Exploring Strategic Organizational Engagement in Social Media: A Revelatory Case

Completed Research Paper

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Abstract

There has been little theorizing in information systems (IS) or management literature to inform organizational strategies for social media engagement. Aral et al. (2013) lament the dearth of scholarly work focused on understanding organizations' high-level social media strategies. In this research, we describe our case research to develop an empirically informed understanding of strategic organizational engagement in social media to advance organizational goals. We present an in-depth case study of strategic social media engagement at a successful multi-national business and IT consulting firm who routinely develops and deploys social media strategies to advance organizational goals. We situate our interpretation in the dynamic capabilities perspective, and present a revelatory case well-suited to developing an empirically-informed understanding of strategic social media engagement to advance organizational goals. We develop an analytic perspective of social media based as social systems, and describe topical collectivities as strategically important members of their ontology.

Keywords: Social Media, Strategy, Strategic Engagement, Dynamic Capabilities, Topical Collectivities

Introduction

Theories on the interplay between organization and environment have come to shape management thought regarding how organizations influence their markets, create demand for their products and services, manage perceptions of their brand, and marshal intelligence from the community. For example, resource dependency/mobilization, population/community ecology, network, organizational field, industry, and societal sector theories are each interested in organizational environments and the relations among the entities within them.

Social media are an increasingly important environment where organizations expect (*and are expected*) to engage. Their stakeholders are there. Engaging in social media involves engaging in the exchange of information around topics of shared interest. Recognizing the strategic importance of social media, organizations are investing heavily to create a presence in this increasingly competitive space. Worldwide social media advertising was $6 billion in 2011 - a 71% increase over 2010 (Williamson 2012). However, organizations struggle to develop effective strategies for social media – strategies which can advance organizational goals. "There is no established path of activities that lead a company down the path of "social readiness," and there are not widely accepted industry-specific best practices" (Aral et al. 2013, p.9).

In traditional media, managements are accustomed to command and control of messaging around their brand. Social media breaks this. "This is a world in which customers are fully in control of their online experiences and where their motivations lead them to connect online with other consumers while they create and consume online content, much of it user- rather than marketer-generated"(Hoffman and Fodor 2010, p. 42). Not knowing how to strategically engage in social media, many organizations satisfice by repurposing traditional advertising strategies here (Hoffman and Fodor 2010). However, advertising strategies ignore the "social" expectation of the medium. In social media, one-way messaging by the brand is often viewed negatively, and is ineffective. Consider the recent announcement by General Motors that it would discontinue its $10 million dollar annual advertising campaign on Facebook after its marketing executives determined their paid ads had little impact on consumers (Terlep et al. 2012). This highlights the difficulty organizations face in developing effective social media strategies for engagement.

Social media are highly dynamic -- participants and the ideas being discussed are in constant flux. To leverage social media's potential organizations must be capable of responding to strategically important ideas and actors in their social media environment. They must be able to assess w*ho* to engage and *what* to engage on to advance the strategic goals of the organization. Stakeholder theory argues that organizations must "identify and invest in all relationships necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the enterprise" (Freeman and McVea 2001, p.4). They must engage "all and only those groups that have an interest in the business". How can an organization recognize their stakeholders amid the vast audiences interacting across social media? How can they know who to engage?

What should an organization engage their stakeholders on? Social media is a discursive and dialogic medium where participants engage in conversations around topics of shared interest. Common interests are the locus of social media engagement. To know what to engage on requires that an organization learn the interests of their stakeholders in social media and use that knowledge to engage with them on the strategically important ideas associated with their shared interests. Purposeful conversations between the organization and its stakeholders around ideas of shared interest form the basis for strategic social media engagement.

There has been little theorizing in information systems (IS) or management literature to inform organizational strategies for social media engagement. In developing their recent framework for research on social media and business transformation, Aral et al. (2013) lament the dearth of scholarly work focused on understanding organizations' high-level social media strategies. We concur. In searching for a vocabulary to inform our understanding of this complex topic, we find little to illuminate our path. Without theory to provide contextually appropriate conceptualizations and analytics, organizations are challenged to implement effective strategies for social media engagement. There remains a critical need for theorizing on the discursive, structural, or other aspects of social media which could inform organizational strategies for social media engagement. The lack of current understanding motivates this research, which aims to *develop an empirically informed understanding of strategic organizational*

engagement in social media to advance organizational goals. To accomplish this, we conduct an in-depth case study of strategic social media engagement at Infosys, Ltd., a successful multi-national business and IT consulting firm who routinely develops and deploys social media strategies in a business-to-business (B2B) context. Based on their long history of strategic engagement in social media, Infosys, Ltd. is a revelatory case well-suited to developing an empirically-informed understanding of strategic social media engagement to advance organizational goals. We adopt the dynamic capabilities perspective (Teece et al. 2007) to inform our understanding of how Infosys Ltd. attunes itself to its social media environment and executes strategies for engagement.

The balance of this paper is organized as follows: First, we discuss background literature which shapes our pre-understanding of social media as social systems, and the figuration of social structures within them. We describe dynamic capabilities in the context of the social media environment. Next, we describe our case organization and briefly describe the methodology employed in the study. This is followed by our interpretation of the case study data with respect to strategic organizational engagement in social media to advance organizational goals. Lastly, we discuss the contribution of this study, its limitations, and directions for future research.

