel employees make sense of the implementation of

organizational social media. More specifically, we explore what guides their sensemaking over time. Hence, concepts from Weick's [12] sensemaking theory are used: *bracketing*, *identity construction* and *organizational defenses*. *Bracketing* illustrates the process of handling information (e.g. about the new IT) and finding certain cues that can be used in the sensemaking process. This includes that users sort out mechanisms that they can connect to and that make sense to them [28]. When related to the use of IT, the bracketing process occurs when users use or identify the features of the IT that seem useful to them, for example in their daily work activities. This also includes ignoring some features that do not fit into the users' sensemaking process. Therefore, different users bracket different features, hence different users interpret the technology differently. Furthermore, IT implementation involves *identity construction*, which is an important element in making individual meanings collective ones [22]. The identity construction involves sorting out relevant meanings of the IT, but is also a process of negotiation where the user relates the features of the IT to identity. Furthermore, identity construction is social and ongoing. In the context of IT implementation in a work context, users refer to their identity when trying to find features in the IT that can help them use and understand the new technology. Over time the occupational identity becomes a guide in the IT use and closely intertwined in the organizational routines and procedures [29]. Hence, the users interpret the IT based on their already established work roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the users' occupational identity shapes the sensemaking process, but similarly the sensemaking also shapes their identity, by either confirming or questioning their present understanding of who they are [30]. The process of constructing occupational identity is closely intertwined in *organizational routines* that the employees use in their daily work. Argyris [31] uses the concept of "organizational defensive" routines to describe certain types of enactments. These defensive routines are defined as "actions or policies that prevent individuals or segments of the organization from experiencing embarrassment or threat" [31, p. 25]. These organizational defensive routines can severely obstruct flexibility in the use of new technology [32]. Furthermore, these routines avoid and cover up events that would otherwise embarrass and threaten an organizational member.

4. Method

4.1 Research Context

In 2013 the international hotel chain started to use social media. This included both the use of social media by the hotel brand and by individual hotels within the chain. Organizationally, this meant that the use of social media should be incorporated in the hotel chain organizational structure as well as the individual hotels. A social media manager was put in charge of creating guidelines and strategies for social media use and in each of the individual hotels one or two employees were chosen to be in charge of that task. The hotels in this study are located in seven European countries. Since the purpose of the study is to identify how hotel employees make sense of organizational social media over time, a longitudinal study was chosen [13][33] involving an interpretive case study methodology [34]. A case study design was used since it is appropriate when studying a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" [35, p.13]. In this paper, the international hotel chain represents a single case with embedded cases, represented by the individual hotels in the study [35].

4.2 Data collection

The data was generated mainly from individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. Additionally, complementary data included observations at the hotel organizations, online observations of social media platforms and written documents, such as social media strategies and guidelines. A total of 37 interviews were conducted with 28 hotel employees during four years. These interviews include 15 follow-up-interviews. The respondents were selected based on their actual use of social media in each organization. All respondents worked at the 14 hotels within the international hotel chain and were responsible for the use of social media at the individual hotels. Social media use is therefore mandatory for the respondents in the hotel chain. These interviews provide evidence about the sensemaking process of the users within the organizations. The initial interviews were conducted in 2013-2014. The interviews had an explorative approach towards the views of employees at the individual hotels on the hotel chain's decision to use social media and their actual use of it in each hotel. The researchers followed a semi-structured interview procedure [35] to ask questions about how each employee processes the use and perceptions of social media usage in the hotel organizations, but also about their private social media use to understand how they made sense of social media in the workplace. We chose individual interviews,

