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# Social Media and Organizational Communication

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**Abstract**

Social media currently have great influence on how information is obtained and exchanged. Thus, companies need to develop new approaches in organizational communication, while social media can become significant tools of organizing communication. The question is whether conceptual models of implementing social media can be identified within the organizational communication so that they should focus on the communicational needs of the company. This paper shows to what extent the use of social media can improve organizational communication and what constraints and risks may occur resulting from this usage.

*Keywords:* social media; organizational communication; Web 2.0; user-generated content; social media channels;

## 1. Introduction. Conceptual approaches

Although they are still regarded with some fear and are considered a potential danger within organizational communication, the new media influence both the traditional media and the behaviour of media users. On the other hand, new media have not eliminated or replaced the traditional, rather they have influenced them, forcing the latter to accept them (Holtz, 2006). Just as with classic media channels, the new media have their advantages and disadvantages, so that professionals have to carefully evaluate them in order to use them to their maximum efficiency (Berger, 2008). By using social media, public opinion communicates itself, and through this way of communication notable target audiences can be reached. This means that the classic target audiences of the organization are 'activated'. They no longer content with receiving and consuming information but will make their

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own contributions to interpreting and commenting data. "Corporate communication should follow this trend, or, at least, perceive it" (Julich, 2012). Internal communication also changes within the social media. Employees communicate in social media and contribute to the company's image and reputation (Julich, 2012). The role of internal communication expands in the direction of getting feedback from within the organization. Classic communication, through traditional channels, no longer satisfies the needs of employees, nor does it create the feeling of belonging to a group. The external public perceives the employees as true ambassadors of the company and thus feedback takes on a major role in building its reputation (Banuta, 2011). The challenge for organizations is whether they will make their structures flexible and harmonized so as to successfully integrate social media into the communication policy. Using the method of contextual analysis, the present study aims to identify the role and framework for implementing the social media strategy in the communication policy of an organization.

## 2. Positioning social media within organizational communication

In order to position social media within communication, we must first highlight their particularities. Specialists in the field (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) believe that social media represent a group of Internet-based applications which rely on ideological and technological principles of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. We might say that Web 2.0 enables the transition from the web in which *one reads* to the web in which *one writes/reads*, a web full of user-generated contents that allows the use of applications accessed by users who utilize a computer connected to the Internet. According to Tim O'Reilly (2006), the definition of Web 2.0 is: "Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as a platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform." Burton (Insidedge, 2007) referred to social media as "me" communications, challenging communicators to use them to stimulate employee engagement, provide relevant information and find the insights and problems of employees. This means (Berger, 2008) a shift in the professional's role from the mere dissemination of information to opening for dialogue, the elimination of the notion of control, careful listening to the other in conversations, straightforward communication and transformation of managers into basic communicators. Berger (2008) also argues that social media means new electronic communication channels based on the virtual environment: blogs, podcasts, wiki encyclopaedias, chat rooms, discussion forums, RSS feeds, websites, social networks such as mySpace or Second Life and other dialogue-generating media. Social media revolutionize communication and reconfigure the old S-M-C-R model of internal communication. New media increase the volume, speed and daily flux of communication, connecting people, giving them a voice and stimulating discussions on shared interests.