Theoretical Foundations

Social Media as Social Systems

Parsons defines social systems as: "a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols" (Parsons 1951, p.5). This definition well-describes social media, which are computer-mediated environments where pluralities of participants interact, motivated by their needs, through symbolic interaction. In this paper, we adopt an analytic view of social media as social systems. We take the view that social media are dialogic systems, where peers engage one-another in the exchange of information around ideas of shared interest.

Action theory (Parsons 1937) describes how needs-based motivations and value-based orientations of individuals drive their actions in open social systems. According to Action theory, we (humans) are self-aware social actors, cognizant of others and our social situation. Our social actions are goal-oriented, intended to satiate our needs. Actions can be aided by socially-situated instruments and are subject to socially-situated constraints, particularly the standards and norms of the social context where the action takes place and the moral standards of the actor. Parsons describes relational orientation as an individual's motivational and value-based orientation toward their situation. Parsons argues that, through their actions, individuals within a social system seek to fulfill their own needs, while the system must also have its own needs met in order to be perpetuated.

In social media, information is the coin of the realm. Social exchange is the means of its conveyance. Social media are open social systems where individuals needs motivate their actions (Giddens 1979; Parsons 1951). The needs of social media participants motivate them to engage in the exchange of information around shared interest. Convergent interests among social media participants drive social engagement.

Fields and Figuration

Within social systems, Bourdieu conceives "fields" as social arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status (Swartz 1997). Fields are spaces of relations in which contestation is temporarily manifest as hierarchical positions among actors within them (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991). Fields describe social structure. Fields represent the "relations between positions, objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose on their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)", (Bourdieu

and Wacquant 1992, p. 72). Within a field, the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize these different kinds of capital are expressed as both product and process. Capital might be economic, cultural, or symbolic. The current configurations of capital within a field shape the social practice of its members.

For Bourdieu, "figurations" embody the current relational positions and determinations within a field. This concept of figuration is drawn from the work of Norbert Elias, who was concerned with social structures established by mutually dependent actors, and their transformations consequent to increases or decreases in interdependencies among them and degrees of power. For Elias and Bourdieu, figurations are metaphorical lava lamps, always in the process of becoming something else.

For Bourdieu, figuration is the product of contestation. In "*The production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods*", Bourdieu discusses contestation as the agent of change in the art world. He describes how the avant-garde act collectively to challenge the status quo within the art field. When successful, the avant-garde replaces the previous avant-garde. When this change is sanctified by those in the art field, the previous avant-garde becomes the rear guard.

Within a field, at any given moment, there are ideas and actors which are impermanent, passing through quickly. Others hold an established, more permanent position. The rear-guard exemplifies an established element, which is defined as such by their continuing participation. The more permanent elements, such as the rear-guard, provide continuity to a field. Grenfell and James (2004, p. 509) note that an important aspect of Bourdieu's field is that "competitors agree on the principles of verification of conformity--on the tacit contract, inseparably political and cognitive, which founds and governs the work of objectification". Field is a social construction.

Bourdieu's conceptualizations of field and figuration provide useful vocabulary to inform our discussion of the dynamic configuration and reconfiguration of fields as social structures in social media. Social media are petri dishes of temporal and overlapping fields and figurations. Bourdieuian fields are dynamic, and aren't constrained by the implication of consensus necessary in the neo-institutionalist perspective. They preserve the conflictual essence of social interaction.

Stakeholders

Stakeholder theory aims to explain "whom", within their environment, an organization must attend to. Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives". Stakeholder theory provides management a conceptualization from which to consider the appropriateness of demands placed upon it by various claimants, helping them identify those claimants whose demands must be attended, and those whose demands can be argued. Thus, stakeholder management is concerned with managing the myriad groups and relationships with whom the organization is engaged in a strategic manner, satisfying "all and only those groups" who have an interest in the business (Freeman and McVea 2001).

Freeman's early work regarding stakeholder theory develops the concept of stakeholders principally as a tool for examining the external environment of the organization; an exogenous rather than dyadic perspective, meant to inform strategy (Freeman 1984). However, his later work softens that perspective somewhat, suggesting the need for active management of relationships and the promotion of shared interests. While a subset of stakeholders might be understood to include shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, etc., the more complete stakeholder population also includes those peers within the organizational environment which might affect the organization going forward. Therefore, stakeholder management requires both proactive and reactive management of extant and potential relationships.

Freeman and McVea (2001) argue the criticality of identifying and investing in all relationships necessary to ensure the long-term survival of the enterprise, and recognize the heighted importance of value-based management in developing shared values within organizations' communities of potential stakeholders. Freeman's later perspective toward stakeholder management emphasized the integration of economic, political, and moral analysis in the development of prescriptive and descriptive strategies on the part of organizations, such that stakeholder relations can be both created and influenced, not merely attended to.

Stakeholder theory contributes to our understanding of "whom" an organization must engage in social media - whose needs must be attended.

