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# Organizational use of social media: The shift in communication, collaboration and decision-making

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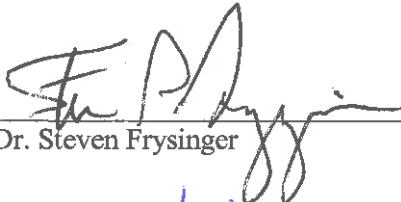
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Organizational use of social media: The shift in communication, collaboration and  
decision-making

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In

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## **Abstract**

### **Organizational use of social media: The shift in communication, collaboration and decision-making**

Social media has driven organizational communication, collaboration and decision-making in recent times. This thesis focuses first on the popularity and widespread usage of social media like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and how it has provided businesses with platforms to collaborate and communicate virtually. It then explores how organizations can implement social media for the purpose of external marketing and advertising, to connect to consumers and for the purpose of internal communications. For example, how can organizations tap the potential of social media and connect with consumers? Social media has provided organizations with opportunities for management of customer relationships, innovation, improved operations within the organization, and leadership. It has not only revolutionized internal communications, collaboration and decision-making in organizations, but it has also had a vast impact on almost all aspects of life. In the final sections of the thesis, some guidelines are discussed for organizations that decide to employ social media. The future of social media is rife with possibilities. The thesis concludes by demonstrating how tapping that potential for important corporate decisions will offer opportunities for businesses and will soon prove to be a transformative force by provoking a shift in communication, collaboration and decision-making.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Hurricane Sandy ravaged the east coast of the United States of America in 2012, and was the deadliest hurricane of the year and the second-costliest hurricane ever. Hurricane Sandy, however, marked a shift in emergency disaster management actions taken before, during and after the hurricane hit. Even before the disaster struck, most states with potentially affected areas had effectively used social media to prepare citizens for the onslaught. Some states declared disasters and warned people immediately via social media, in some cases days before the actual event took place. Throughout the duration of the disaster, the public turned to social media for help. They used social media sources extensively for updates and assistance required during the disaster.

However, the true potential of social media was manifest after the disaster was over and rescue efforts started. First responder agencies and utility companies used social media to receive orders regarding evacuation and emergency assistance. The New York Office of Emergency Management, NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg, and New Jersey governor Chris Christie all used their Facebook and Twitter accounts to relay updates about the disaster to the public and to provide aid and evacuation orders. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relied heavily on social media in addition to the traditional means of communication and information sharing. Digital broadcasts took precedence over the traditional means of broadcast such as print, television and radio. FEMA not only published a Sandy-specific webpage to update live information but also used Facebook and Twitter to provide information to the public before, during, and after Sandy made landfall (Cohen, 2013). The American Red Cross reached greater numbers of people by campaigning on social media sites



than they ever could in any disaster situation using conventional means. They received numerous donations from strangers and celebrities alike. The Red Cross established a team of 23 members who monitored posts regarding Hurricane Sandy, and was connected to an on-the-ground team of 4,500 volunteers via social media for follow-up during the crisis (Dewey, 2012).

It was not only these organizations that turned to social media to reach and help people in a time of disaster. Communities also used social media to reach out to individuals in need. Posts such as “More cleaning supplies needed at Mt. Loretto at 6581 Hylan Blvd,” and “Plenty of blankets available at 900 Richmond Rd for pick up,” guided organizations and individuals to come together and collaborate to help. A week after the disaster, volunteers recruited through social media cooked upwards of 10,000 meals a day for those affected by disaster through a movement called “Occupy Kitchen”. “Social media today is not about the tools, but the technology and behavior — virtual collaboration, information sharing and grassroots engagement — that transforms monologues into dialogues.” (Dewey, 2012) Social media tools provided a platform on which individuals and organizations could come together to communicate and collaborate to help in a dire situation.

Humans today live in a time of radical technological advance. Perhaps every generation feels exactly the same way. Today you find so-called smart phones, laptops, tablets, and various other electronic devices in the hands of many people you meet in the US and other developed nations. Everyone is constantly connected to each other via a many applications, websites and devices available on the go. Being ‘social’ has a whole new definition today. The world is connected through social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and a range of other interactive sites. Communication today has shifted rapidly from having a face-to-face

conversation to communicating through social media spawning new terms such as Facebooking, blogging, yelping, and tweeting. The virtual world has shrunk faster than anyone could have imagined 20 years ago. Finding long lost friends from high school, colleagues, relatives and connecting to them or with your loved ones over miles is as easy as a few taps and clicks (Macosenz & Ladougla, 2010).

A wide number of social media sites boast of hosting abundant data from micro-updates like personal events, job referrals, relationship status and private thoughts to music, pictures and personal home-movies. There are almost 200 million active blogs available online where people share their thoughts and opinions about a wide range of topics and where people with similar thoughts and opinions sometimes come for a healthy discussions about those ideas. The consumer adoption, across a range of ages, of these social media websites is very high. Table 1 shows the percentage of Internet users who use social media by age group.

**Table 1: % of Internet users that use social media by age group (Duggan, 2013)**

Age of user	% of Internet users using social media
18-29	83
30-49	77
50-64	52
65+	32

Even though the percentage of social media users decreases as age increases, more than 50% of the population younger than age 64 uses social media websites. (Duggan, 2013). So, it's no surprise that these tools have begun to weave their way into the

professional working environment (Macosenz & Ladougla, 2010). For many public and private organizations, implementation of social media is high on the agenda.

If millions of people are using social media, sharing content and offering their opinions online, how can organizations tap that potential and connect with consumers? Large companies have gone global and have businesses on almost all the continents of the world. Globalization, mobility and virtualization have become common trends. Collaborating to make business decisions, across the globe, is a top priority for many companies. Hence organizations could utilize the potential of social media and connect through a common social media platform where consumers and stakeholders can collaborate and make productive decisions (Macosenz & Ladougla, 2010).

However, it is becoming increasingly challenging for organizations to connect with employees and the consumers of their products. Traditionally, large corporations with significant brand recognition and established channels across the globe prospered because consumers simply bought the product because they identified the brand and trusted it. However, with the convergence of social media via Internet and mobile technology, this picture has changed. There has been a disruptive shift in the way people look at the market. Online reviews, instant feedback, expertise and experience of people who are connected to each other via social media have broken the boundaries of traditional marketing. Today a consumer has access to the reviews of millions of people online across the globe before they decide upon a product. The interesting part of this is that the corporations usually have no influence upon these reviews. Only if they can deliver a genuinely good product and give people a good experience using it, can they truly obtain the approval and business of millions of online users (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).

Hence it has become very important for corporations to take advantage of this vast network of users who are willing to share their opinion about various products online for free. If these corporations could make collaborative business decisions after receiving feedback from various social media websites, then their products could have a better chance of succeeding. The role of social media in collaborative decision-making is slowly increasing and it could grow exponentially as companies realize the potential that social media has to offer.

However, the potential of social media is not limited to simply obtaining information from customers and other external sources. Social media can also be used to connect upper management with each other and with their employees. Social media can be thought of as an electronic water cooler. It can be a place where all employees interact with each other, discuss creative ideas, and create inter-departmental and cross-divisional collaboration. This not only aids in decision-making, but also helps lead to greater innovation (Brandell, 2008).

One of the examples of such a collaborative effort is at Procter & Gamble (P&G). P&G, one of the largest companies in the world, uses social media sites extensively to connect with their employees and customers. They use RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds for distributing information about existing and new products to their customers. They use wikis to promote various collaborative efforts among their employees and blogs to communicate with their customers. They have also started their own social network for connecting their employees to various experts in their respective fields. (Lai & Turban, 2008)

As noted above, the employees of an organization who are connected via social media are revolutionizing the whole corporate outlook by engaging in flexible and dynamic

interactions, which weren't imaginable just a few years ago. Social media represents "...a new form of organization that offers unprecedented levels of flexibility and responsiveness and has the potential to revolutionize the workplace." (Harden, 2012).

This thesis will examine the use of social media in organizations for the purpose of communication, collaboration and decision-making. First, a literature review regarding social media and its history will be reviewed. Second, the use of social media in organizations will be described, as well as how organizations can effectively use social media for decision-making. Third, various technologies which can integrate social media into the workplace will be discussed. Currently available technologies will be listed as along with some custom social media technologies. Besides the various affordances of social media, the thesis will also explore potential disadvantages of using social media and how organizations could overcome them. Finally, guidelines that will help in unlocking the potential of social media of social media will be discussed.