since we were interested in each employee's perception of their own work practice, their professional identity and experiences. The interviews were organized in three themes to explore how they make sense of the new technology: 1) work tasks and work situation, e.g., "What have been the greatest challenges of using social media?"; 2) perception of social media, e.g., "Do you use social media in your private life?" and "What do you believe to be the advantages of using social media?"; and 3) social media usage, e.g., "Can you describe how your hotel use social media?" Each theme had an explicit purpose and a set of open-ended questions for the interviewer to choose from, all with the intention to get the respondents in a narrative frame of mind to describe and give examples based on their own experiences. The narration-based inquiry approach was intended to not only describe actual situations but also uncover the respondent's experiences and perceptions of the topics of interest. Throughout the interview, the respondents were asked to reflect on why and how the hotels use social media, which was relevant when analyzing their sensemaking processes related to social media [12]. The follow-up interviews were conducted regularly during 2015-2017, in order to examine the individual employee's interruption and usage of social media over time. The follow-up interviews followed the same themes as the initial interviews, and thus individual changes as well as organizational processes could be identified over time. In addition, the interview questions were developed based on the previous interviews and continuous online observations of the hotels' social media activities since the first round of interviews. The recruitment for the follow-up interview was based on the criteria of availability. Longitudinal studies often have challenges in sample attrition, due to changed conditions, i.e., employees change jobs or organizations go out of business [36]. The hotel industry has high employee turnover and many of the respondents interviewed in the first round had changed positions or workplace a year after the first interview, which was important in the analysis of the social media use. The complementary data was used to ask more informed interview questions, and enable a more initiated analysis where the respondents' narratives could be linked to external circumstances and changes in the organization. Thus, written documents including extracts from social media guidelines and policy documents used by the hotels constituted a source of empirical data. Furthermore, observations with field notes were conducted at the hotels in relation to the interviews. Thus, the interviewing researcher got insights into how the hotels use social media to communicate with guests and provide them with information. Hence these observations provided a

"customer perspective" that was valuable when discussing the social media use with the respondents at the hotels. Additionally, participatory observations were conducted during the visits at the hotels, as during the interviews the employees often used their smartphones or tablets to demonstrate how they use social media in their work. This gave understanding into the organizational use and the respondent's daily work practices [36]. Also, research notes were taken before and after the interviews [37]. Online observations were also made by continuously following social media content published by the hotels during 2013-2017. Throughout these online observations the "Netnography" method [38] was used, and published content in social media platforms was observed without the researcher participating. These observations gave understanding into how social media was used by the hotels and the employees and was useful during the follow-up interviews.

4.3 Analysis

The hermeneutic circle emphasizes a spiral understanding of the data by focusing on the meanings of the parts and then linking them with the whole in an integrative manner [34]. In doing so, an understanding of the studied phenomena could be achieved. In this case, it means identifying the employees' sensemaking process related to social media and linking them to actual use. The first step in the hermeneutic analysis was to read the transcripts and get insight into the context of the hotel organizations and hotel chain. Since the study is longitudinal, a timeline was made in order to emphasize the different organizational actions and events that took place during the four years. Then, by going back and forth through the data, a sensemaking of the data was created, using open coding processes [39] with fictive names of respondents. During the entire hermeneutic analytical circle the data sources from online observations, participatory observations, and notes were used in order to create more understanding of the social media use and the respondents' sensemaking processes. The analysis was conducted with emphasis on developing certain interpretive understandings of text in light of chosen theoretical concepts, followed by explaining these meanings for the development of our theoretical arguments. Each individual interview transcript was examined by both authors separately but using the same analytical processes. Furthermore, we were able to give a number of examples of how the hotel employee's experiences and interpretations formed their reactions towards the social media implementation. The three concepts of bracketing, identity construction and organizational defenses were

used when coding the empirical data. Throughout the process of analyzing the empirical data, we found various meanings of the social media and could summarize the employees' sensemaking processes in the three categories: 1) bracketing, the process of creating sense; 2) identity construction with sensemaking; and 3) organizational defensive routines, which will be further developed in the following section.

