

Where the shoe pinches: Realizing dominant problems as an organizational social media business profile evolves

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ABSTRACT

When managed properly, social media has been shown to provide clear benefits to organizations. However, social media mismanagement can lead to undesirable situations. This study aims to identify and examine problems associated with social media as its use by an organization evolves. We identify such problems by surveying Canadian organizations. Survey participants were asked to rate the severity of the problems faced by their organization as their social media business profile (SMBP) evolves. Our findings reveal two waves of problems occurring where severity levels increase through the evolution of the SMBP. The most prominent problems are failure to develop metrics for measuring returns on investment and failure to translate data into actionable insights, both of which are related to analytics. We also show that larger organizations tend to experience more strategic problems, while organizations of the service sector experience more severe problems. In identifying the types of problems that emerge and when to expect them during SMBP evolution, this study enables practitioners to anticipate and develop plans that mitigate such problems and to harness the full potential of social media.

1. Introduction

The social media business profile (SMBP) is an online presence and platform used by organizations for marketing, public relations, recruitment, research, product and service testing and occasionally complaint management (Aggarwal, Gopal, Sankaranarayanan, & Singh, 2012; Duane & O'Reilly, 2012; Piskorski, 2011). Managing the SMBP can be challenging because social media is “a moving target” (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013, p. 4), and given the rapid development and ever changing technological interfaces of social media applications, as well as the growing pervasiveness of smart phone-enabled social media access, an organization's SMBP can become subject to problems as it evolves (Chung, Andreev, Benyoucef, Duane, & O'Reilly, 2017). Such problems are wide-ranging, change from one growth stage to another, and can shift from involving a lack of skills to a lack of resources and strategy (Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010).

Social media strategies for organizations can be difficult to develop, and for this reason, many organizations have yet to develop such strategies (e.g., Aggarwal et al., 2012; Barnes, 2012; Jacobs & Nakata, 2010; Munene & Nyaribo, 2013; Piskorski, 2011; Weber, 2011). As their use of social media matures, organizations are urged to “integrate

social media strategies with their overall strategy” (Aral et al., 2013, p.8). A failure to formalize usage policies on internal/external social media can have unintended consequences (Aggarwal et al., 2012; Bott, Montagno, & Lane, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Munene & Nyaribo, 2013; Piskorski, 2011; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). For example, social media can pose significant threats (Hong, 2012; Li, Yu, & Fielden, 2013; Nesbit, 2011; Shneiderman, 2015) of brand hijacking and squatter account formation or of a lack of control over content (Jacobs & Nakata, 2010). Furthermore, they can lead to “abuse, addiction, and misuse”, reduced productivity, an increasingly “strained computing and network resources”, and “misrepresentation” due to staff failures to distinguish between personal and business uses (Munene & Nyaribo, 2013, p.149). Aguenza and Som (2012 p.49-50) warn of embarrassments and compromised reputations that can result from staff misuse of social media. Thus, all organizations' stakeholders must learn to use social media properly to meet their respective objectives (Aral et al., 2013).

Stages-of-growth models are widely used for the management of information technology (IT) (Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010). These models describe phenomena observed as IT evolves through different stages of its life-cycle (King & Teo, 1997). Solli-Sæther and Gottschalk (2010) posit that as an organization moves through IT stages of growth,

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the types of problems it faces can vary. In reference to the context of social media use by organizations, [Jacobs and Nakata \(2010\)](#) proposed a conceptual six stage model, but according to [Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#), the model reflects a non-specific approach to modeling. [Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#) proposed a conceptual stages-of-growth model for managing an organization's SMBP, and the model was empirically validated in [Chung et al. \(2017\)](#), hence our decision to use [Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#) model. Despite conceptual advances made, few empirical studies have examined problems associated with the use of social media as it evolves through different stages. This study addresses this gap in the research by building on [Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#) and [Chung et al. \(2017\)](#) work and by applying the stages-of-growth model for SMBP to Canadian organizations.

Therefore, our research question is as follows: *what problems may an organization experience as its SMBP evolves through different stages of growth?* To address this question, we identify three objectives:

- to survey organizations of the Canadian business community on the problems that they face with regard to the evolution of their SMBP and regarding the severity of such problems;
- to analyze the survey results based on the stages-of-growth model, the sizes of organizations, and the economic sectors in which organizations operate; and
- to identify and systematize what these problems are and when they are most likely to emerge through an SMBP's evolution.

The practical contribution of this study is in revealing and systematizing the potential problems an organization can expect to encounter, when to expect such problems through SMBP evolution, and how severe such problems are likely to be. Practitioners can use this information to better plan for and mitigate the effects of such problems for their organizations. As for the academic contributions of this paper, the work shows how the stages-of-growth model for the SMBP ([Duane & O'Reilly, 2012](#)) can be applied, thus illustrating the stages-of-growth modeling process outlined in [Solli-Sæther and Gottschalk \(2010\)](#).

