

## Social Media for Businesses: Requirements and Functions for Management

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### Abstract

Social media tools are in constant development, and those tools are essential for businesses as they have the power to create a competitive advantage. This study focuses on the management of social media environment from the perspective of organizations. Social media management abilities on the individual basis consist of the roles of producer, distributor and recipient. Corporate basis abilities require roles of advisor, architecture and analyst. In this respect, in-depth interviews which are carried out with social media managers revealed answers to the questions such as: How much importance do managers assign to social media tools? How did managers internalize social media processes and which functions are essential in social media management process? Respectively, individual and organizational functions for social media management were identified. This study highlights the functions that are essential in the management of social media tools; moreover, for future research, those individual and organizational functions can be used to develop a social media management effectiveness tool.

**Keywords:** Social media, Social media management, Qualitative study, Social media management abilities, Turkish managers.

### 1. Introduction

Digitalization started in 1960s, technological advancements occurred among 1960 and 1984, as the usage of computers increased. Since then the interaction among humans and computers also increased. Between 1993-2000, digital communication has become a current issue and by the beginning of 2000s, social media networks started to emerge (Scolari, 2009). During 2000s, diffusion of internet created more powerful users. Google Company, established in 1998, experienced a fast growth due to the increasing amount of internet usage and a new era started in 2000s. Tom O'Reilly calls this so-called era, of which has different dynamics, as Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is the usage of social media; which contains new advancements on the internet, technologies and methodologies created by different users. Web 2.0 refers to the increasing number of users and their contribution to social media usage, not simply a second version of Web (Knight, 2011, Hanna et. al. 2011, Dimauro & Zaweł, 2012). Web 2.0 refers to a world that has strings attached to all, giving the opportunity that persons can become a user and creator at the same time. Thus, becoming a part of the system as user and a creator builds a huge impact. (Rigby, 2008; Akar, 2011).

Thanks to new communication technologies, place and time boundaries are vague. Individuals can reach internet, send and receive instant messages whenever they like. Besides, people living in different geographical regions can use instant messaging (Başer, 2010; Montalvo, 2011). Technology can also help mass media tools to diversify. As can be seen, social media has emerged and gained power with the diffusion of internet. Smart phones also contribute to the increasing usage of social media sites and instant

messaging. As a conclusion, one can say that social media is not a very new construct; but the emergence and development of social networks has been very fast (Smith, 2009, Safko, 2012).

There have been essential changing trends in communal living with the emergence of social media tools. News and information spreads fast, and their impact can also be observed instantly (Evans et. al. 2010, Friedrichsen & Mühl-Benninghaus, 2013). Social media creates a platform for organizations to carry out their marketing and public relations activities. However, applications are not restricted only to marketing and public relations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Human resources, political platforms, tourism information, health regulations, governmental applications and self-description web sites. are other practices enabled by social media. Resources created by social media could develop very fast but those can also be ruined rapidly just by one mistake. (Xiang & Gretze, 2010, Shirky, 2011).

How can organizations manage social media communication? The process is full of discrepancies. Number of actors in Web 2.0 has been increasing ever since and the process becomes more ambiguous. To sum up, social media is an indispensable part of today's organizations, and how managers can reveal the power in these tools depends on their abilities.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Social Media Management and Strategies

Digital revolution, triggered with new advancements in communication technologies, has become an organizational concern. Michael Porter states "Rules of competition are not changing, the technology is changing, and organizations adapting to change will have competitive advantage". His views highlight the importance of digital communication (Porter, 2017). Confidential organizational information can quickly and easily be revealed via online tools, traditional structures focus on control rather than prevention, and this may be controversial.

The most basic feature of social media is enabling *interaction* among individuals and organizations. Another feature, *demassification*, means specialized care of each individual in big numbers of groups. Third feature, is *asynchronicity*, enabling an individual to communicate in preferred time horizon (Lister, 2009). Those features make social media an essential tool for organizations, consumers and stakeholders. Social media facilitates organizations to establish a more participative environment, much horizontal structures, of those are less procedural and more flexible. As such, managers must internalize the rule of "creating together" and collaboration; also know about the dynamics of different tools (We Are Social, 2014).

Usage of social media provides a diverse pool of benefits. These benefits can be listed as: increased organizational visibility, supported customer relations, communication with target consumers, differentiation and improved organizational image (Mavnacıoğlu, 2015). However, benefits are only possible when social media tools are effectively managed and this effective management depends on establishment of correct strategies (Qualman, 2010).

Social media strategy provides competitive advantage in digital evolution. The main requirement of creating a competitive advantage through social media strategies depends on their fit with other strategies such as positioning and competitive strategies. For instance, an aggressive competitive strategy requires aggressive social media strategy; or quality, low price, customer satisfaction issues require that the language used in online channels must also be in those directions (Barney & Hesterly, 2012). Otherwise, social media may create losses rather than gains.

