

Encouraging User-Generated Content with a Conceptual Social Media Communication Process Model

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ABSTRACT

Internet phenomena like Facebook or Twitter hold great potential for companies. The 21st century's social networks are platforms for the (semi) public exchange of information that is produced and consumed by users alike. For an organisation, taking an active part in these conversations can support the efforts to gain more trust, co-shape the organisation's image and obtain knowledge from user-generated content. User-generated content can help optimise processes and act as a testimonial for the organisation's services and products. This work offers an outline of motivation for, types and use of user-generated content in Social Media and provides a conceptual process model facilitating external knowledge management within organisational communication measures in Social Media.

Keywords: Business Management, Marketing, Organisational Communications, Social Media, Social Science, User-Generated Content, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube attract millions of people. The social network Facebook, for example, currently has more than 800 million active members who communicate and share multimedia content on the platform at least once a month (Facebook, 2011). In Social Media, users expect a certain amount of forthrightness and transparency by the communicating persons and organisations alike. The

organisations, however, must act carefully in the process of sharing their knowledge as it is a crucial factor of economic success. Especially if organisations aim to motivate users to give feedback about products or campaigns, want users to collaborate in product development or optimization processes, or to create positive content about the organisation; users demand information, incentives or other benefits from the organisation in exchange.

This paper provides an approach to external communication in Social Media for the purpose of profiting from the knowledge and

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content created by users. The focus lies on the following two research questions:

- What information should be published by the organisation?
- What is the motivation of user-generated content?

Answering the questions will provide the basis for a conceptional process model.

After a brief explanation of the methodology, the theoretical basis which consists of a number of existing communication concepts and sociological research on Social Media is presented. In the second part, the conceptional process model which builds on the theoretical basis is introduced.

In this work, knowledge management is understood as a process of choosing, editing and distributing information (Schüppel, 1996). In the context of Social Media communication, this means that an organisation – whether it is non-profit or profit-oriented – shares and discusses information with an external target group. The objective is to gain new knowledge from dialogues with the target group.

The most common and widely adapted definition of Social Media describes them as platforms that facilitate this interpersonal communication, the publishing, discussing, rating and sharing of multimedia content without demanding high-level technical skills from the users (O'Reilly, 2005; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Examples for Social Media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or multimedia platforms such as Flickr or YouTube. Social Media are subject to constant evolution with new platforms launching and others closing down frequently. One of the newest and most notable additions to the Social Media sphere is Google Plus, the social network created by Google. This platform experienced an immense growth within its first weeks of existence, growing to approximately 25 million unique visitors within the first five weeks (Wasserman, 2011).

Theoretical Basis

The conceptional process model presented in this work is based on three existing models which provide steps to develop a strategy for using Social Media in organisational communications. Each model provides a different approach to communicating in digital social networks. These three approaches were analysed and split into their individual elements. The basis for the extraction of these elements is the fundamental concept of a marketing plan (Pelz, 2004) which includes the following steps: Analysis of the starting point situation, objectives, strategy and activities, implementation and marketing mix, and finally, the measurement of results. The methods suggested for the different elements in the existing models (e.g., a Social Media SWOT analysis, the ACCESS model, the Lasswell formula) were compared and checked for integrity, feasibility and implementation in the overall context of organisational communications.

For each model, adequate case studies that were suggested by the authors of the respective model were analysed. With the insights gained from analysing the marketing concept and the case studies, the strengths and weaknesses of each existing Social Media concept were extracted and compared. Additionally, the insights gained from literature research on unique aspects of Social Media sociology, structures, technology and motivators for users to participate and generate content were considered.

The three concepts for organisational communications in Social Media were chosen from a variety of approaches for their clear structure and because they were equally based on theoretical research and practical experience. Each model has a unique approach and consists of different actions and methods for mastering each element in the strategy development process. The concepts were analysed with consideration of the following factors: situation analysis, definition of objectives, content strategy, platforms and tools, mobile channel, budget, time and resource planning, and performance measurement.

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