



Managing an organisation's social media presence: An empirical stages of growth model



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ABSTRACT

The adoption of social media by organisations has proven to be very beneficial; however, few studies have examined how to manage an organisation's social media adoption and usage. Mismanagement of social media could have significant and unintended consequences for the organisation and its stakeholders. This paper addresses the lack of research in organisational social media management by empirically validating a previously developed conceptual social media stages-of-growth model. Hence, the research objectives are to (1) test empirically that the conceptual stages-of-growth model suits the evolution of social media adoption in organisations, and based on the lessons learned to (2) provide recommendations to revise the empirical model. Furthermore, we propose a three-tier typology for classifying organisations based on the potential of their adopted social media. We argue that the empirical model will foster a better understanding of how social media can be adopted and managed within organisations.

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1. Introduction

Social media applications are most typically used by organisations for marketing, advertising, public relations, recruitment, research, product/service testing and review, idea generation, feedback, and occasionally, complaint handling (Aggarwal, Gopal, Sankaranarayanan, & Singh, 2012; Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). However, when it comes to social media's use by organisations, we have “barely scratched the surface of what is coming and what is possible” (Aral et al., 2013; p.3), and there is a “growing importance of social media as a strategic tool” (Parveen, 2012; p.3). Social media can revolutionise how organisations engage with the market and society, creating new enterprise-wide possibilities and challenges from marketing and operations, to finance and human resources management (Aral et al., 2013).

There is a lack of understanding regarding how social media can be managed so that it strategically benefits the organisation (Parveen, 2012; p.2). According to Aral et al. (2013, p.4), “there is no agreement with respect to how responsibility for social media should be allocated within organisations, how social

media activities should be funded and governed, what should be outsourced, and what broader changes with regard to an organisation's structure, processes, leadership, training, and culture are needed to harness the potential of this transformative force”. More importantly, there is no established *path of activities* that guides a company down the track of *social readiness* and there are no widely accepted industry-specific best practices (Aral et al., 2013).

This paper aims to address the lack of research on understanding social media management in organisations by (1) empirically validating a Stages-of-Growth (SoG) model; and (2) providing recommendations to improve the empirical model. This paper also proposes a Social Media Business Profile (SMBP) typology for classifying organisations based on the potential of their use of social media. Such typology was developed by applying (Bughin & Chui, 2010; Wilson, Guinan, Parise, & Weinberg, 2011) categorisation of social media strategies to Duane and O'Reilly's (2012) SoG model. Note that while Duane and O'Reilly (2012) engaged in extensive theory building, they did not empirically investigate or validate their proposed SoG model, a key shortcoming of their work. This paper addresses that shortcoming, and in doing so, the discursive power of the SoG model is significantly improved, resulting in theoretical and practical contributions.

The paper is organized as follows. The theoretical background is detailed in Section 2, which includes a summary of a conceptual stage of growth model (Section 2.1) and presents and justifies the

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development of our proposed organisations' typology (Section 2.2). The development of an empirical SoG model is presented in Section 3. Finally, Section 4 presents our discussion, conclusions, and future work.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. A conceptual stages of growth model for managing an organization's social media business profile (SMBP)

Social media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; p.61). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identify four key types of social media in organisations: (i) Collaboration projects (e.g., Wikis); (ii) (Micro)-Blogs (e.g., Twitter, Blogger, Wordpress); (iii) Content Communities (e.g., Flickr, Slideshare, YouTube); and (iv) Social Networking Sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn). The concepts of Web 2.0 and social media are critical for organisations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) as they change the way they communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Aral et al., 2013; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Levina & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013; Parveen, 2012).

Evidence from a multitude of sources (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Barnes, 2012; Jacobs & Nakata, 2010; Munene & Nyaribo, 2013; Piskorski, 2011; Weber, 2011) suggests that organisations have not developed strategies to manage social media. As social media adoption matures, organisations must “integrate social media strategies with their overall strategy” (Aral et al., 2013; p.8). Failure to formalise usage policies for internal/external social media use also has unintended consequences (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Bott, Montagno, & Lane, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Munene & Nyaribo, 2013; Piskorski, 2011; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Social media has the potential for negative effects (Hong, 2012; Li, Yu, & Fielden, 2013; Nesbit, 2011) with brand hijacking, squatter accounts, and lack of control over content being some of the issues (Jacobs & Nakata, 2010). Furthermore, social media can potentially lead to “abuse, addiction and misuse”, “reduced productivity”, an increasingly “strained computing and network resource” and “misrepresentation” due to staff failure to distinguish between personal and business use (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013; p.149). Aguenza and Som (2012 p.49–50) warn of the “embarrassment” and “damage” to reputation by staff misuse of social media. Thus, all stakeholders must learn to use social media to meet their respective objectives (Aral et al., 2013). In other words, a better understanding of social media management and its use and adoption by organisations is crucial for academia and practice.