5. Findings

5.1 Bracketing: the process of creating sense

The decision to implement social media in the respective 14 hotels in the study was taken centrally by the hotel chain. After the decision was taken, the different hotels started to use social media in their daily work activities. A majority of the employees says that they think that the hotel chain was late with the decision to use social media. Further, they argue that it was pressure from the individual hotels, stakeholders and customers that finally became crucial. The employees explain the apprehensive attitude as a sign of fear of the unknown and fear of losing control over the hotel brand. When the hotel chain took the decision to implement social media all hotels were encouraged to start using Facebook and Instagram. However, beyond that they were free to decide what kind of social media to use. It should be noted that the use of social media was mandatory for the interviewed employees and each hotel is in charge of its own social media activities. Anna, one of the employees, illustrates the exploration phase as follows:

As I understand it, they [hotel chain] were afraid that it would start to sprawl, that the brand would sprawl too much. And I think that because of that they were late, they had to create some kind of standard for how and where we should be seen. That's when they hired that guy who would be responsible [social media manager], then everything was controlled. Maybe too controlled. We went from nothing to having schedules for what we should post on Facebook and Twitter and stuff like that.

The use of organizational social media created insecurity among the employees. This was due to the high flexibility of how to use social media but also what social media platforms to use. Furthermore, organizational routines were disrupted due to the need to manage the social media platforms, such as customer complaints and questions. During the four years of the study, the employees did not interpret the social media platforms used as a natural part of their

organizations. Instead, the social media platforms and the activity within them were looked upon as an additional arena that needed to be managed. A result of this was that the social media platforms were neglected. The employees needed to decide whether the social media use made sense and added value in their daily work. A majority of the employees were irritated that the social media use created pressure to be available around the clock, even when they were not at work. This responsibility was closely related to their occupational identity as service providers. The employees emphasized that they were present in social media platforms to please the hotel guest – not to follow or please the hotel chain management. Carl illustrates this by saying:

It's a 24-hour job for me... with respect to the guest or whatever it may be. If there is an emergency or a question that someone wants answers to, then I want to solve it. The first thing I do in the morning is to look at the status updates on Facebook and that's the last thing I look at before I go to bed.

The quote above also illustrates a bracketing process, and that the employees were trying to find cues that could be useful in their daily work and established routines. Due to the scarce use of social media within the hotel organizations, the hotel management decided to make an effort to create shared interpretation and use of social media. They wanted the employees to view social media as an extended digital part of the physical hotel. As a consequence they started a corporate blog where employees and hotel management could post social media content in order to inspire each other and share experiences and knowledge on how to manage social media. However, the employees largely neglected the blog. Some employees claim they did not even know it existed and others saw it as a way for hotel management to control their social media use. Hence the corporate blog did not start a bracketing process. Instead it made the discrepancy between the hotel chain management and the employees more evident and meaning could not be produced. Interestingly, the employees' bracketing process was influenced by social media content outside the organizational boundaries. While neglecting the hotel chain management's guideline strategies, a majority of the employees looked at social media content outside of the organization, when trying to make sense of how to use social media. For example, they looked at competitors' Facebook pages in order to understand how and what content they should publish.

5.2 Occupational Identity construction with sensemaking

The use of organizational social media in the hotel organizations was closely related to identity construction. The managers' creation of meaning about social media was strongly related to their occupational identity. That is, their occupational identity both shaped and controlled their social media use. The fact that the social media use was "put on top of everything else" redefined the managers' identity and justified their use, or non-use. The managers defined themselves as "service providers" whose job was to provide good service to their hotel guests – not to be specialists in social media. This is illustrated by Amanda:

I mean my focus is to give good service, I always have the best for the hotel guest in mind. I don't really care about social media, I mean I use it, but I don't see the point of it.

Having to manage the social media was considered something that created a distance from their profession as service providers. The pressure of using social media created additional and new work tasks that the hotel employees were not familiar with. The employees had trouble relating the usefulness of social media to their profession as service providers and did not see the value to the customer's experience of the hotel related to social media. Furthermore, it was evidently important for the employees to be a part of the process of deciding whether to use social media at the hotels. Though they were positive about the decision to implement social media, at the same time they were disappointed that the decision took so long. Dan, one of the employees, says:

Why haven't we [the hotel chain] done this earlier, like four years ago, we are so late!... I don't want to talk about stereotypes but I think that the old school marketing guys [management] don't like social media. They like the Internet but they don't like social media. But the young guys like social media and the Internet.