In this context, the issue of positioning social media within the communication strategy is being raised. Many specialists place the use of the new media within the application mechanism of public relations. These aim primarily to transmit information in order to facilitate communication and mutual understanding among various institutions and various audience types. The new breakthroughs and technical applications create new opportunities for public relations experts. Thus, modern communication techniques can reach to increasingly larger audiences much faster (Costea, 2012). An interesting approach of social media role in public relations belongs to Bordeianu (2012), who states that "online public relations may be defined as the meeting point of communication between an organization (companies, public agencies etc.) and its online readers (network users)". In this sense, the Internet is a support which is naturally integrated into the strategic communication planning of organizations. Thus (Costea, 2012), communication will address not only the consuming mass and potential or existing customers, but also a large and diversified mass of audiences: employees, shareholders, partners, channels, analysts, investors, suppliers, public administrators (Public Affairs and lobby), non-profit organizations (social political engagement), geographical community, mass-media (online and offline) etc. Tudor (2013) places social media alongside public relations within the integrated organizational communication elements. A study conducted by Towers Watson in May 2013, cited by Ciochina (2013), revealed that around 50% of companies worldwide use social media for internal communication. Although many authors and practitioners support the importance of these communication channels in the process of genuine and informal interaction with employees, the study shows, nevertheless, that a small percentage of respondents certify to the efficaciousness and efficiency of these channels. It is precisely why public relations specialists will equally use old and new media, depending on the objectives proposed and means (financial, technical, of competence) available. At the same time, the new communication technologies bring along, beside

their numerous advantages, unexpected challenges as well, therefore the preparation of online messages should involve a much more elaborated and applied creative work than for traditional media (Costea, 2012).

## 3. Social media in Romania

In Romania, the most frequently used social media channels are Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, according to a study made by socialmediatraining.ro (2014), adapted and presented in the table below:

Table 1. Social media in Romania (March 2014)

| Social Media Channel | User accounts | Unique visitors |
|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 7,200,000 | N/A |
| LinkedIn | 1,323,169 | N/A |
| Trilulilu | N/A | 1,739,134 |
| TPU | 773,135 | 2,157,414 |
| Foursquare | 90,289 | N/A |
| YouTube | 718,065 | 5,340,000 |
| | User accounts | Active users |
| Twitter | 125,061 | 19,812 |
| Instagram | 77,152 | 45,401 |
| Skype | N/A | 1,410,508 |
| | Created blogs | Active blogs |
| Blogging | 80,657 | 12,926 |

Although the overwhelming majority of Romanian companies use social media for external and internal communication, about half of their managers believe that the usability of social networks will increase in the near future. A survey conducted by E.Y. Romania, during 22.08.2013-10.10.2013, published in Adevarul newspaper (Andriescu, 2013), reveals the following relevant aspects:

- 78% of Romanian companies use social media;
- most-used channels are Facebook (93%), YouTube (43%), LinkedIn (43%) and Twitter (26%);
- channels are used for brand communication (87%) and marketing/sales (85%), and, to a lesser extent, for recruiting, networking, competitive analysis and research;
- more than half of companies surveyed have been using social media for up to three years;
- 49% of respondents post every day, 15% every 2-3 days, 21% once a week, and 15% once a month or every few months;
- 39% of the Romanian companies surveyed have a special department, 83% considering social media to be a very fast and efficient way of presenting new products and services;
- most respondents assign 1-5 hours to social media activities, while 30% assign over 10 hours every week;
- 49% of respondents think that social network utility for the company will increase in the near future;
- multinational companies in Romania are the most advanced in using social media.

The survey reveals that organizations in Romania realize the potential and suitability of social networks in promoting the company. However, the level of utilization (78%) is below the global one which is close to 100%. Although more than 80% of managers consider social networks as being efficient in promoting products or services, less than a half of the companies have created a special social media department, and the use of these channels for internal communication is almost nonexistent, except the multinational companies operating in Romania.

## 4. Social media strategy within organizational communication

The question is, on the one hand, if social media should be used by all companies and, on the other, if the organizations which use them should adopt proactive strategies for this environment. It is obvious that not all companies use social media, at least for product promotion. If target audiences are not Internet users, then this attempt is futile (for example, rural aging population). The company addressing these audiences must see, however, if social media are somehow necessary for brand or internal communication. It should also be taken into account whether the organization is prepared for social media implementation and which are the potential barriers that can block this attempt. Moreover, the resources required for implementation shall be considered and it shall be established whether the goals of social media communication should be enclosed in the general goals of organizational communication.