## **Chapter 2: Decision-making**

### **2.1 Definition**

Decision-making is a process in which we identify and evaluate a problem and select potential solutions for the problem (Al-Tarawneh, 2012). We often make relatively unconscious decisions about our everyday problems which don't require advanced analysis (Chang, 2012). However, decision-making in management is an essential skill required for an organization to succeed. It can be seen as a routine activity for executives in an organization (Antunes, 2012). Decision-making is a dynamic process; once the problem is identified, the best course of action must be selected and implemented. Depending on organizational structure, decision-making is either a group or an individual process.

Regardless of whether it is a group or an individual process, decision-making can be divided into the following steps:

- Defining the problem
- Determining requirements
- Establishing goals
- Identifying alternatives
- Defining criteria
- Selecting decision-making tools
- Evaluating alternatives against criteria
- Validating solutions against the problem statement

(Al-Tarawneh, 2012)

In many organizations there are layers of hierarchy, where decisions are made at the executive level and then passed down to other employees. In this scenario, the

decision process is not always clear to all employees in an organization. Most often their job is just to implement that decision. On the other hand, some organizations provide a certain level of independence to their employees to make the decision-making process more decentralized. This not only helps the organizations to democratize the decision-making process, but also gives employees the satisfaction of being heard (Al-Tarawneh, 2012).

## **2.2 Communication and information sharing in decision-making**

Whether decisions are made by a group of employees or by executive leaders, communication and information sharing between individuals participating in decision-making is very important. If communication is thorough and accurate, decisions tend to be more informed and effective. For organizations that practice a top-down approach, where only top executives make decisions, relevant processes and requirements are communicated downward to employees via a hierarchical chain of management. In this approach information is shared with employees on a need-to-know basis, through one-on-one communication with their manager. In other words most of the employees are not part of the decision-making process, but are only aware of the partial information given to them (Van Zly, 2008). This lack of information sharing and communication can lead to tensions within the organization and delay decision effectiveness. The decision-making process is improved when all employees feel that their contributions are being respected. Often, a good management decision-making process involves cooperative communication and equal exchange of information between all levels of the organization. This is exemplified in a bottom up approach to decision-making. Such an approach includes a number of employees working together, collaborating on finding an appropriate solution to a problem. In

this approach every level of the organization holds different information and shares it with others. Hence, every level of the organization will have knowledge of what went into a particular decision (Al-Tarawneh, 2012). Increasingly in many organizations knowledge is gathered using social media applications. Information gathered using social media tools could be biased, unreliable or even false, in contrast to manuals and procedures created and vetted by experienced personnel. Employees have to be vigilant in communicating and information gathering tools over social media (Van Zly, 2008).

### **2.3 Collaborative decision-making**

In general, more information on a topic may lead to a better understanding of that topic. In a work environment, by sharing information, values and preferences, people can build their knowledge, which can result in making better decisions. In collaborative decision-making, various groups of people come together to access the pool of knowledge, and communicate by various means (Mirakaj, 2010). Decision-making performed via collaboration should not stop at integrating different systems or data sources. It should also provide tools to bring people together to interact so they can produce collaborative solutions (Littleson, 2008).

Collaborative decision-making is an integral part of a modern organization. In today's competitive market, the decision-making process is crucial. Collaborative efforts of employees within the organization as well as experts outside of the organization are often required. With the improvement of information and communication systems, collaborative efforts have become much easier to implement. These tools allow employees the flexibility of working from anywhere, providing access to all the information sources, and connecting them with others in the organization.



Collaboration requires managing information, proper analysis of that information, and discussion (Littleton, 2008). Discussions via tools such as email, instant messaging and notification services facilitate conversations between decision makers to solve a problem (Mirakaj, 2010). However, people or organizations cannot solely rely on basic tools such as email and instant messaging to stay informed and make decisions. With the rate at which global markets and enterprises are evolving, collaborating within organizations is simply not enough.

Email is a form of dialogue in which one person communicates with one person or a group of people asynchronously. It can be a long tedious process to work on a collaborative project by email. Also, only the people who send and receive the emails are part of the communications. In contrast, with social media the communication is visible to all (if the user so chooses), and the content is editable which makes it a viable collaborative tool and easily searchable for future decision-making. Phone calls and instant messengers are also simple dialogues between two or a few people and are not broadly collaborative nor easily accessible by others. Social media tools allow information to flow in multiple directions, keeping both executive and employee informed.

Organizations should evolve with the market and utilize new tools to enhance their collaborative process. There are many social media tools which can enhance collaborative decision-making process. With the use of social media tools, organizations can provide real time information and data to all the decision makers, and also reach out to their customers. Organizations have to take ever-changing customer opinion and needs into consideration.

Thus collaborative business decisions cannot be made in isolation. The decision-

making process in any organization will have to involve different collaborative tools. These tools will not only make collaboration and decision-making simpler and faster but also more effective and efficient.

A case study of a large entertainment company (NBC Universal) shows the importance of using social media for communication and collaboration. The company uses a social media application called Chatter, which is part of the enterprise platform provided by salesforce.com. The entertainment company now uses this platform for internal communications to fill 2 million advertising spots across 15 TV channels. Earlier they had problems coordinating among various departments of the company and there were regular disconnects between the sales and marketing teams. The sales team never had a clear understanding of what slots were available and they could not sell them efficiently. But with the advent of Chatter the communication between marketing and sales teams improved dramatically. The sales team could view all advertisers and advertising spots available to them and interact with other teams in the company to fill slots efficiently. This case study shows the impact of social media for internal communications and collaboration in organizations (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

### **2.3.1 Need for collaborative technology**

In face-to-face meetings, one of the objectives of collaborative technology is to enhance meetings (e.g. use of interactive smart boards in group meetings). However, the intent of many collaborative technologies is to support and enable a meeting between isolated participants. Collaborative technologies can make information equally available to all the participants and facilitate many participants working on a common project simultaneously. It allows individuals to participate and put forward their ideas without waiting or getting blocked by other individuals. Another feature of

collaborative technologies is that they record all discussions between employees working on a mutual project. This eliminates the burden of a specific individual keeping track of all the information and controlling its dissemination. Since, employees can follow progress on the project simultaneously, it allows them to create a work structure that teams can follow to perform various tasks (Dennis, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Web 2.0**

Various collaborative applications are based on Web 2.0 platforms. The term Web 2.0 applies to a dynamic web that lets individuals interact online. Web 2.0 is marked by the transition from static HTML web pages to more interactive and collaborative web applications such as blogs, wikis, video sharing, mash-ups, and social networking sites. The most significant advantages of Web 2.0 for organizations include user-generated content, free information sharing, web-based communities of users and improved collaboration with internal users (employees and management) and external users (consumers) (Lai and Turban, 2008). Other features of Web 2.0 include the opportunity to utilize the collective intelligence of employees, provide productive organizational communication, and produce “mash ups” of current applications to create new ones. A mash up is where a single website or application uses contents from different sources to produce a new service.

### **2.3.3 Enterprise 2.0**

In an effort to keep employees informed and to utilize everyone’s unique expertise, companies have begun to utilize Web 2.0 technologies. Enterprise 2.0, a term coined by Andrew MacAfee, characterizes the implementation of social media in an organization. Enterprise 2.0 applications hold great potential for organizations to improve their collaborative communication and knowledge management. Enterprise 2.0 technologies offer a “bottom-up” approach for organizations where all the content

distributed and retrieved from social media sites are produced by collaboration (Antunes, 2012). Organizations can utilize Enterprise 2.0 applications to create a collaborative work environment for their employee's regardless of their physical location.

Decision-making is an essential part of an organization. Whether the decision-making is done individually or in a group, it requires a lot of communication and collaboration by people within an organization. Collaborating within organizations leads to better understanding of the problem at hand and organizations can reach an appropriate decision more effectively and efficiently. To facilitate these means of communication and collaboration, there is a need for collaborative technology within organizations. Social media, which is developed on the platforms of Web 2.0, is one of the means that facilitates the organizational needs for decision-making. Chapter 3 explores the origins and growth of various social media technologies and how these technologies can integrate with the organization's needs. It also explores the existing technologies available and custom technologies, which could be developed for decision-making purpose.