Topical Collectivities

Within Bourdieuian fields, collectivities (*e.g. the avant-garde*) self-organize around the shared interests or perspectives of members. Recent work by Brown et al. (2007) supports the self-organization of collectivities in social media, where collectivities self-organize around topics of shared interests and/or shared group mindsets. Collectivities emerge and have a reality that is partly independent of the interaction that gives rise to them (Morgeson and Hofmann 1999). Giddens (1993) refers to this as duality of structure, where social structure is both constituted by human agency and yet is at the same time the very medium of this construction. An extensive body of organizational (Watson 1982; Weick and Roberts 1993; Weick 1979, 1987), sociological (Giddens 1979; Parsons 1937, 1951), and social-psychological (Allport 1967) theory argues that collectives "can and should be studied as systems of interaction" (Giddens 1993, p.128).

In this study, we use the term topical collectivity to describe the self-organizing communities in social media where members exchange information with one-another around topics of shared interest. Topic, as used here, refers to a set of conceptually interrelated ideas which hang together in a cohesive way. We situate these within Bourdieuian fields (*i.e. social arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status*).

Topical collectivities manifest themselves consequent to the discovery of intersubjective commonalities among social media peers. Parsons (1951) work on actor motivation helps explain the figuration of topical collectivities. Social media is conversational, dialogic. The semi-transparent nature of social media allows participants to identify conversations whose topical content matches their own interests. Actors are motivated, in terms of a tendency to the optimization of gratification, to engage in conversations that match their needs. The need-based motivations of individual participants, organizations and collectivities can converge around topics of common interest.

Figuration of topical collectivities is an expression of homophily, which describes the principle that interaction occurs at a higher rate among people who are similar along some set of shared attributes (Rogers and Bhowmik 1970). Homophily is a basic organizing principle in social systems, with structural implication. "Homophily implies that distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance, the number of relationships through which a piece of information must travel to connect two individuals" (Mcpherson et al. 2001, p.416).

Lazerfeld & Merton (1954) identify two types of homophily. Status-based homophily is based on formal, informal, or ascribed status. Value-based homophily is based on values, attitudes, and beliefs. Brown et al. (2007) find that status-based homophily has little value in characterizing homophily in online settings. They find that *shared group interests* and *group mind-set* drive value-based homophily. Value-based homophily around a topic of common interest is the cohesive force that motivates individuals, groups and organizations to self-organize into topical collectivities within the social media. Examples of these include: topical blogs, message boards, LinkedIn groups, forums, etc. Brown et al. (2007) offer empirical evidence that topical interests are foci around which topical collectivities form.

Practical rationality evolves within topical collectivities as a product of discursive interaction (Habermas 1981). Shared understanding is achieved through cooperative search for understanding. The validity of consensual norms and shared social knowledge is grounded in inter-subjective and mutual understanding of intentions. These shape the perspective held by a topical collectivity toward its foci. Bourdieu's Avant-Garde art collective example, as well as the findings of Brown et al. (2007) that topical collectivities in social media can self-organize around group mindset, make apparent that members of a topical collectivity can hold a shared perspective toward the collectivity's foci. In this study, we describe the shared perspective of a topical collectivity as a frame. Frames, as used here, are of the variety discussed in social movement literature. Frames are a social construction of reality (Benford and Snow 2000); shaped by referent facts and events, and drawing on the experience of the members of the topical collectivity. They embody the shared beliefs, superstitions, misconceptions and strategic motivations of the topical collectivity.

Frames are dynamic, subject to changing environmental realities and changing member opinion. Over time, as members express their opinions, offer knowledge, and share insights and perspectives, frames settle. While individual opinions within a collectivity may still diverge, the arguments which support or refute those opinions become entrenched, and interest in re-litigating them diminishes. Group consensus determines what counts as social knowledge, and what constitutes the group's frame.

Topical collectivities are self-organizing social structures in social media, situated within Bourdieuian fields. They organize around the need-based motivations of actors toward a topic. Their foci are shared group interest and/or shared group mindset. We describe the mindset of the topical collectivity as a thought frame which represents the topical collectivity's perspective toward their focal interest. Stakeholder theory argues that organizations must attend to "all and only those groups who have an interest in the business" (Freeman and McVea 2001). We pre-theorize topical collectivities as idea-based analytic conceptualizations useful to inform organizations regarding which groups (*who*) they must engage with in social media and *what* to engage on.

To this point, we have described our analytic perspective of social media. Next, we turn the discussion to dynamic capabilities to consider the interplay between organizations and their social media environment, particularly how organizations enable and execute strategies for social media engagement which advance their organizational goals.

Dynamic Capabilities in Social Media

In the context of this study, a key challenge for organizations is to link their engagement in social media to the generation of sustained competitive advantage (SCA). Strategic management scholars have long been concerned with how organizations generate SCA. One highly active area of research on the source of SCA is the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney 1991). A central tenet of the RBV is that organizations derive sustained competitive advantage from their endowment of assets which are simultaneously valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN). While an organization's resources remain VRIN they are a potential source of SCA. In this way, the RBV explains the distribution of SCA among organizations in equilibrium. However, a central criticism of the RBV is its inability to explain how organizations can create or refresh VRIN resources in response to the dynamics of their environments (Priem and Butler 2001; Teece et al. 2007). The dynamic capabilities perspective extends the RBV in this regard, describing how organizations adapt their resource base in response to their changing environment (Teece et al. 2007). The dynamic capabilities view argues the abilities of organizations to acquire and deploy resources in response to the dynamics of their environment are themselves a source of sustained competitive advantage.