Analyzing the answers given by several specialists and consultants in the field of social media, Botezatu (2012) concludes that a company needs a proactive social media strategy only if it can thus fulfil a strategic goal. Communication consultants say that, in order to be efficient, social media strategy should be established within the general company strategy and that of communication. Entering social media may occur any time, so long as there is a strategy and depending on the company needs and objectives: of communication, business, marketing etc.

Social media strategy consists of the same elements as the communication one: target audience, goals, content strategy or communication pillars, suitable channels, tools, competitors etc. Some consultants believe that social media strategy can be built by the marketing department together with the sales department, if they are separate, and in close cooperation with the CEO and product managers; others show that the ideal mix of the team building the social media strategy is made of professionals from the company communication department and representatives of the communication agency and that it is better for new companies to consult a public relations agency for, thus, they can make sure that social media are integrated into the communication strategy and are not an independent element (Botezatu 2012). Social media strategy implementation and results should be followed by the top management because these channels are not just a means of communication but also one of relating to customers.

Performance indicators for social media are set from the beginning, when the strategy in the field is being built, depending on the company communication and business goals: reputation, brand associations, turnover. The following can be mentioned:

- qualitative indicators: degree of community involvement, relevance of general conversations, quality of the content published;
- quantitative indicators: number of fans/followers/members, number of shares generated by them (likes, comments, tweets, retweets, shares, mentions, referrals etc.);
- interaction and conversion rate, if it is e-commerce, positive or negative feedback etc. (Botezatu, 2012).

As regards the costs of implementing social media, they are larger than at first sight. The reason is that, although physical costs are lower than with other channels, the human resources ones are high because results can be obtained only if professionals or decision makers in the company or agency are involved. In addition, costs depend on communication objectives, activities and needs (Botezatu, 2012).

In a similar approach, Tudor (2013) shows the steps to pursue in creating an online communication strategy, as follows:

- setting goals:
- short-term;
- medium-term;
- long-term;
- choosing the mix of communication channels:
- what networks are suitable?
- why?
- what will be the frequency of communication?
- establishing work policies;

- making the editorial plan;
- implementing;
- continuous monitoring**.**

Internally, social media can contribute to a number of organizational dimensions: improvement of communication processes, community development, facilitation of information flow, promotion of values and consolidation of organizational culture, stimulation of creativity, even of collective intelligence, under optimum conditions.

Social media adoption constraints emerge as difficult-to-counteract limits, whether we speak about hesitation (users do not know how to use social media and find difficulties in adopting the technology), incertitude (the user has opinions regarding the low potential of the communication means) or conditions of reduced adaptability of the organizational environment and the list could go on depending on the social-economic and cultural background in which the organization operates (Ciochina, 2013). Risks may appear following the use of social media (Tudor, 2013), they are related to information security, to how employees, who become Brand Ambassadors, are supervised, the way resources are granted, time management, how organizational culture and online identity manifest themselves and to the implementation and management of the new technologies (the lack of knowledge and understanding of social media).

## 5. Conclusions

Social media ease the development of a "powerful global discourse" (Berger, 2008) in which everybody can take part, exchanging opinions, ideas, knowledge and images. Web 2.0 tools give communication professionals the opportunity to become more and more innovative and creative and add increasing value to the business. Basically, they support the formation of an authentic community inside the organization, increase the degree of employee cooperation both individually and at team level and encourage the exchange of experience and know-how in real time (Banuta, 2011). However, these channels have, just like the traditional ones, advantages and disadvantages and only a careful evaluation of them can make them efficient. This paper has shown how target audiences are 'stimulated' through social media use and how internal and external communication can thus be highlighted. The study has also presented several social media strategies and illustrated some of the constraints and risks which organizations that use this modern communication method are subject to. As Jurlich (2012) shows, though, "the great challenge for the future is the development of organizational structures and processes that are flexible enough to meet the communicative demands in the era of social media".

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