## **Chapter 3: Social Media**

### **3.1 Definition**

Social media, created with Web 2.0 technology, is a means of personal and public communication through the use of various networking software and websites. However there have been disagreements over the scope and meaning of the term social media (Power and Phillips-Wren, 2011). Every researcher seemingly has their own definition of social media, which varies as different and newer technologies become available.

Before the evolution of social media post the Internet 2.0, as we all know it, the roots of social media go much deeper to almost 18<sup>th</sup> century Victorian era. An 1849 publication of ‘Anecdotes of The Telegraph’ reported an incident of a marriage ceremony being conducted of a bride in Boston and the groom in New York via telegraph. Well before the advent of Facebook, 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers used to run snippets in newspapers of briefly-glanced strangers and tried to connect them. In 1961, DC Comics used to post names and address of people (who wished to be identified) whose letters were published. Comic book enthusiasts could connect with each other this way and a network of connections emerged via comic books. This gave rise to popular comic book conventions. In 1960’s and 1970’s hackers known as “phone phreaks” used to hack telephone networks and initially used to make long distance calls for free. However, it later evolved into a chat-room style conference call network, where these phone phreaks connected people over phone calls for a live group interaction. These are some of the instances of the origins of social media before the advent of Internet 2.0, which explains the desire for communication and collaboration (Whitehouse, 2012).

Post evolution of Internet 2.0, the definitions of social media changed drastically.

Kaplan and Haenlein's definition of social media fits best in post Internet 2.0 era. They define social media 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 and Haenlein, 2010), and which can be divided into six different categories:

1. Collaborative projects
2. Blogs and micro-blogs
3. Content communities
4. Social networking sites
5. Virtual game worlds
6. Virtual social worlds

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

On other hand Mangold and Faulds (Mangold and Faulds, 2009) described social media more broadly. According to them, social media can encompass every software program or website with which a person shares ideas, thoughts, pictures, audio, music, video and other content. They have subcategorized social media into 15 different categories, which includes the following (Mangold and Faulds, 2009):

1. Social Networking Sites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, Faceparty)
2. Creative works sharing sites:
  - Video sharing sites (YouTube)
  - Photo sharing sites (Flickr)
  - Music sharing sites (Jamendo)
  - Content sharing combined with assistance (Piczo)

- General intellectual property sharing sites (Creative Commons)
3. User-sponsored blogs (Cnet.com)
  4. Company sponsored websites/blogs (Apple Weblog)
  5. Company-sponsored cause/help sites (click2quit.com)
  6. Invitation-only social networks (ASmallWorld.net)
  7. Business networking sites (LinkedIn)
  8. Collaborative websites (Wikipedia)
  9. Virtual Worlds (Second Life)
  10. Commerce Communities (eBay, Amazon, Craigslist, iStockphoto)
  11. Podcasts
  12. News delivery sites (Current TV)
  13. Educational material sharing (MIT Open Course Ware, TED)
  14. Open Source Software communities (Linux, Mozilla)
  15. Social bookmarking sites allowing users to recommend online news stories, music, videos etc. (Digg, Reddit)

Kaplan and Haenlien describe social media in a very concise and direct manner, which appeals to people well versed with technology. On the other hand Mangold and Faulds' definition of social media is very broad and helps the uninitiated understand the internet-centric definition of social media.

### **3.2 History of social media**

To understand social media we need to explore its history. The Internet started out as a giant Bulletin Board System (BBS) that allowed users to exchange software, data, messages, and news with each other (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In 1979, Duke University graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis came up with the idea of networked communication over computers for exchange of information. This idea was implemented in 1980 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and “Usenet” was launched worldwide, which was the first genuine attempt at social networking. Various discussion groups were held covering a wide variety of topics from humanities, sciences, business, politics, computers, and other areas. The discussion forums on these websites were called “newsgroups” (Goldsborough, 2005).

By 1992, Internet became one of the most popular networking tools, which linked researchers and educators. Marc Andreessen headed a team at NSF centers which successfully developed a browser to develop NCA Mosaic or popularly known as Mosaic. In less than 18 months of its introduction, Mosaic became the browser of choice for almost over a million users. This set off an exponential growth in the area of decentralizing information and connecting people and led to the development of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer. (Andreessen, 1993)

Founded in October 1998 by Bruce Ableson and Susan Ableson, “Open Diary” was the next attempt at social networking. This website brought together people from various fields who wrote diaries or blogs, as we now call them, on a common platform to share their views and perspectives on various topics (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

As the Internet matured and became more widely available in the late 1990’s, there



was an explosion of Social Media websites. Figure 1 gives a graphic timeline of this dramatic growth.

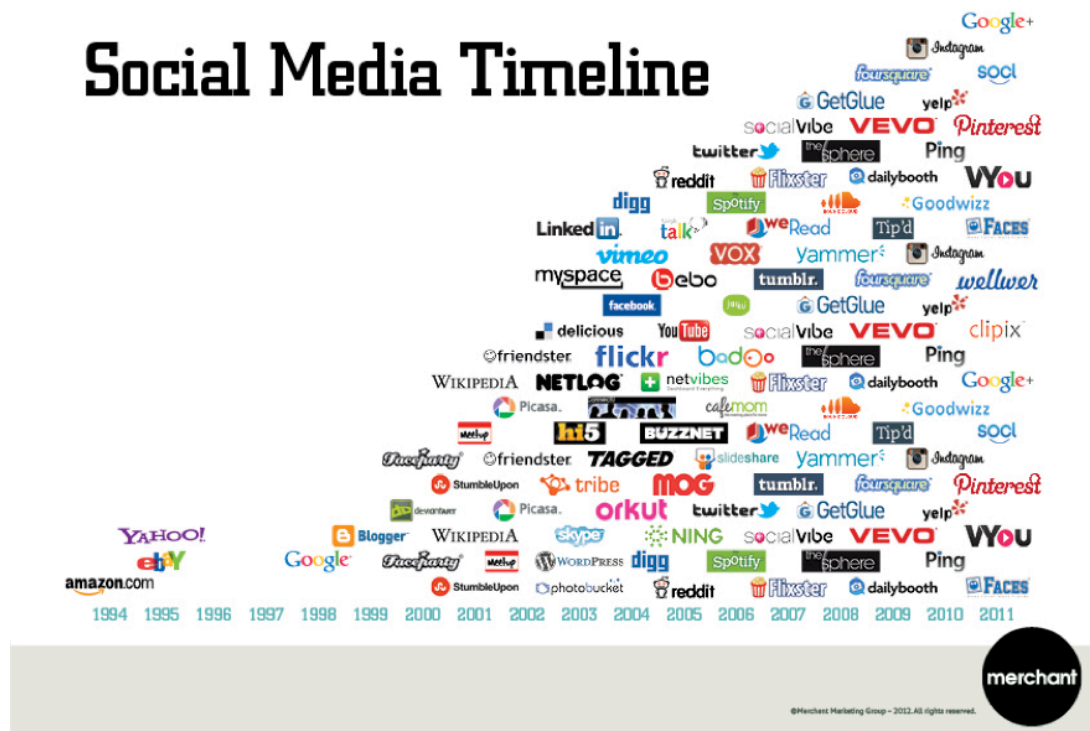
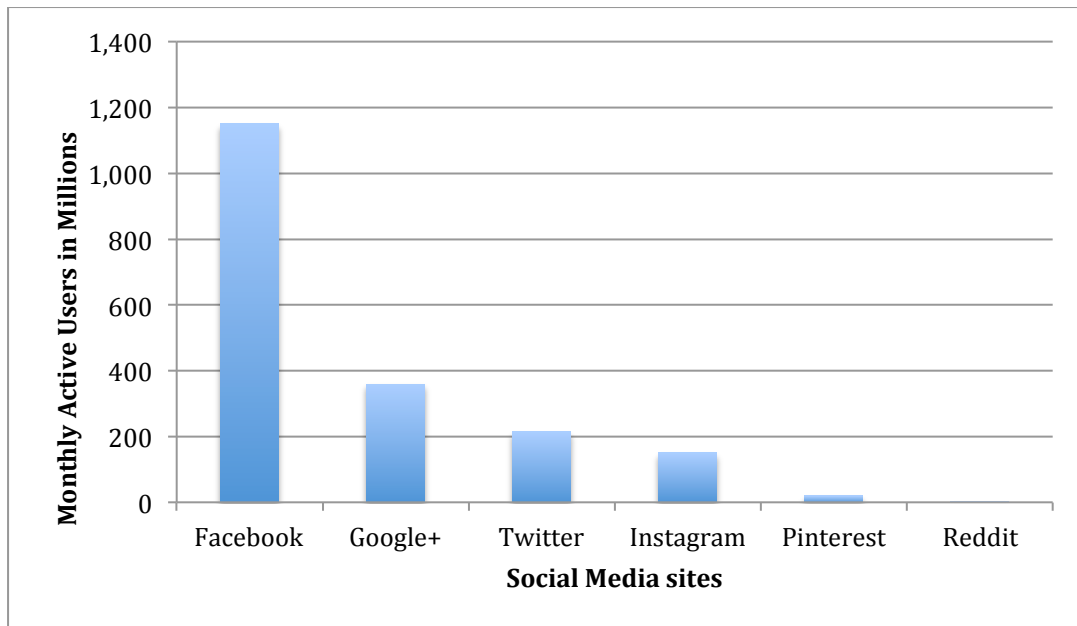