This paper is organized as follows. A literature review is presented in Section 2 and provides background information on the stages-of-growth model as well as social media implementation problems as discussed in the literature. In Section 3, the problems discussed in the literature related to social media use by organizations are classified into four types. The research design used is detailed in Section 4 in reference to the tools and approaches used to analyze the survey data and to test the hypotheses. Our results are listed in Section 5 in reference to the data collection process used, to the descriptive statistics generated from the survey and to the results of the analysis. A discussion of the observable patterns is provided in Section 6, and concluding remarks are presented in Section 7.

2. Research background

Social media use by organizations has been shown to follow a stages-of-growth model ([Chung et al., 2017](#)), and it is possible for organizations to experience different problems at different stages as organizations' social media business profiles mature ([Duane & O'Reilly, 2012](#)). To identify and study the types of problems that are most likely to occur at each stage of growth, the background information on stages-of-growth models (Section 2.1) and the social media implementation problems as discussed in the literature (Section 2.2) are discussed in the following sections.

2.1. Stages of growth

The stages-of-growth method is a widely accepted approach used to model the growth of information technology (IT). [Gibson and Nolan \(1973\)](#) pioneered a theoretical model using a four-staged approach, which he later revised to a six stages-of-growth approach ([Nolan, 1979](#)). Since then, the idea has evolved, and other scholars have proposed different stages-of-growth models ([Galliers & Sutherland, 1991](#); [McKenney & McFarlan, 1982](#)) to capture how IT functions evolve within an organization. Stages-of-growth models have since been applied to e-business ([McKay, Prananto, & Marshall, 2000](#)), Intranet ([Damsgaard & Scheepers, 1999](#); [Duane & Finnegan, 2003](#); [Hinrichs, 1997](#); [KPMG, 1997](#)), data-warehousing ([Watson, Ariyachandra, & Matyska, 2001](#)), and e-government ([de Brí, 2009](#)) contexts.

[Jacobs and Nakata \(2010\)](#) proposed a stages-of-growth model for social media adoption to provide a roadmap for facilitating the planning and development of social media strategies. Heavily influenced by [Earl \(2000\)](#), the six-stage model includes a brief description of the focus of each stage. However, according to [Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#), [Jacobs and Nakata's \(2010\)](#) model does not identify any mechanisms by which progress can be maintained or measured, and the paths of evolution are not clearly defined. The model does not identify the management challenges or dominant problems that must be overcome at any stage. Ideally, all stages-of-growth models should identify benchmark variables and dominant problems encountered at each stage ([Solli-Sæther & Gottschalk, 2010](#)). Furthermore, [Jacobs and Nakata's \(2010\)](#) model is conceptualized on a single stages-of-growth model, the [Earl \(2000\)](#) model, and it does not consider the contributions of other stages-of-growth models. [Earl \(2000, p.37\)](#) described his own proposed model as highly idealized, and neither [Earl \(2000\)](#) nor [Jacobs and Nakata \(2010\)](#) empirically tested their models.

[Duane and O'Reilly \(2012\)](#) proposed a conceptual stages-of-growth model for managing an organization's SMBP, and the model was empirically validated in [Chung et al. \(2017\)](#). The model has five stages ([Fig. 1](#)).

Stage 1 is the *Experimentation and Learning* stage, wherein the SMBP can grow organically through the efforts of a few individuals operating within the organization. No strategies are applied to bottom-up approaches of the first stage, and there are no related impacts on business processes. In Stage 2, *Rapid Growth*, the SMBP evolves through the efforts of teams or groups of employees who are typically involved in customer relations activities. At this stage, no strategies have yet been developed, but external stakeholders are encouraged to like, comment on, and share content posted by the organization. Stage 3 involves *Formalization*, and organizations have at this point developed strategies associated with the growth of their SMBP, and the activities revolving around the SMBP are now linked to the organization's business processes. *Consolidation and Integration* occur in Stage 4 as the administration of the SMBP is carried out centrally within the organization. At this stage, the SMBP is used to drive fundamental changes within the organization. The most noticeable characteristics involve the use of business intelligence (BI) and the integration of stakeholders in product/service development. The last stage of the growth model, Stage 5, involves *Institutional Absorption*, whereby organizations shift their focus to sustaining and optimizing the use of established social media applications. The style of management used in Stage 5 empowers all stakeholders and facilitates business-wide conversations that can benefit the organization.

The SMBP stages-of-growth model follows the stage modeling

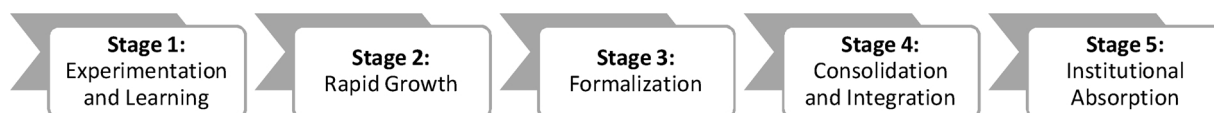


Fig. 1. SMBP stages-of-growth as proposed by Duane and O'Reilly (2012).

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