Dynamic capabilities are organizational processes intended to "impact on the firm's extant resource base and transform it in such a way that a new bundle or configuration of resources is created so that the firm can sustain or enhance its competitive advantage" (Ambrosini and Bowman 2009, p. 9). Teece at al. (1997) argue that dynamic capabilities enable new organizational strategies in response to changing market conditions by reconfiguring organizational resources in new and different ways. The reconstitution of organizational assets in response to new opportunities or changing market conditions can involve reconfiguration of organizational processes, resource allocation and/or resource utilization. Resources can include human capital, technological capital, knowledge capital, and tangible-asset-based capital within an organization. In the case of strategic organizational engagement in social media, dynamic capabilities enable or improve organizational strategies to generate economic, cultural, or symbolic capital held by the organization in the current figuration of their Bourdieuian field. Accumulation or monopolization of this capital enriches the strategic palette of the organization. For example, an organization might inculcate dynamic capabilities which generate social capital with key stakeholders in social media. The benefit of this might be to increase environmental munificence, in order to positively affect the likelihood of success around the organization's marketing objectives.

Teece argues that dynamic capabilities are contingent on the existence of three fundamental component capabilities: "the capacity (1) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) to seize opportunities, and (3) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and when necessary, reconfiguring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets" (2007, p. 1319). Organizations aiming to strategically engage in social media must inculcate these micro-foundational capabilities to

manifest dynamic capabilities toward their social media environment. In the case research which follows we will explore how our case organization executes on these microfoundations to sense and shape opportunities and threats in social media, seize opportunities within areas of strategic interest and reconstitute organizational resources to act on them and build high-level strategies for social media engagement.

Summary

In the previous section, we introduced theory and conceptualizations to sharpen our focus on the prerequisites for strategic organizational engagement in social media which we identified in the introduction, namely - w*ho* the organization should engage in social media, and *what* to engage them on. We have described our analytic perspective of social media as dialogic social systems where peers engage one-another in the exchange of information around ideas of shared interest. We have described how participants in social media are motivated to engage in the exchange of information around particular ideas based on their own needs, and their tendency to the optimization of gratification. We have described how ideas are the commonality on which the interests of organizations, collectivities, and individuals can sometimes converge. We have discussed topical collectivities as useful conceptualizations to understand how multiple of the organization's stakeholders cohere around topics of interest within the organization's field, and how topical collectivities whose interests are aligned with those of an organization represent a natural audience for the organization to engage with on ideas of shared interest. We have described dynamic capabilities in social media to inform our discussion on the interplay between organizations and their social media environments and understand how they build and execute strategies attuned to this environment.

As we conclude this section, we would like to first clarify that the theoretic pre-understanding we have articulated in this section is not deterministic. We do not mean to imply that our pre-understanding will hold as we interpret the case, or that we will seek evidence to prove our concepts. Rather, this pre-understanding describes our theoretical sensitivity at the outset of our interpretation. In the section that follows, we provide a description of our case organization and describe our adopted methodology.

The Context of the Study

Case Background

This research examines the external strategies for social media engagement at Infosys, Ltd., a global leader in information technology and consulting services with annual revenues exceeding $7 billion. It provides business consulting, technology, engineering and outsourcing services to Global 2000 clients in over 30 countries. Since 2006, Infosys has actively pursued strategic engagement in social media and is recognized as one of India's premier thought leaders. Infosys provides; business consulting, technology, engineering and outsourcing services to clients in over 30 countries. Infosys defines, designs, and delivers technology-enabled business solutions for Global 2000 companies and also provides a complete range of services by leveraging domain and business expertise and strategic alliances with leading technology providers.

Infosys employs approximately 150,000 people globally, with 64 offices and 68 development centers across the world in US, India, China, Australia, Japan, Middle East, UK, Germany, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Poland, Canada and many other countries. The company's offerings span business and technology consulting, application services, systems integration, product engineering, custom software development, maintenance, re-engineering, independent testing and validation services, IT infrastructure services and business process outsourcing.

Infosys is an early adopter of social media, and has strategically engaged in social media since 2006. It is committed to strategically engaging with its customers, partners, prospective employees and other key stakeholders in social media. Infosys is not just leveraging social media to engage stakeholders. It actively seeks and incorporates key market inputs through social media interactions. These influence corporate strategy and positioning in social media. Infosys actively engages its stakeholders through various social

media destinations including corporate blogs, third-party hosted blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Slideshare and LinkedIn.

The broad objective of social media strategy at Infosys is to achieve an enhanced level of engagement with current and potential partners in the social media and further the strategic positioning of Infosys as a thought leader. The company views social media as key to engagement with its stakeholder.

Based on their long history of strategic engagement in social media, Infosys, Ltd. is a revelatory case well-suited to developing an empirically-informed understanding of strategic organizational engagement in social media.

Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this research may be characterized as "revelatory" case research. Yin (2009) defines a revelatory case as one where the problems of the case are believed to be common to other cases. Yin (2009) supports the sufficiency and appropriateness of a single-case design when that case is revelatory. Social media are increasingly an environment where organizations engage. Therefore, the understanding we develop researching the social media engagement strategies at Infosys, Ltd. has the potential to inform other organizations strategizing to proactively engage in social media. This satisfies Yin's requirement regarding a revelatory case.

In this research, we describe Infosys' strategic social media initiatives as they expand their products and services into the retail banking sector. Recognizing that little exists in research or practice with regard to social media strategies for organizations which transcends traditional advertising strategies, this research seeks to develop a content-rich case around the research question with the goal of cultivating depth of understanding toward the topic. Based on guidance from Flyvbjerg (2001) regarding information-oriented case selection, Infosys represents a particularly appropriate case, as management at Infosys employs a rich palette of social media strategies. They are well-suited to the research aim of this study, which is to understand how organizations can strategically engage in social media to advance organizational goals. Further, Infosys Ltd. is a global leader in information technology and consulting services, and is heavily engaged in the strategic use of social media. They are an ideal and perhaps unique exemplar in that regard.

Our methodological stance may be seen as interpretive in that it uses texts which reflect the interviewees' experiences to develop second-order theoretical understanding. We embrace the methodological guidelines summarized by Klein and Myers (1999) which recommend sense-making by interpreting data via the hermeneutic circle, where we use constant comparative analysis to tease out initial concepts, link evolving concepts to higher level categories, and to identify potential linkages between the categories themselves where appropriate. As patterns emerged, every effort was made to situate them in the context of extant literature and refine our conceptual framework appropriate to the research question to guide consequent iterative inquiry. We chose an interpretive methodological stance to develop an empirically-informed understanding of strategic social media engagement at Infosys, Ltd. to advance organizational goals. Our "experience-near" approach allows us to understand how strategic engagement to advance organizational goals is understood by those enacting the strategy.

Our long-term engagement with Infosys, Ltd., and our intensive data collection on strategic organizational engagement in social media through semi-structured interviews and other resources has helped us gain a broad understanding of Infosys, Ltd.'s strategies for social media engagement. Over the last two years we have conducted multiple interviews with key staff within the organization on strategic engagement in social media. Specifically, we conducted multiple interviews with the Global Head of Digital Marketing, the Head of Online Marketing in-charge of Products, Platforms and Communities and the Head of Digital Marketing Strategy. We interviewed the Practice leads for the Social Media and Technologies group, as well as process specialists at Infosys organization involved with the Social Media Command Center (SMCC). We also interviewed senior architects who work with the SMCC and multiple internal social media efforts which also interface with select clients. Data from complementary interviews and public sources was triangulated to develop a suitable resource for interpretation. Preliminary sense-making of the data collected, with regard to strategic engagement in social media is discussed in Heath, Singh, Ganesh and Taube (2013). As we practiced sense-making and interpretation via the hermeneutic circle, we triangulated our understandings with those of our interviewees to determine their agreement

with our conceptualizations and understanding. In order to minimize researcher bias and assure inter-coder reliability, multiple researchers have coded each interview, and have purposefully raised alternate explanations and interpretations to challenge one-another's assumptions and interpretations. To the extent possible, we have situated our interpretation in existing literature, particularly the dynamic capability perspective of interaction between organizations and their environment.

Interpretation

As we begin our interpretation, we recognized the benefit of describing our work in two distinct phases. In the first, we interpret how Infosys inculcates the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities for strategic engagement in social media. In the second, we interpret how Infosys executes stakeholder-sensitive strategies in social media based on these microfoundations.

Dynamic Capabilities for Social Media Engagement

At Infosys, central responsibility for managing the social media presence of the brand belongs to Digital Marketing. Digital marketing operationalizes the organization's social media engagement via its Social Media Command Center (SMCC). The SMCC is a research vehicle with which Digital Marketing generates insights which can inform the company's message development, position development and product development. Additionally, the SMCC serves the specific social media needs of various business units within the organization (or verticals). Strategic social media engagement can be initiated by the SMCC or by verticals. When initiated by a vertical, the SMCC facilitates the social media engagement while the initiating vertical takes partial responsibility for the social media engagement. In each case, the SMCC depends on its internal customers (vertical) or Infosys' stakeholder in social media to decide what is important. Governance of social media engagement by the organization is shared between the leaderships of Digital Marketing Strategy, the verticals, and the Online Marketing for Products, Platforms and Communities.

Within the SMCC, resources are invested to "identify and follow key communities and what they are talking about" (Global Head of Digital Marketing). Social media is quite dynamic. Ideas, actors and sentiment shift quickly. In order to attune itself to its social media environment, Infosys has developed dynamic capabilities for social media engagement. Literature on dynamic capabilities suggests an organization's ability to rapidly respond to changing environmental conditions is contingent on the existence of certain micro-foundations within the organization (Teece 2007), in particular the ability of the organization to sense its environment, seize the opportunities it presents and to reconfigure organizational capacities to leverage those opportunities.