Figure 1: Timeline of various social media sites between 1994-2011 (Dec, 2012)

In 1999, social media websites like Blogger and Faceparty appeared, and post-2000, Wikipedia, Picasa, Friendster, Flickr and other sites were created. The number of active monthly users each of these social media sites generates is given below. The social networking site Facebook is currently one of the leaders in social media, with video sharing site YouTube a close second.



**Figure 2: Number of monthly active users for various social media sites (as of January 2014)**

Source: <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2014/01/17/20-social-media-facts-and-statistics-you-should-know-in-2014/>

### 3.3 Growth of social networking

A revolution in social networking came with the advent of newer social networking websites, based on Web 2.0. In 2002, Friendster used the concept of degrees of separation. It promoted the idea of social networking by creating rich bonds among people who knew each other directly or via certain friends and provided a common platform for them for social interaction. With the success of Friendster, many other social networking sites followed. LinkedIn, launched in 2003, created a professional platform for work-based interaction. It is more than a mere playground for teenagers and classmates. LinkedIn is a serious platform for working people who want to connect with other professionals and to expand their contact networks. As of January 2014, LinkedIn reported 300 million registered users on its website (<https://www.linkedin.com/about-us>). MySpace, which was also launched in 2003, has almost 10 times fewer (36 million as on October 2013) monthly active users than LinkedIn. However, Facebook, launched in 2004 for Harvard students and opened to the general public in 2006, is currently the most frequented social networking website.

As of September 2014, Facebook claims 1.35 billion active users (<https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>). To put this number in perspective, if Facebook was a country it would be the second most populous nation, second only to China.

### **3.4 Impact of social media**

The impact of social media has been dramatic. Various studies performed by “the Pew Internet Project” and Madden and Zickuhr in 2011, found that 85% of Internet users in the age groups of 18 to 29 use social networking sites, of which almost 61% use them on a daily basis. The significant usage of social media has not only increased among young adults but also has increased substantially in the older age group of 50 to 64. Social networking site users in the age category of 50 to 64 has more than doubled from a mere 25% in 2009 to 51% in 2011, in terms of the percentage of people who use social media over those who use the Internet overall). Social media sites have become so popular that, among all the web-based applications, only email and search engines have reported more user traffic. The usage of social media has clearly increased in all age groups and continues to do so (Tess, 2013).

As consumers spend more time on social media sites, their decision-making is being influenced by content on these sites. Observing this vast potential and ever-increasing user base of social media sites, many public and private organizations use social media for interpersonal communications and public relations. A study by McCorkindale in 2009 found that almost 69% of the Fortune 500 companies use social media either for organizational communications or for public relations (Macnamara, 2012).

As noted earlier, social media has come a long way since 2002. People around the

world have been using it and sites like Facebook have reported 1.35 billion monthly active users worldwide as on September 2014 (<https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>). Renren, the Facebook of China, itself reports 219 million monthly active users as on September 2014 (<http://www.renren-inc.com/en/>). But how can this huge base of potential consumers be useful for organizations? The next chapter discusses the opportunities provided by social media for organizations. It discusses how organizations can benefit from social media and how they can use the platform of social media for marketing their goods and services and also for internal communications, collaboration, and decision-making.

## **Chapter 4: Social media and decision-making**

### **4.1 Need for social media in decision-making in organizations**

Social media by design is created to bring individuals closer to one another. In organizations, it is used to build a community for employees to work together for decision-making process. According to Kathryn Yates, global leader of communication consulting at Tower Watson, “As the need for global collaboration increases, we expect more companies will join those already leveraging social media to creatively communicate messages.” (Emerman, 2013). As organizations expand globally, the number of remote employees and partners also increases. Social media provides a bridge for isolated employees to come together, and enables them to be a part of larger organizational community, where they can not only collaborate but also engage in an organization’s performance, culture and values.

According to research by Tower and Watson, to maintain a growing number of remote workers, organizations need to connect them with their leaders, managers, and other colleagues, and social media tools can provide just that connection. Even though there exist tools such as phones, emails, instant messengers etc., none of these are broad-based, collaborative tools, which are required by remote workers. Even with advancement and ease of availability of social media tools, this survey reports that only about half of employees surveyed use various social media tools for internal communication. Furthermore, there is little agreement about which social media tools are most effective among those employees. If organizations wish to build a community that facilitates employees and leaders coming together, they need to start experimenting with a wide array of social media tools and find tools that best fit their organizational need (Emerman, 2013).

In order to establish a mandate for appropriate social media, organizations first have

to recognize the ways in which social media can be effectively utilized. Organizations can use social media tools in three different ways to fulfill their objective of collaborative decision-making and communication.

The first role of social media in organizations is for external marketing and advertising. Various companies launch online campaigns on Facebook, Twitter and MySpace and try to target as many relevant audiences as they can. Traditionally, an organization had to pay millions of dollars for advertisements on television, in newspapers and on radio to reach their customers. However with social media, organizations can either take up paid advertisements on sites or create pages or groups in which people voluntarily enroll and receive updates about new products and campaigns. The use of social media platforms for advertising and marketing increases organizations' reach dramatically.

For example, a small South African winery, Stormhoek Vineyards, increased its sales substantially by creating groups for wine tasting parties using wikis and blogs. Social media can revolutionize marketing not only for the large established players who can reach their customers by spending millions on paid advertisements, but also for small start-ups who engage their customers via free publicity using social media sites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

This brings us to the second role of social media, which is enabling consumers to talk to each other directly. Importantly, companies have little control over the communication between the users. They generally cannot selectively block out the bad comments and promote only the good ones. Hence the consumers receive authentic opinions of other consumers via social media. Traditionally, whenever there was a dissatisfied customer, they might go around telling their friends, who in turn might share the criticism with their friends. This had a limited reach and sometimes

the original review might not reach a broad audience. With a social media platform, whenever there is a dissatisfied consumer, they can post their story (whether it's true or not) and it may become viral and quickly reach thousands or even millions of users on the Internet. This has far-reaching effects for both consumers and companies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). However, the important point to note here is that the authenticity of the content of the post is questionable.

The third role of social media is internal communication for an organization. Social media can revolutionize the way communications takes place within an organization. Up until now, the various forms of business communication, such as emails, phone calls, company intranet, instant messages, and personal or group meetings are some of the means of communication used in organizations. To analyze how internal communications within an organization can be revolutionized, we will first explore how information is handled in social media. Any form of information or content generated on social media is visible to everyone who has access to the same social media site. Hence information is not restricted to only a few people within an organization, but is shared with everyone (if the user so chooses). Content and information generated on social media sites is non-perishable. Unlike phone calls or personal meetings where the information is not necessarily archived after being created, any information on social media site is logged and recorded forever, until it is consciously destroyed by the creator. Thus, if rules and regulations of companies are generated on social media sites, any employee can have access to them at any time and will not have to ask others regarding them. These non-perishable data are always increasing on social media. Hence, the logs and content created since the adoption of social media are stored and can be viewed for any reference purpose. However, such

abundant data can sometimes be overwhelming for employees and it is possible to not find certain important data when required simply because of its vast abundance. The ability to edit the content is also one of the interesting aspects of social media, since others can constantly improve content created by one person until a final product is created. This is important when some content requires collaborative efforts and technical inputs across various departments (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Importantly, all the edits can easily be tracked to their creator, so due credit can be given individually. As mentioned above the information or content on social media is unrestricted, visible to all, non-perishable, editable, reusable, re-analyzable and easy to search. All these features make the organization a “socially resilient enterprise” since all the tracking, recording, analyzing and reusing of past interaction makes internal communications more effective and efficient.