The quote above illustrates that the employees were not involved in the implementation decision and they were not asked about how to best implement it. The employees felt that their role as service providers and their knowledge of each hotel's guests was overlooked and that they just had to accept the hotel chain's decision without any discussion. This frustration was revealed in the employees' social media use during the four years of the study. For example, they largely ignored the guidelines and strategy documents distributed by the hotel chain. Further, they blamed

lack of resources and time for the poor social media use. Moreover, the employees experienced that they implementation of social media forced them to perform work tasks that were previously considered to be the work of the IT department. Ben illustrates this frustration by saying: "I'm a hotelier – not an IT expert!" The quote is also related to the employee's sensemaking processes that revealed itself in self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, the employees that had negative presumptions about the use of social media did not use it and therefore did not see the benefits it could bring. Hence, the employees' interpretations affected their behavior and use. The employees experienced the social media implementation to have a negative impact on their professional roles and responsibilities. In that sense, the social media use started an identity process of creating a stronger occupational identity related to their roles as service providers.

5.3 Organizational defensive routines

In the four years of the study it was found that the social media platforms were not a natural part of the studied organizations. This was a direct consequence of the employees' sensemaking processes. Thus, the failure of communication and failure to implement a social media strategy that could actually create an understanding of the value that social media could bring to the hotels. Due to the fact that the employees did not interpret social media as a natural part of their daily work routines, the use was sprawling. As a result the hotels created organizational defensive routines that were justified by the need for "risk management" and the need to manage brand reputation. Therefore, only one or two employees at each hotel were allowed to use social media. These employees had the mandate to publish social media content e.g. on Facebook and Twitter and also answer customer complaints on social media platforms as well as online reviews. Hence, the hotels needed to cater to both external use of social media use as well as social media use by stakeholders such as guests. The defensive organizational routines were used to make sure that unintended and unwanted outcomes were avoided. However, these defensive routines were also counter-productive as they both restrained how social media was used by the hotels but also how e.g. online reviews were managed by the hotels. First, by only allowing a few employees to be present in and publish material on social media, the use became highly dependent on individual employees' interpretations and sensemaking processes. A result of this was a sprawling social media use with a great range of quality. This was evidently a result of very different interpretations of the meaningfulness of using

social media. Second, by being aware of the power and influence of online reviews, the hotel chain created strict manuals on how these should be managed. For example, the employees got pre-written answers to online reviews that they could “cut and paste” to the reviews. Further, they also got instructions about what percentage of the reviews they should answer. For example, all negative reviews should be answered while only 50 percent of the positive ones needed to be answered. This is illustrated by Alex, one of the employees:

We get more and more social media activities and then we have to prioritize and find routines for them. We have an internal goal for online reviews to answer all online reviews regardless of whether it's a one-star or a five-star review. And then we have guidelines from the hotel chain that give us instructions about what percentage we should answer depending on the stars. We should answer all the one and two [stars], 75-80% of the three [stars] and 50% of four and five [stars]. Basically we want to answer everything but you do not have time.

In the case of online reviews the defensive organizational routines created a quantitative, impersonal way of providing service to the customers. Despite the counter-productive consequences of their defensive routines, the hotel chain management preferred the routines. Hence, risk management was more relevant to the hotel than actually embracing the usefulness of social media in their organizational context. Furthermore, due to the lack of common interpretations of the meaningfulness of social media, the social media use in the hotels was not satisfactory to the hotel chain management. Therefore, after three years of practicing a more “bottom-down” approach toward social media use, where the local hotels managed their own social media platforms, the hotel chain decided to centralize the use. In practice this meant that the local hotels were forbidden to use social media platforms and the hotel chain created “social media teams” that managed the social media channels centrally with a “top-down” approach. This was also a way of creating defensive organizational routines and making sure of that the social media content was controlled and managed without creating any risks.