Workers at the SMCC operationalize sensing by scanning and monitoring social media. Scanning often begins by searching various social media venues around lists of keywords. These list might include the name of the firm, its products, its' competitors, etc. They might also include emerging ideas, or terms associated with a topical context of strategic interest to the organization. They might scan for word association between the brand and positive or negative terms. The SMCC "holds its ear to the ground" to learn what is being said, by whom, and which ideas are gaining resonance (Head of Digital Marketing Strategy). The results of scanning allow Infosys to know *where,* in social media*,* their stakeholders are exchanging information on the ideas strategically important to the firm. Infosys is interested in learning "where these people hang out – you go where they are" (Global Head of Digital Marketing). Once venues have been identified where important conversations are taking place, Infosys monitors conversations on these venues to understand their context and importance. "Who are the stakeholders? Who are the decision makers? Who are the CXOs and the C-1s? We can get an ear into this group and learn what is important…the micro-trends" (Global Head of Digital Marketing). SMCC evaluates the conversations on social media from two perspectives: Does this have value for marketing; and is there an opportunity to interact? They listen to what is being said, and by whom.

Infosys actively senses social media to identify topical collectivities in their field whose topical interests overlap their own strategic interests. In this way, they locate their audience of current and potential stakeholders. They listen to conversations taking place within the topical collectivities they identify to learn the frame the membership holds toward their collectivity's focal ideas. By focusing on the ideas and

actors whose interests overlap their own, Infosys winnows its social media engagement from the broad to the narrow. From here, management can match the cost of engagement with its strategic potential to determine *what* to engage on.

Here, the challenge for management is determining which ideas can and should be acted upon—which should be seized. In the words of the Global Head of Digital Marketing at Infosys, "any organization, including Infosys, has to figure out which conversations to be engaged in and how much it should be engaged". Seizing involves filtering technological, market and competitive information and determining the implication of possible actions. While some in the organization are better positioned than others regarding this calculus, Teece (2007) argues that leaving this task to the cognitive traits of a few individuals leaves the organization vulnerable. At Infosys, ideas sensed in social media are escalated to the appropriate management within the firm capable of determining their strategic potential.

> *We break up the topics of the conversations around different dimensions and see how we should respond based on what the conversation is about, who is talking and what they are saying. Longer-term issues are evaluated on their business value. We look at who in Infosys can use this and what can they do with this information. We could have done this earlier, but social media makes this real-time. I can do brand audits monthly and actually see the brand imaging and its impact and how it is playing out in the media every day (Practice Lead, Social Media* and Technologies).

The last micro-foundational prerequisite for dynamic capability is the ability to reconfigure organizational capacities to leverage opportunities that present themselves in the organization's environment. When Infosys makes the decision to act on a particular idea, they dedicate the necessary R & D resources to develop content and expertise around the idea that can foster long-term and meaningful co-engagement with social media peers and further the strategic interests of the organization. A Principal Architect at Infosys notes: "Careful selection is made to identify content and internal experts. This is a highly focused effort. We have over 500 bloggers drawn from all over the company to produce content." Following this theme the Global Head of Digital Marketing observes: "Today my blogger is not a spokesperson; they are a content expert—when a journalist wants to talk to the content expert, it cannot be handled by PR. That is a very big challenge. Developers and content experts have to learn new responsibilities—sometimes there are policies or guidelines...but right now it is a chaotic time".

Infosys evaluates the efficacy of its strategic engagement with a particular idea in terms of return on engagement. They assess the number or requests for information they receive from social media on an idea, the number of whitepapers viewed, the numbers of PDF views, and the number of comments to a blog, etc. This is assessed pre- and post-engagement to determine trends around their engagement with a particular idea. They also monitor social media for conversations which link Infosys to the referent idea to see what is being said. In this way, they quantify the results of their engagement.

> We look at a wide range of things—visits from the target audience, visits from companies in our target market, repeat visits we get, are they downloading papers? Are they contributing content, opinions, issues? The kinds of queries coming in based on content distributed. Are they identifying themselves, and their willingness to talk to us or about us to others?

> We position content to the sites and track views and responses. We mine visits and see how many people are listening to our message. If there are visits, we assume they are listening. For example, we look at RSS consumption—what feeds are consumed? Are they being mashed into other content? We look at visits from social media to our blogs and track repeat visits. This helps us figure out who is listening and what they are listening to (Global Head of Digital Marketing).

Executing Strategy

The microfoundations discussed in the previous section enable the single strategic social media initiative we discuss here, where Infosys seeks to strategically engage in social media to support its entré into the

retail banking space. Infosys aim here is to position itself as a thought leader engaged in delivering the products and services to help shape the future of retail banking. As defined by Infosys' Global Head of Digital Marketing, "Thought leadership is the ability to understand customers' business and provide genuine insights on how technology can be used for competitive advantage in the customer's business in the immediate and long-term". To build thought leadership, Infosys identifies and visibly engages ideas mutually important to themselves and their stakeholders in social media.

Infosys' initial thrust is to identify peers in social media whose topical interests overlap those of the organization. This is accomplished by scanning social media for keywords and phrases to learn who is speaking about the topic and where. Infosys searches social media for peers whose interests intersect their own. In other words, Infosys is seeking extant topical collectivities in social media to engage whose interests overlap the strategic interests of the firm. They are looking for potential stakeholders in social media who are motivated by their needs (as is Infosys) to engage in conversations around the future of retail banking.