Studies by Millen, and Feinberg in 2006 and Mejova, Schepper Bergman and Lu in 2011 showed that whenever employees need to search for any information for a particular decision-making purpose, they tend to initially search existing tags and bookmarks saved on social media sites or search for an internal file within the existing repository. In this way archiving of information over time on social media sites not only makes the decision-making process prompt but also easy (Treem, 2012).

Much research has been performed on IBM’s social media site where researchers found that the use of internal blogs, wikis, social tagging and social networking site not only helped employees to communicate with each other across buildings but also to share their content across different departments and organizational boundaries. It has been noted that the comments obtained on blogs of employees have not only had far reaching effects in decision-making but have also helped create tighter relationships within the organization. Another study performed on IBM’s social



media site found that the use and reuse of existing social tags and content coincided with the formation of communities of practice. These communities of practice helped the organization in creating abundant and useful data, which was not only useful at that moment but could also be useful later on. Hence the availability of such important data created and stored on social media sites will help in decision-making not only immediately, but for years to come (Treem, 2012). The use of social media for internal communications can be considered as one of its major roles.

There are multiple ways that social media can be useful in organizations for decision-making. Here are some hypothetical situations which can occur in organizations:

#### 1. No time for decisions

Imagine that an employee received an unexpected request from a customer. He or she needs to address this problem immediately and has to obtain inputs from five other decision makers in his company. They unfortunately have no time to schedule a meeting with these people and need to make an urgent decision. They can immediately use social media software that connects them to their colleagues and post queries online. They immediately start receiving opinions of colleagues and can make the decision (Ullman, 2011).

#### 2. Managing virtual decision-making events

An individual needs to collect information from 100 of their colleagues and needs to compile those data and present them to their employer within a week's time. Traditionally they would need to organize an event, call every colleague, hold a meeting and ask everyone to fill in forms or email the survey to these 100 colleagues. Later they would need to compile all that data and submit it to their employer. Rather

with the help of social media, they can simply create an online poll and connect all of their 100 colleagues, regardless of location, and ask them to fill in an online survey. This survey automatically shows the compiled data and the work is done only with a few clicks, taking collaboration to the next level (Ullman, 2011). Even though online polling is not directly social media, one can use social media to spread the word of the poll, so you get more responses by connecting to a large group of people, simultaneously.

Here are key aspects that summarize the need for social media in organizations:

1. Compiling HR reports for companies spread over various continents (Ullman, 2011).
2. Reducing consulting costs by connecting to specialist opinions online and obtaining their feedback (Ullman, 2011).
3. Making transparent decisions in which not only every employee but also the consumers feel that they were a part of that decision-making process (Ullman, 2011).
4. Help managers better understand trends and customer opinions (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011).
5. Predict and influence consumer behaviors for products and services (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011).
6. Act as communication-driven decision support systems (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011).
7. Attract younger users and get them involved with decision-making (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011).
8. Attract diverse and large numbers of participants for surveys (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011).

9. Allow information to flow in multiple directions (Ghafoor and Martin, 2012).
10. Help employees to participate in and monitor online discussions that can be useful in picking out problem points (Ghafoor and Martin, 2012).

As noted above the importance of social media in organizations is expected to grow over the next few years. Even though organizations have just started adopting social media, many leaders are enthusiastic about its value. (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012a).

## **4.2 Questions to be addressed**

As pointed out earlier, the importance of and need for social media in businesses is growing. However, since it is in its nascent stages in this venue, managers and decision makers are skeptical about adopting the new technology. They have concerns regarding implementation of social media as a serious mode for business communication, collaboration and marketing, rather than a social tool for passing time. Here are a few of the concerns raised by CEO's & managers in a study by Bulmer & Di Mauro and by MIT & Deloitte:

1. How does one use social media for decision-making? How does one integrate social media with their business? (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012a).
2. Is social media regarded as a trustworthy source of information? Can managers use social media for important business decisions based on surveys results obtained on social media? Can social media connect effectively with genuine end users of the products? (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).
3. How secure is the information on social media? Can employees and managers use social media without the worry of information pilferage?
4. Does social media provide an environment where employees and managers can access information, advice and engage in collaborative decision-making? Can

social media provide such a complex platform where important business collaboration takes place efficiently and effectively? (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).

5. In what ways is social media a better platform than the traditional means of off-line networking? Can it replace the traditional means and provide a better means for networking? (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).
6. What are the tools available on social media for professionals to make decisions? Will they be user-friendly and easy to use for professionals? (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).
7. Can social media change not only networking and communications but also enterprise-level operations? (Bulmer & DiMauro, 2009).
8. What are the internal barriers that managers have to face for the adoption of social media in their organizations? (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).
9. Do the managers and leaders possess the tools to drive the adoption? (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b)

These are just few of the concerns raised regarding the implementation of social media in organizations. These queries are discussed and analyzed in the remainder of the paper.

### **4.3 Current perceptions of social media for decision-making in organizations**

Social media technologies have supplied a new mode of collaboration and communication tools for businesses. However the level of acceptance of these tools varies from firm to firm. For many organizations implementation of these tools is still in the early stages. According to Kruschwitz, a number of organizations lack an understanding of social media and thus fail to integrate it in their organization. Also, leaders of other industries don't feel a need to change their traditional and currently

effective ways.

The potential of social media in organizations has been realized by leading researchers at various universities. Professor Wanda Orlikowski from the MIT Sloan School of Management believes that social media is the future of decision-making and “Companies need to get started because this is here and it’s here to stay, especially for the Millennial Generation. This is what they are used to.” (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b). Gerald Kane from the Carroll School of Management at Boston College feels that social media has gone beyond the phase where it can only be considered hype or a passing fad. He firmly believes that social media is here to stay and is going to be the future of decision-making in organizations. He feels that, “Any new technology experiences a faddish hype cycle where people adopt it because they feel they have to. With social [media], we are passing the peak of faddishness. Companies are starting to crack social [media]’s code and turning to it for business advantage, intelligence and insight.” (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013). A scientist at MIT and author of the book *Enterprise 2.0*, Andrew McAfee also feels that social media is going to be massive for all organizations for decision-making. He says that, “I have never spoken to an executive or a manager who says, ‘I just long for the days when we collaborated in the old style and e-mail was all we had and nobody had a voice. Man, that was so fantastic. Let’s please go back there.’” (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

MIT Sloan Management Review conducted a survey in collaboration with Deloitte, to elucidate the perception of decision-makers in the organizations with regard to the implementation of social media for decision-making. Around 3,500 managers, business executives, and analysts from organizations around the world participated in the survey. It was concluded that only 18% of the people surveyed thought that social

media is important for decision-making today. However, almost 63% believe that it will be important for their organizations within three years (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012a; Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

In another survey by MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte, they found that only 20% of the CEO's, CFO's and CIO's of various organizations said social media is useful in 2011. However, within a year's time, in their 2012 survey, 35% of them agreed that social media is important for their organizations. A majority of the surveyed executives do feel that social media does indeed have the potential to transform traditional means of working (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013).

According to the survey by MIT and Deloitte, the largest and the smallest scale organizations show the highest success rate, almost twice the rate as compared to medium scale organizations, in implementing social media for decision-making. The small organizations do not possess the financial resources for promoting themselves via traditional marketing. Hence executives and decision-makers find social media an attractive platform for marketing. This makes the managers and executives from organizations of small size more open towards implementing social media for decision-making. For large-scale organizations, social media is just another means of connecting to the consumers, with which they can project themselves as a small and intimate company who cares about each and every loyal consumer of their products. Top managers and executives in large organizations are open to adopting social media to make their organizations friendlier and more intimate (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b). Medium scale organizations, on the other hand may not have strong management support for immediate adoption of social media.