6. Discussion

The present study reveals that the hotel employees’ sensemaking process of social media in their work practice was highly dependent on their existing occupational identity, but also existing routines related to their daily work as service providers [12]. Furthermore, the employees relied on existing frames

of reference [11] created in their private lives [1] concerning social media that restricted their social media use and their bracketing process of making sense of social media in their daily work activities. These perceptions and existing frames of references had negative consequences for the way in which social media was used both in the hotels and for the hotel chain’s overall social media use. Furthermore, the high interpretative flexibility [1] of the meaningfulness of social media created self-fulfilling prophecies [12] among the employees. For example, those that were negative towards social media during the exploration phase remained negative during the entire study. That is, their expectations and interpretations of social media did not change despite efforts made by the hotel chain. The study revealed existing routines concerning the service provided at the hotels, and the employees did largely identify themselves as service providers, hence the use of social media supported their occupational identity [12]. The employees created perceptions based on existing work tasks and routines, hence the social media use could not become a natural part of their hotel service activities. Instead, the employees interpreted the social media implementation as disruptive force that disturbed existing organizational routines. These perceptions affected the way in which social media was used and hence had implications for social media use at the hotels. Furthermore, it affected the hotel chain’s social media strategy, or in other words, the strategy was largely ignored by the employees. The new situation that occurred with the implementation of social media created a shock” [12] among the employees and since the social media use was mandatory for them they had to decide what was important and what made sense in this new situation. This involved a bracketing process [12] and as suggested by [9] the cues that was essential for the employee bracketing process were found outside the organizational boundaries, pointing at the relevance of embracing a wider perspective when studying social media use in and by organizations [7]. Interestingly, the employee’s interpretation and frames of reference concerning social media [11] did not change particularly during the four years of the study, despite managerial efforts to influence them and create shared cues [12].

Furthermore, the study revealed that the sensemaking process involved an ongoing identity construction process during the four years of the study. This identity construction was evident among the employees, who struggled with maintaining their role as service providers in a physical arena. The digital service arena created in social media platforms did not fit into their identity as service providers. They also

felt run over by the hotel chain management since they were not included in the decision to implement social media. This disappointment had large implications for the employees' identity construction and for their social media use. Also, the hotel chain management tried to create a sensemaking process by creating a corporate blog. This effort failed, however, and was actually counterproductive. As a result, the hotel chain management created defensive organizational routines [31] in order to manage the risk of allowing employees to use social media and represent the hotel chain and its individual hotels.

7. Conclusions and future research

The present study examines how hotel employees make sense of the implementation and use of organizational social media in their organizational environment. The study emphasizes the sensemaking processes of organizational social media in both the exploration phase of the implementation and the post-implementation phase [21]. The following research question was asked: *How do hotel employees make sense of organizational social media in their daily work practices?* By an extensive interpretative longitudinal case study and by using the sensemaking theory [12] as an analytical lens we have gained insights into why individual users use social media in a certain way and how they react to the implementation of social media in an organizational context. By focusing on concepts from sensemaking theory (bracketing, identity construction and organizational defenses), the analysis of the research findings suggests that the hotel employees construct interpretations, or cues [12] for organizational social media, based on both their experience of social media in their private lives and their occupational identity as service providers. Furthermore, the study helped explain the practical use of social media over time and the organizational defenses that occurred related to the "shock" created by the implementation of social media [12]. These findings add to the existing research of sensemaking of IT implementation and organizations and also contributes to existing research by addressing organizational social media [3][7]. Further, we emphasize the relevance of not just taking fragmented parts of the organizational social media use into consideration. Instead we argue for the importance of highlighting both internal and external use of social media and how they affect the employees' sensemaking process. Furthermore, we emphasize that for successful organizational implementation of social media, employees must be given the time and opportunity to include it in their existing daily work routines, which is also pointed out by earlier research

[12] [22] [1]. The present study makes a practical contribution by pointing out the need to understand individual employee's sensemaking processes in order to create a successful implementation. This might help managers provide efficient guidance of the implementation process and gain knowledge about employees' values and identities related to their daily work activities. The study also emphasizes the need to study social media implementation in its specific context where the use and interpretation actually takes place. We encourage research to focus on sensemaking processes when examining the use of social media in an organizational context.

8. References

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