Early investigation by Infosys finds that there are conversations taking place around the future of retail banking, and there is considerable interest among potentially important stakeholders in social media. However, these conversations are scattered. No topical collectivity has yet formed around this emerging topic. This motivates Infosys to found the Retail Banking Innovation (RBI) group on LinkedIn to focus on the specific needs of this community.

> RBI, talks about retail banking in general. It is neither Infosys-branded nor overtly promoted. We bring together like minded people and engage them in discussions. This way, we can get an ear into a group and learn what is important...the micro-trends. There is no discussion about selling Infosys' products or solutions. They are talking about their pain points and giving Infosys a platform. It's about changing the dynamics of the industry. (Global Head - Digital Marketing)

Here, social media participants, whose needs motivate them to participate in conversations on the future of retail banking, self-organize as a topical collectivity. In the course of a few months, this topical collectivity grew and developed a cohesive frame regarding the ideas and issues important to the membership. Entré into this topical collectivity allows Infosys to better understand the field and the frame held by its social media stakeholders. Getting participation is not an issue.

> Participation is not a problem. We can easily get too much. We look at how active the members are and try to give them value. Why would you spend time here? We have to understand what is different? What kind of consumption? What behavior? What topic is being discussed? It is important to invest time and effort ... that is a challenge and we are trying to achieve that.

> For members, the most beneficial [take away] is validated information because a dedicated community of your peers who "know" endorse the information [or not] - and they give you information with context and perspective that is useful for you. This is more powerful than just news. When the perspective is shared, it has substance. In our [social media] communities, value information is filtered, endorsed and validated across borders. It simulates community and extends over a time period where people remain engaged. This has a lot of value - beyond what you can get from branding and marketing. (Head - Online Marketing: Products, Platforms and Communities)

On learning the frame of the topical collectivity regarding the ideas and issues of concern, Infosys positions content that is useful to them, based on their revealed interests. This strengthens group cohesion and perpetuates the topical collective. Infosys invests over 500 bloggers to populate content to the topical collectivities where it engages.

> You provide content valuable to them. You build and give them the platform and engage with this community - the brand becomes part of the community. Their needs are fulfilled through the content provided by members of the community including the brand. The thought leader can fulfill needs by providing knowledge or engaged peer discussions with

> the group. Then your marketing objectives are transferred to the community and they can provide recommendation. (Practice Lead - Social Media at Infosys)

The state of the art business intelligence garnered through strategic engagement with topical collectivities drives product development, messaging around the brand, and the strategic direction of the organization. Ideas important to its audience inform the R&D of internal content experts and engineers. Infosys' ability to sense ideas and opportunities through participation in topical collectivities helps them understand what is important to their stakeholders in this area of strategic interest. They seize the ideas which match their own capabilities and interests, and which make evident their thought leadership to their stakeholders. They reconfigure their resource base to respond to the ideas they seize (*i.e. content experts, bloggers, engineers, R&D budget, management*). The dynamic capability of the organization toward social media, embodied in their processes, continually refreshes and reconstitutes the resource base of the organization, allowing the organization to implement new products and strategies which assure its relevance to the social media audiences within its areas of strategic interest.

Infosys invites key stakeholders to speak to the topical collectivity on issues important to them and give them a voice in their community of like-minded social media peers, within and outside the topical collectivity of interest.

> Sometimes, we take members from the community and ask them to co-develop with an Infosys person and Infosys branding and then publish this to the community - members get excited and peers participate. (Practice Lead - Social Media at Infosys)

Through engagement with stakeholders in social media, additional relationships may develop at multiple levels across Infosys and the stakeholders' organizations. Infosys' participation in topical collectivities gives them a voice in shaping the frames they hold toward ideas and issues strategically important to the firm. Through engagement, Infosys is able to identify potential partners to collaborate with to develop products, services or content related to creating the future retail banking industry. Often, engagement that begins in social media continues on private platforms, where Infosys directly engages with its stakeholders to co-create content, products or expertise.

> The differentiator [regarding which engagement with a stakeholder to escalate] is their behavior. If there is interest in co-creation and engagement, then you move them to the private platforms (Head of Online Marketing: Products, Platforms and Communities).

Through strategic engagement around ideas important to the topical collectivities in which they participate, Infosys aims to increase their engagement with their current and potential stakeholders and foster munificence within fields of strategic interest

> "In the long term, it is the relationship that matters. The thought leadership position helps develop and nurture relationships." (Head - Online Marketing: Products, Platforms and Communities)

Discussion

Regarding strategic engagement in social media, Infosys tends to think in terms of engaging audiences whose interests around a particular topic are congruent with their own. This might sometimes involve engaging in new fields, such as retail banking, or an area within the organization's extant fields. The Bourdieuian concept of field is useful to understand how, at a macro level, social media can be conceptually segmented such that an organization hoping to strategically engage in social media might target their engagement toward an appropriate audience who are motivated to engage on the important ideas and issues central to a field. Inside a field of strategic interest, further segmentation is possible by identifying topical collectivities whose foci match those of the organization. For example, within the field of retail banking, there are likely many topical collectivities. However, only a subset of these might be interested in discussing the ideas and issues around the future of retail banking. Lastly, Infosys listens to the conversations within a topical collectivity to learn their frame toward the ideas and issues strategically important to Infosys. For example, protest groups might be interested in talking about the future of retail

banking in a very different way than a group of C-level executives. Infosys is interested in segmenting social media so that they engage the right groups of stakeholders which will help them advance their organizational goals. Market segmentation strategies frequently rely on demographics to segment audiences. However, Infosys' approach to social media segmentation is based on the revealed topical interests of their stakeholders.