The perception regarding social media also differs by industry. Media and technology

industries are some of the early adopters of social media. The culture of an industry plays an important role in adoption. The decision makers of these industries consider themselves innovative and open to new ideas. Hence these managers are adopting social media for connecting not only with suppliers and consumers but also with employees within the organization for decision-making. The perception among the managers in an organization plays an important role when it comes to the successful implementation of social media in organizations for business decision-making (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012a; Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

#### **4.4 Advantages of using social media for decision-making**

To illustrate the importance and advantage of social media in today's businesses, consider the case of the McDonald's restaurant chain. A mother tweeted to McDonald's Twitter site that when they had ordered a Happy Meal, her four-year-old son received a girl's toy 'The Littlest Pet Shop' instead of the boy's toy 'Wolverine' and this caused a problem in her household. In response to this tweet, McDonald's, an active user of social media, immediately dispatched a boy's toy to the child. On receiving this toy, the mother was so happy that she posted this incident on a blog. It turned out that the mother's blog was very popular and had almost 50,000 followers. Now the mother frequently tweets regarding McDonald's and personally defends McDonald's against critics. By using social media, McDonald's not only made one customer happy but also found a marketing tool that promoted McDonald's for little cost. This illustrates the power of making one customer happy on social media, and exemplifies the use of social media in organizations for the role of marketing (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

Another case study comes from the same entertainment company, NBC Universal,

that gained advantage by integrating social media in their organization. In 2011, a cruise ship had run aground along the coast of Italy. The media company's executive received this update on his email late at night. He used Chatter to connect to various other executives at the media company, and was able to pull all cruise advertisements planned for that day. He realized that there would be negative publicity for cruise companies and they would lose rather than gain any advantage by advertising on that day. The media executive was able to make prompt, collaborative decisions using social media. The cruise companies called a few hours later asking for their advertisements to be pulled. It would have been too late by that time to pull out the advertisements, but the media executive could gladly say that the job was already done (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

As noted in these case studies, the advantages of using social media in organizations can be substantial. Four key areas have been identified where social media plays a crucial role in an organization for decision-making:

1. Managing customer relationships

Social media has revolutionized the way companies connect with their consumers. Companies are active on existing social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter where they regularly monitor and post content related to new products or updates on existing products, engaging customers with various offers and promotions. This creates virtual communities of loyal consumers. This form of marketing has the advantages of bearing a very low cost as compared to paid marketing on television, and targeting the appropriate audience rather than bombarding everyone with paid advertisements. Also, social media can engage consumers in a two-way dialogue rather than the traditional monologue form of marketing. By doing so, consumers feel



that their voices are heard by the company and they are helping shape the company's offerings, and in return the company receives valuable feedback from their loyal and trustworthy consumer base. For Example, McDonalds has a blog called "Open for Discussion" (<http://community.aboutmcdonalds.com/>), in which users can come together to share comments on social responsibility regarding sustainability. Various customers, suppliers, and employees make contributions and share their stories and experiences from around the world (Lai & Turban, 2008). The aggregate feedback obtained from consumers via social media is considered trustworthy, as the opinion reflects not just one person's judgment but thousands or potentially millions of people's feedback all compiled in one place (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

## 2. Innovation

Organizations use social media for innovation by obtaining new ideas and modifying existing products and services. Innovation is one of the major advantages of social media in organizations and has been rated as the second-most important feature by various CEO's and executives (Kruschwitz, 2012). Employees can participate in providing their insights to the executives and decision-makers. Previously executives made the decisions with little input from employees and rarely any input from the end users of the products. According to MIT professor Eric von Hippel, "This traditional innovation paradigm is fundamentally flawed," (Von Hippel, Ogawa & P.J. de Jong, 2011). With the advent of social media, executives and decision-makers have access to opinions from their employees as well as opinions, feedbacks and reviews from loyal consumers of the product. According to von Hippel, "Consumers themselves are a major source of product innovations." (Von Hippel, Ogawa & P.J. de Jong, 2011). Many organizations have already adopted the approach of using social media and

connecting to consumers for innovations. Volvo, Nike, Lego and Threadless (a Chicago-based clothing manufacturer and retailer) are a few of the companies that are using ‘virtual consumer environments’ to bring innovative changes to their products (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

One major organization that benefited greatly from the use of social media tools is Lego. Lego Group, a Danish toy manufacturer, used Lego Cusoo (<http://lego.cusoo.com/>), a social media tool with which Lego fans could submit their ideas for new product designs and Lego enthusiasts could vote on those ideas. One fan suggested that Lego should incorporate a wildly popular social media game called Minecraft and develop a Minecraft Micro World. This idea received a huge number of votes and management decided to adopt this idea. Lego Cusoo turned out to be more than a way to connect to consumers and achieve a greater level of intimacy with them. It turned out to be an innovation tool with which new development ideas came not only from management, but also from actual end users of the toy. Lego gave the consumers a say in product development and distribution strategies. Lego Cusoo has turned out to be a great innovative tool for the organization (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012a).

### 3. Operations within organizations

Operations are another key aspect in which social media can bring about significant change in an organization. Simply by connecting employees to each other in the most efficient manner, valuable information can flow into and within the organization. To truly understand the problem of operations within an organization, Hewlett-Packard CEO Lew Platt’s comment in 1998 is most apt: “If only HP knew what HP knows, we’d be three times more productive”. Social media can simplify the traditional

dissemination process, by making the required information available immediately, connecting to various people inside the organizations promptly and sharing and compiling the information efficiently (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b). Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company uses social media for their internal operations with which an employee can potentially connect to every other employee in the organization. A case study of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company is described in more detail later in the paper.

#### 4. Leadership

Social media has the potential to change leadership in two distinct areas: strategic insight and execution. Executives can analyze the successes or failures of new products by obtaining feedback from Facebook and Twitter feeds. Consumers promptly post complaints and reviews of new products on social media sites well before the complaint or warranty department hears about them. This gives the decision-makers and leaders valuable insight as to what should be their next step or plan of action. They can immediately connect to other executives in different departments via social media and can execute a plan of action without any delay. Social media helps the leaders to sharpen their vision and extend their reach at the same time (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b). SAP's developer ecosystem is one of the social tools with which developers seek each other's input.

#### **4.5 Challenges in adopting social media in organizations**

The study by Gartner in 2009 (Smith, Cain, Mann, et al 2009) revealed that the failure rate in adopting social media in organizations is as high as 70%. Gartner has attributed this high failure rate to various factors such as lack of a clear understanding of how social media works, limited vision regarding the integration of social media in

an organizations' daily work flow, lack of management support for adoption and using social media to help solve business problems.

In 2003, Gourville listed several rules of thumb explaining the reasons consumers do not accept change very easily when it comes to switching from an existing product to some new improved product (Gourville, 2003). Gourville claims that a consumer underestimates the advantages of a new technology by a factor of three while they overestimate the advantages of older existing technology by another factor of three. Hence any new technology has to overcome this nine-fold barrier before consumers readily adopt the new technology (Van Zly, 2008). The challenges in adopting social media in organizations can be broadly divided into four categories, explored below.

**A. Lack of management understanding, support and push:**

Given that social media is still a relatively new concept for organizations, managers are very cautious in their approach towards it. Rather than introducing social media tools in their organizations, they are tempted to wait until the social media technology is more mature. However, according to experts in the area, taking a step back and waiting until the technology matures is not the right move (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012b). This strategy may leave the organization a few steps behind their competitors in innovation, and put them at a disadvantage in customer relations management. Lack of support and push from upper management for trying new social technology can hold firms back in achieving the potential of social media in their organizations. MIT professor Alex (Sandy) Pentland points out, "Like any emerging technology trend, social business can seem perpetually just out of reach. Let's wait a year; the thinking goes. It's not quite real, not quite ready for prime time. If that's your approach to social business, you may be overestimating the amount of effort it takes to start putting this trend to work for your organization today." (Pentland, 2012).