Although social media has become an important research topic in both personal and corporate contexts (Aral et al., 2013; Levina & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013), limited research has been conducted on organisational use and management of social media (Parveen, 2012). This may be explained by the fact that organisational adoption of social media is slow compared to the growth of social media for personal purposes (Baltatzis, Ormrod, & Grainger, 2008).

SoG models are a long established approach to information systems (IS) growth and management over the past forty years, and a wealth of knowledge exists regarding the management of information systems as they evolve and mature (Chan & Swatman, 2004; Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010). SoG models represent “a picture of evolution, where the current stage can be understood in terms of history and future” (Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010, p.288), providing an opportunity to identify the number of stages, the paths of evolution, and the benchmark variables at each stage (Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010). SoG models have been developed in a multitude of IS domains including data processing (Gibson & Nolan, 1973; Nolan, 1979); intranets (Damsgaard &

Scheepers, 1999; Duane & Finnegan, 2003; Hinrichs, 1997); knowledge management (De Bruin, Freeze, Kaulkarni, & Rosemann, 2005; Gottschalk & Khandelwal, 2004; Mehta, Oswald, & Mehta, 2007); and social media management (Duane & O'Reilly, 2012; Jacobs & Nakata, 2010).

However, very few SoG models explicitly detail how an organisation actually moves forward or transitions to a new stage (Kazanjan, 1988), including the most recent SoG model for social media management proposed by Duane and O'Reilly (2012). Indeed, Rocha (2012, p.200) concludes that “there is still a way to go for having available widespread and detailed maturity models”, and according to De Bruin et al. (2005, p.2), “there is little documentation on how to develop a maturity model that is theoretically sound, rigorously tested and widely accepted”. Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk (2010, p.279) recognised that researchers “have struggled for decades to develop stages-of-growth models that are both theoretically founded and empirically validated” and in this respect, they developed a five step Stage Modelling Process to analyse SoG models in the context of their development, representing a theoretical and an empirical research procedure “where the object changes its status from a suggested stage model, via a conceptual and theoretical stage model, to an empirical stage model, and finally to a revised stage model”. Solli-Sæther and Gottschalk (2010) identified four key topics to analyse/theorise a SoG model including:

- 1 **Stages:** Organisational phenomena undergo transformations in their design characteristics that can be defined in terms of discrete stages of growth.
- 2 **Paths of Evolution:** An organisational phenomenon shows a predictable pattern of development from the first stage to the second stage, and so on, until it reaches the final stage, either directly or via bypassed or revisited stages.
- 3 **Dominant Problems:** Dominant problems at each stage of growth will statistically correspond with the conceptual formulations given for that stage.
- 4 **Benchmark Variables:** Values of benchmark variables for each stage of growth will statistically correspond with the conceptual formulations given for that stage.

While Duane and O'Reilly (2012, p.1) did not empirically test their Social Media Business Profile (SMBP) SoG model, their extensive review of “SoG models in the literature, social media practitioner reports and best practice guides, and industry reported cases of SMBP implementations” provides a robust conceptual stage model from which to conduct empirical validation of the model. Table 1 provides an overview of the stages, paths of evolution, and benchmark variables arising from Duane and O'Reilly's conceptual SMBP SoG model.

2.2. Organizations' typology

The ability to categorize organisations adds to the didactic power of an SoG model. For that we analyse the literature on organisations' adoption, approaches and/or strategies towards social media, and develop a typology based on their ability to progress/grow within the frame of the SoG. How an organisation evaluates its social media strategy must be analysed relative to other organisations that fall within the same category.

There are important correlations between social media adoption and different organisational features (Bughin, 2008). “Every organisation will differ in how and where it starts its social media strategy in terms of the array of social networking tools it employs, its pace of adoption, the extent to which it engages the social community, and its investment in, and ability to leverage the information gleaned.” (Prohaska, 2011 p.61).

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