Infosys' dynamic capabilities toward social media form a foundation on which any number of social media strategies for engagement can be operationalized. They have learned as an organization to sense, seize and reconfigure organizational capacities in response to changes in their social media environment based on the revealed interest of their current and potential stakeholders in areas of strategic interest. They sense and shape opportunities in social media by identifying the communities in social media whose interests overlap their own. They listen to these communities to learn their interests and concerns, and to identify ideas or issues with potential strategic value to the organization. They join (or organize when necessary) topical collectivities germane to their strategic interests and perpetuate topical conversations.

Infosys seizes ideas from social media which are important to the organization and its stakeholders and establishes their role as a thought leader. Rather than advertise to social media, they co-engage around common issues and ideas within the topical collectivity as peers. The organization behaves as a cooperative partner engaged in problem-solving around shared interests. As their motives to engage ideas important to the topical collectivity become known, their marketing objectives are transferred to the collectivity. They partner with peers within the topical collectivity whose motivational needs can drive co-engagement to develop solutions, products or content aligned with strategic interests.

As ideas and issues mutually important to the organization and its stakeholders emerge, Infosys reconfigures its resource base to engage these ideas or issues. Content experts, engineers and bloggers are repurposed to develop content and expertise around the ideas and issues deemed strategically valuable by appropriate management. In this way, Infosys matches the dynamism of its social media environment with its own dynamic capability to attune its resource base to the opportunities which emerge. The organization constantly reinvents itself as a thought leader in their field.

Through their engagement in social media, Infosys is increasingly viewed as a partner in the topical collectivities where they participate, working to solve common problems. This gives them a voice within these collectivities to help shape its direction. Through engagement, the organization works to foster munificence in its social media environment—to create champions and sideline critics. Infosys' engagement in social media allows them to marshal intelligence from strategically important stakeholders in social media and attune their strategic focus to their ideas, issues and perspectives. In this way they are better able to situate their products and services, manage perceptions of their brand, and foster long-term relationships with strategically important partners to help cement their relevance to the community in the future.

Conclusion

In this research, we have described how Infosys strategically engages in social media to advance their organizational goals. Strategic engagement in social media topical collectivities helps them participate in discussions that allow the organization to marshal intelligence from engaged peers "who know" the ideas and issues that are 'touched' by the organization's products and services. The lines between the brand and the community are blurred. Infosys' stakeholders, including its customers, are members of topical collectivities. It is here that engagement pays dividends – stakeholders get to see the frame of the organization and participate in discussions regarding the strategies and actions of the organization. Infosys has the opportunity to execute social media strategy aligned with the interests of their stakeholders in social media.

Organizations struggle to develop effective strategies for social media due the lack of research that help organizations understand and establish processes to advance their strategic objectives in social media. Infosys is a useful exemplar which reveals that such strategies are possible. Executing on the microfoundations for dynamic capability in social media, they enable high-level strategies for social media engagement to demonstrate thought leadership to the topical collectivities within their areas of strategic interest. An important contribution of this paper is the conceptualization of topical collectivities as social

systems within social media, and providing researchers a link to well-understood social theory of figuration and frames to explain their structuration and function. Our theorizing is not meant to reify topical collectivities, but rather to provide a way of conceptualizing social media which is useful to conceive strategic management interventions. Analytical treatment of topical collectivities, through figuration and framing mechanisms, reveal useful structures in social media on which to execute strategy. This paper presents a revelatory case study to illustrate how topical collectivities and figuration theory can be used by organizations to link their interests with those of strategically important topical collectivities within social media to meet strategic objectives. We describe how, through engagement with topical collectivities, organizations can inculcate dynamic capabilities toward social media which enable higher-level strategies attuned to the social media environment. It is our hope that this work provides a foundation for further theoretic and practitioner work to integrate extant organizational and management theory, based on the attributes and characteristics of social media discussed herein, which, to the best of the authors' knowledge, have not been previously discussed in academic or practitioner literature.

Potential areas for future research around this topic abound. Several were revealed in this study, which warrant further researcher attention. For example, further work is needed to understand the attributes of topical collectivities that contribute to their growth and vigor. Additional work is needed to understand how organizational interaction with topical collectivities influences them. Research is needed to understand the discursive social processes by which frames are formulated, contested and reformulated within topical collectives, and the impact of organizational participation on those processes. Our study is primarily concerned with strategic engagement in social media between organizations and groups. Additional work needs to be done to consider strategic engagement between organizations and individual stakeholders in social media. We look forward to participating in this exploration.

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