Sustainable and compatible social media strategies will enable a competitive advantage (Wilson et. al., 2011, Safko, 2012). Qualified social media managers are needed. If required, social media management should be conducted in a specialized and independent department. Outsourcing social media professionals may also be another option (Berthon et. al., 2012). Currently, organizations prefer outsourcing more due to the fact that managers do not have enough time for social media management. Or even if they have time, social media management requires a specialized expertise. A social media manager or outsourcer company must be aware of the fact that, employees are also customers of the organization. As such, digitalization steps are mostly shaped by customer expectations (Sevinç, 2016). Hence, social media managers are the voice of organizations in web-based platforms. They decide on strategies and tactics, plan marketing and public relations activities, communicate with consumers and increase customer commitment.

Whether managed inside or outsourced; six key abilities are essential in social media management (Deiser & Newton, 2013). Listed below:

- *On individual basis*
  - Producer: Manager conducts creative, artistic and visionary activities, has basic technical skills such as video shooting.

- Distributor: Manager understands multi-sided or two-sided platform dynamics and what causes messages to go viral. Messages are shared via word of mouth and web, manager builds social followers.
- Recipient: Selectively answers questions and creates harmony via networks, filters usable information from the platforms. Manager can make sense of the noise (any factor that can disrupt the quality of the message) through intelligent filtering.
- *On corporate basis*
  - Adviser: To establish social media strategies; managers create a formal structure, collect the ideas from Generation Y, enable 360 degree environment in social media usage, coordinate activities within span of control.
  - Architecture: Manager creates vertical accountability and horizontal collaboration, facilitates social media for key business functions.
  - Analyst: Manager investigates the industrial dynamics, follows advancements, and analyzes the cultural and behavioral implications of social media.

Today, many managers might be unwilling and insufficiently skilled to develop social media strategies, due to the fact that existence in web and effective management of social media tools are challenging (Kietzmann et. al., 2011). Investments in social media tools will not have a high return unless social media strategies are not correctly chosen (Barutçu & Tomaş, 2013). To sum up, decision on technology type, visibility of tools, aims of usage and organizational applications build the social media strategy (Meijer & Thaens, 2013).

### 2.1 Aim and Importance of the Study

Social media is an indisputable dimension for businesses, individuals and even countries. In the future, it is predictable that new social media tools will be created, current ones will advance and taken all together, technology will have a greater part in our lives. When humans' lives become like the Truman Show or Big Brother, organizations will still be trying to take advantage of social media (For Truman Show see; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Truman\\_Show](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Truman_Show) and for Big Brother see; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Brother](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Brother))

Obviously, the ones that can best benefit from social media are possible with the managers who understand and manage it. Managers should have these perspectives and be able to put this perspective in their business. Being an active Facebook or Twitter user will not turn a manager into a successful social media strategist, there are more to it. In this respect, this qualitative study focuses on three main points: importance assigned to social media, how modern age managers view social media and how prepared they are for future dynamics of social media.

### 3. Research Method

In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 social media managers. Theory from the relevant literature was transformed into interview questions. Open-ended questions were asked while interviewing the managers. Interviews lasted 60-75 minutes; voice recording was carried with permission. Each record was examined later on. The sample consists of 13 master graduates, 1 Ph.D. graduate and 7 participants had bachelor's degree, with area of expertise from social media, marketing and corporate communication. In-depth interview questions are listed below:

- What are the criteria that show an organization is effectively using social media?
- What are the resources and capabilities that an organization must possess to use social media platforms efficiently?
- What are the aims and goals for using social media tools?
- What are the abilities and knowledge that a social media manager must have?
- What are the capabilities and skills a social media manager must have?

Semi-structured interview format let the interviewer change the sequence of questions and ask additional questions. Interviewer also gave additional information about social media managers' problems and their needs, with the aim of facilitating the conversations.

### 4. Findings

Answers gathered from 21 managers were examined and classified under two categories namely as "managerial level" and "corporate level". Those findings were evaluated in line with the aims of the study.

Semi-structured interviews reveal the summarized findings for the *managerial level*;

- Managers should have a command of the knowledge regarding the working ways of social networks,
- Managers should possess knowledge on how marketing functions are carried via social networks,
- Managers must take precaution on the update of social web sites and follow the content shared online,
- Managers should participate in the construction of visuals in social media,
- Managers should be able to follow the content about their organization on blogs, forums and social networks,
- Managers should pay attention to new generation's knowledge and experience on social media,
- Managers should control the social media accounts of their organizations and run necessary analyses,
- Managers must have the optimization knowledge to appear in the first places regarding search engine results.

Importance assigned to social media applications and managerial skills are summarized under aforementioned statements. However, the most highlighted factors happened to be are “managers must have control over social media tools and update the organizational content in a fast-changing web environment”. In addition, managers state that social media experts must have technical knowledge and take appropriate actions to keep up with fast changing trends. Those facts are in line with theory driven producer and distributor characteristics. As known, social media platforms pay special attention to visuals. Necessary organizational content is created by paying special attention to necessary visuals. Findings regarding to the “taking” role suggest managers to take action in line with the needs of different groups of consumers and use the knowledge gathered from those groups to fulfill organizational interests. In fact, customers' views and needs define the social media content. In this respect, managers' roles require to analyze customer opinions and create specific content to grab their attention. As such, customers can start the communication process with the organization.