**B. Time required in information sharing:**

Keeping up with several social media sites and constantly updating information on them can be very time consuming. Employees have limited time to update/share their expertise on social media sites, even though they are aware that sharing and documenting their expertise can ultimately prove beneficial for their organization. There are always demands that employees' time be spent addressing more urgent requests from their superiors. Time and skill needed for using social media can reduce employee's motivation to share (Yuan, Zhao, Liao, & Chi, 2013).

**C. Language barriers:**

One of the challenges in adopting social media is a potential language barrier. Since most of the information online is in English, it is difficult for non-English speaking employees around the world to access this information (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010), and contribute their opinion via social media sites. Hence, it might be difficult to get those employees to share and document their knowledge via social media (Yuan, Zhao, Liao, & Chi, 2013).

**D. Risk, security and loss of control in using social media:**

In adopting social media for organizations there is some fear that an employee can irresponsibly post confidential information, which may be detrimental to the image or success of the company. This "loss of control" over what information is posted on social media is noted as another major challenge in employing social media (Macnamara, & Zerfass, 2012). Other challenges in employing social media in public and private organizations include the concern for security, privacy and content control. When a company uses existing social media sites for any form of communication

among their employees or for public relations, they expose themselves to various security threats and legal risks. Organizations have to rely on the security system employed by social media sites and hence any breach in such a system may cause a leak of confidential company information (Macnamara, & Zerfass, 2012).

As listed above, organizations need to overcome a variety of obstacles before adopting social media. However, even after overcoming these obstacles, there are some disadvantages in adopting social media that the organizations need to aware of.

#### **4.6 Disadvantages of using social media for decision-making**

So far we have noted the various advantages in adopting social media in organizations. However before adopting social media, it is necessary that the organizations become aware of the risks involved. The risks that are associated with the adoption of social media may be equal to or even exceed the associated benefits. Social media has a vast reach wherein millions of people can communicate globally and offer organizations a huge platform for collaboration and decision-making. However, along with the opportunity it also provides significant risks (Merrill, Latham, Santalessa & Navetta, 2011).

##### **A. Unwillingness to share information by employees**

Information sharing is very crucial in organizations for decision-making. However while having the right information can give individual employees a competitive edge, sharing that valuable information with others over social media can erode that advantage. Thus, employees may be unwilling to put everything they know on social media sites. Employees are willing to share their knowledge in a collaborative environment, where there is no personal gain. However if it is a matter of competitive edge or personal gain they tend to withhold the information or can go as far as

misrepresenting the information. Such behavior on social media sites can prove very disadvantageous for the organization (Yuan, Zhao, Liao, & Chi, 2013).

### **B. Information overload**

The second challenge in using social media for decision-making is having too many options. Over the last few years social media technology has grown so much that there is an abundance of information, but it is scattered across multiple applications. It can be an overwhelming task to search for valid information for decision-making. There is simply too much information available; it is difficult for employees to decide where to start and how to discover useful platforms. According to an employee in a survey by Yuan “I really cannot say how I discovered these tools or links . . . sometimes you might discover a link to a very helpful wiki maintained by a western European team that has been in existence for a long time, but you were simply not aware of it. It will become a reference place that you visit often, but there is nothing to help me discover useful platforms or tools like this.” (Yuan, Zhao, Liao, & Chi, 2013).

### **C. Loss of Productivity**

Almost 63% of US office workers use social media like Facebook or Twitter for personal reasons at least once a day and almost 82% use it a few times per week. Almost 71% of 18-29 year old UK office workers access social media multiple times over a week for personal usage (ClearSwift, 2007). As these statistics show, organizations should be very concerned about the employees spending excessive work time on these social media resulting in poor productivity (Naylor, 2007). Many organizations worry that even if social media is used for work-related posting, employees will spend a lot of time updating blog entries or wikis, which decreases

productivity. Social networking sites offer many engaging ways for users to stay on their sites such as games and quizzes, which can occupy a user for hours. Games like “Works with friends” and “Farmville” are specifically designed for users to play long hours and visit those games often, at certain time intervals, which can distract users from work (Cisco, 2012). Hence one of the major concerns for organizations is the loss in productivity caused by the excessive use of social media at work.

#### **D. Damage to an organization’s reputation**

Another major concern for organizations is the potential damage to reputation caused by insensitive and derogatory comments and posts made by employees. Almost one third of office workers in the US have discussed work related issues and stresses on social media (ClearSwift, 2007). This can lead to potential damage to an organization’s brand. Also, as mentioned before, data created on social media are unrestricted and non-perishable. Hence any negative post can exist on social media forever.

An example of social media causing huge damage to reputation occurred in April of 2009. Two employees of Dominos, one of largest international pizza delivery chains, posted a prank video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhBmWxQpedI>). In this video, they purported to be tainting a sandwich that was supposedly to be delivered to a customer. The video instantly went viral and reached millions of viewers. Within 48 hours of posting the video, the consumer perception of Dominos changed from positive to negative. The company attempted to control the damage done by the video by answering questions posted by angry viewers and consumers. The CEO of Domino’s appeared on YouTube, and personally tried to address people’s concerns. However the posting



damaged their reputation to such an extent that a simple search of the word Domino's returned the prank video for a long time. A similar blow was caused to Nestlé's reputation when Greenpeace campaigned against Nestlé for their use of palm oil. Nestlé tried to restrict commentary on this issue, causing more unwanted attention from consumers on social media, and leading to a public relations nightmare (Chaudhary, Frisby-Czerwinski & Del Giudice, 2011).

#### E. Unpredictability of users on social media

Social media provides users with the power of invisibility. Employees and consumers can post content and remarks about organizations without revealing their true identity.

This power of invisibility provides the user of social media with:

1. No Guilt
2. Mob Mentality
3. Relative anonymity
4. No accountability

(Barbara, 2012)

If organizations try to market a product or service on social media positively, the response could be very unexpected and turn out to be negative for the organization.

An example of one such incident involved McDonald's. In January of 2012, McDonald's started a marketing campaign on Twitter by using the hash tag #McDStories, with the hope that people would share some happy and heartwarming stories about their experience at McDonalds. However, people took over the #McDStories hash tag to start bashing the company. Some examples of horrible sample tweets by users include:

1. One time I walked into McDonalds and I could smell Type 2 diabetes floating in the air and I threw up. #McDStories (via Twitter, 2012)

2. The promoted TT of #McDStories isn't going the direction I think @mcdonalds wanted it to go. Lots of weed stories and heart attack jokes. (via Paid Content, 2012)
3. Ate a McFish and vomited 1 hour later....The last time I got McDonalds was seriously 18 years ago in college..... #McDstories(via Twitter, 2012)
4. #McDStories I lost 50lbs in 6 months after I quit working and eating at McDonald's (via The Daily Mail, 2012)

People used this hash tag to bash McDonalds on Twitter, and it became a full-blown marketing nightmare when the traditional media became involved. McDonalds reportedly pulled down this campaign within few hours of posting it. However, campaigns on social media are impossible to control and the bashing continued for weeks.

Therefore, organizations should realize that a cautious approach should be taken with regards to social media campaigning, since a small positive marketing campaign can turn into a huge public relations nightmare (Hill, 2012).

#### **F: Loss of Confidential Information**

Another major disadvantage of using social media in organizations is the potential loss of confidential information. Social media allows employees to gain access to large volumes of organization's confidential information while sitting at their desk. Hence any malicious or even unintentional posting by an employee can result in leakage of this information. This can cause the company embarrassment, financial damage or even expose the organization to major security risks (Van Zyl, 2008).

A U.S. Congressional Representative tweeted his arrival in Baghdad using his cell phone on his secret mission to Iraq. This caused the U.S. House Intelligence

Committee a lot of embarrassment (Molok, 2010). In another example, a militant in the Israeli army updated the status on his Facebook page regarding the time and location of an upcoming raid by Israeli military. That led to the army cancelling the entire raid. Similarly, up to the year 2010, employees had exposed British military secrets on social media sites 16 times (Molok, 2010).

As noted above, carelessness, ignorance and malicious intent on the part of employees can cause major embarrassment, financial and security risk and potential loss of intellectual property.

### **G: Virus and Malware Threats**

Unintentional or malicious intent by employees can not only cause the organization loss of confidential information, but can also expose the organization to various viruses and malware.