Semi-structured interviews reveal the summarized findings for the *corporate level*;

- There must be a professional social media team in the organization,
- Employees should be able to communicate each other and their managers via social media tools,
- In all units of the organization, information technologies must be used, and social media must also be used as an information source,
- Analysis tools must be used to gather and filter usable information,
- Social media tools must be in constant evaluation as they are also an important part of the external organizational environment,
- Current social media trends must be followed by a formal social-media team,
- Competitors' social media usage and strategies must also be analyzed,
- Social media platforms must be used as a formal medium/channel of communication by organizations,
- Organizational services and products must be also introduced via social media channels, with the aim of using online platforms for marketing and public relations,
- Customer complaints and claims must be also managed via social media channels,
- It is not necessary to exist in every social media application or website, the ones that are beneficial must be chosen,
- Social media must not only be seen as a marketing tool,
- A social media crisis management strategy must exist,
- Organization must set budget for social media management.

Findings suggest; corporate level information regarding social media functions, indicate that social media teams have roles such as choosing strategies and planning. The most discussed issue is that businesses need well-established and effective working social media teams. Those teams must possess technical skills and run necessary analyses to filter usable information such as customer views, claims and complaints. Social media managers and social media teams must master information technology and the business should also ensure its digitalization. Currently, external environment and competitor analyses require social media to be evaluated as well as other factors; as a part of the external environment and a source base for competitor intelligence. Those facts are in line with theory driven adviser, architecture and analyst characteristics. With regard to highlighted findings, social media has become an inevitable part of business life that cannot be ignored.

In addition to above summarized findings, study also examined the problems social media managers experience regarding their field of expertise. Especially, interviewer dug deeper about the development and usage of social media in Turkey. Accordingly, individual level usage of social media has also lead organizations to have organizational accounts and pay attention to online channels. As organizations establish social media departments, hire experts and create teams, these trends simultaneously create advantages and disadvantages. For instance, a social media account manager must not harm organizational image or must not organize content against cultural, ethical norms and values. Because visuals, content, answers to customer claims and complaints, can easily and quickly create an online crisis.

Corporate involvement in social media increases the visibility of the organization and enables the reach to customers. Customers can also reach organizations more easily; write about their claims and complaints or satisfaction experiences. The network of wide and rapid share of information can easily trigger a social media crisis. If organizations have crisis plans, they can deal with the fast-occurring events. For a situation to be accounted as a crisis, it should extend beyond few customer complaints. A social media crisis is aggressive and extensive. A social media manager, in case of a crisis, should define the size of the event, discover the source of the problem and what stage the crisis at. Later, a corrective and preventive action should be taken immediately.

To sum up, on the corporate level, social media manager and team must decide on which tools the organization must use at its best. In terms of choosing the right platforms, organizational mission and target audience are essential indicators.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The web 2.0's participative structure has fostered organizational participation in the online platforms. Currently, one-sided transmission of organizational information, introduction of services and products, marketing campaigns are becoming less rare as social media enables two-sided communication among customers, stakeholders and organizations. Individuals can easily give feedback; write about their ideas, complaints, claims or satisfaction experiences. Because social media environments enable interaction and ease, web channels are preferred and effectively used. If organizations do not exist in the right platforms they will not have the chance to have the necessary feedback or manage upcoming crisis.

Since existence in social media has become a necessary condition for organizations, it is also observed that the organizations which can interact with its customers create a difference. Organizations without a compass, such as social media strategy, try to find the right path by trial and error. This effort of trial and error creates the need for "social media management". As a result, one can say that organizations without effective social media management and crisis plans are prone to negative effects of the social media environment.

The literature examines the important points that a social media manager must pay attention, under two levels namely as managerial and corporate (Deiser & Newton, 2013). As such, this study also followed the same path. Study findings support the literature and suggest that social media managers carry an important role. For social media managers, skills and ability development, being in command of the field, and observing the social media activities are highly essential. Besides, social media is a part of the external environment and must be a part of the organizational strategy.

In the last years, digitalization and digital evolution has been the trend topics. From organizational standpoint, information technologies effect internal organizational functioning and the first steps of digitalization was born with social media on web 2.0. This initial study highlighted the importance of social media management for organizations. One can think that organizations keeping up with the fast-changing conditions in social media will also be able to keep up with digital evolution.

This study has several limitations; as qualitative method focuses on in-depth information gathering; samples' representativeness, and generalization are not in concern. Accordingly, this study lacks external validity. No population was defined, but with judgmental sampling voluntary participants took part in the small sample. Future studies can consider using different research methodologies. However, as social media is an ambiguous and complex environment, still the literature needs in-depth information created via qualitative studies; and those studies can suggest paths for organizations in terms of using social media as an effective management tool.

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