Social media exposes businesses to new threats from viruses and malware, which are developed specifically to target new social media technologies (ClearSwift, 2007). These 'hackers' post fake profiles, write fake blogs and post fake content on social media sites, which leads to employees downloading viruses and malware. Once these viruses or malware enter the organization's network, the hacker can gain access to the entire server, view sensitive information, or even potentially take down a company's entire network (Van Zyl, 2008).

A 2009 survey revealed that 24% of small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) have been victims of multiple hacks due to use of social media by their employees. Even companies which have taken various precautionary measures against such viruses by

employing strong firewalls and anti-virus software have still reported successful attacks from viruses, spyware and phishing (Chi, 2011).

As noted, the phenomenon of social media is growing rapidly. Along with that growth, the benefits and risks associated with social media grow as well. As more organizations adopt social media for communications, collaborations and decision-making, they are exposing themselves to risks (ClearSwift, 2007).

However, a key strategy to countering the drawbacks of adoption of social media is analyzing the risks and fully understanding them. This will allow organizational leaders, information technology departments, and knowledge workers to take appropriate precautionary measures before adopting social media in organizations (Van Zly, 2008). It is important that management realizes that these risks are simply challenges that an organization has to overcome rather than perceiving them as deterrents to the adoption of social media.

However, it is not very surprising that organizations stay away from social media. A survey of 1400 CIO's across the US by Robert Half Technologies (<http://www.rht.com>) revealed that almost 54% of organizations have total banned employees from using social media sites in 2009. This number decreased by 2011, where only 31% of organizations banned the use of social media (Brost, 2012)

This chapter has described the need for social media in organizations for communications, collaboration and decision-making. It has shown how organizations can utilize social media for important decision-making. The chapter recognized key concerns that would be raised while integrating social media in organizations and how they can be addressed. Social media can be useful in organizations in a variety of different ways such as managing customer relationships, innovation, operations and

leadership. However there are various challenges that an organization will have to address while adopting social media and be aware of the disadvantages the organizations will be faced with once it has adopted social media. Organizations have faced disadvantages such as loss of productivity, damage to their reputation, unpredictability of users, loss of confidential information, virus and malware threats, and so on. But organizations need to be aware of these drawbacks and take proper precautions before adopting social media.

In the next chapter, the successful implementations of existing and customized social media sites in organizations and how it has helped them in a different ways will be examined. Major organizations such as IBM, Lego, Deloitte, Cisco, and Supervalu have had success stories of implementing and integrating social media in their daily activities. And it is not just corporations that have benefitted, but also election campaigns, local, regional and national governments and public revolutions (eg. Arab Spring) that have prospered with the use of social media. In the final chapters, some simple guidelines are suggested which will help organizations, which are planning on using social media, and the future potential of social media is explored.

## **Chapter 5: Integration of social media technologies with decision-making**

If millions of people are using social media to share content and share their opinions online, how can public and private organizations tap that potential to connect with consumers? In large global companies collaboration in business decision-making is an important priority (Macosenz & Ladougla, 2010). Various organizations use different forms of social media simply to interact with their employees, customers and stakeholders. As described previously, social media can be of many types, including social networking sites, micro-blogging, RSS Feeds, and Wikis. Companies have a wide range of existing and custom social media to choose from depending on their requirements. Some of the examples of the use of social media sites by organizations for the purpose of connecting with each other or their consumers will be described in later sections.

### **5.1. Organizational use of social media for decision-making**

Once organizations decide to go social, they have to choose whether they want to use existing social media sites or make their own custom sites. There are advantages to each option. There are many social media sites already in existence with a wide user base. Social media sites have literally billions of users that an organization can potentially connect to if they use existing sites. Organizations can promote their products and instantly start collaborating with existing or potential consumers by choosing existing platforms.

However, sometimes the needs of organizations are very specific and existing tools are not sufficient to completely fulfill their demands/requirements. Hence the second option for organizations is to build a custom social media platform where they can achieve a high level of personalization, customization and content control. Whatever

route organizations decide to take, it is important to realize the potential that social media provides organizations in terms of collaboration, communication and decision-making.

There are many software applications available that can be used as a standalone collaborative decision-making platform but which do not connect to social media. One such package is StreamWork by SAP, which connects the employees of a company for collaborative decision-making (Sallam & Rozwell, 2010). Here, we are mainly interested in software that connects the power of social media for collaborative decision-making and hence the focus (in this paper) will only be on social technologies

There are a number of organizations which help develop customized and personalized social media tools for collaboration, marketing and communications. One such organization is Salesforce.com. Chatter, one of their most successful products, is a ready-to-use customizable social media tool for organizations (<https://www.salesforce.com/chatter/overview/>). It helps organizations create private communities where employees, suppliers, consumers and partners are all connected and seamless collaboration can take place. Important company files can be shared, viewed and edited easily from anywhere. The ability to edit and share instantly makes it an ideal tool for collaborative work, which eventually helps in the decision-making process. Along with the important business aspects of Chatter, it also provides a social networking platform through which all employees can post their profile, pictures and comments and be connected with each other, no matter their location (<https://www.salesforce.com/chatter/overview/>).

American Express has taken a different approach to social media called OpenForum

(<https://www.openforum.com/>). OpenForum helps small business owners to connect to each other or with experts to help them find useful information and tips. It encourages collaborative social interaction for small business owners via Connectodex, which is a private social networking platform offered on OpenForum. IdeaHub, another private social networking platform offered on OpenForum, helps small businesses connect with experts in their respective field in topics ranging from personal productivity to finance and business management.

### **5.1.1 Use of readily available social media tools**

There are a multiple social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, wikis, and blogs that companies can use for decision-making. These tools are ideal for connecting to a wide range of customer base since they already have large numbers of existing users. One of the unconventional social media tools, which are proving to be a useful collaborative tool for decision-making, is Second Life ([www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)).

Second Life is a virtual world where a user chooses an avatar, and can build elements in the virtual world and perform actions that help shape their virtual world. Second Life is based on being creative and interactive with others. These are the key aspects that organizations seek for collaboration and decision-making. Major organizations such as IBM, Dell, Cisco and Sun Microsystems have seen the potential of Second Life in business applications for “collaboration, research and conceptualization, simulation and prototyping, events, brand promotion, philanthropy and fundraising, political organizations, education, and training and communications.” (Wurtz & Power, 2008). Similar virtual worlds, namely Qwag Forums, Forterra, ProtonMedia, Wonderland, Multiverse and Activeworlds, are alternatives to Second Life for organizations to get their employees together in various collaborative and business decision-making environments. These virtual worlds have developed into a platform



for collaborative business decisions. They remove the confines of space and connect people from any part of the globe on a common ground for various conferences and events. They promote virtual learning and collaborative environments in workplaces (Middleton, 2009).

Supervalu, one of the largest food retailing companies in the USA and the 75th largest Fortune 500 Company, adopted social media for collaboration, effective communication and decision-making. In 2009, then CEO Craig Herket, realized that all store managers and executives met only once a year at annual conferences and did not know the workings of the chain across the USA. He stressed increasing collaboration by encouraging the use of Yammer ([www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com)). He promoted the use of Yammer for exchanging ideas, sharing pictures of successful store promotions, and to increase communication between store managers. He realized that the stores that were active on Yammer had 13% larger sales revenue than the inactive ones. Supervalu's experience with social media suggests that these tools are not only used to connect with consumers and for promotional activities, but can be used for operations, innovation and leadership as well. Social media is used for more than just increasing collaboration and communications but as a strategic decision-making tool (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips, & Kruschwitz, 2012a).

Ford: Another major corporation that utilized social media for marketing, communications and decision-making is Ford (<http://social.ford.com/>). They used blogging to connect to their customers and give them a positive experience when buying a new car. They post news and reviews of their cars on their blogs and

encourage customers to comment on them freely. They ask their customers not only to post their Ford car buying experience on their blogs but to also give Ford suggestions regarding safety, personalization and other unique advice. Ford uses this feedback from their customers to build their next generation of cars. They have incorporated many unique suggestions from their customers to innovate. Ford also uses Flickr to post pictures of their new cars and get their customers excited about new product launches. Ford has gone social not only for marketing their products but also for innovation and important decision-making (Porterfield, 2011).

Dresdner Kleinwort Bank: A German bank, Dresdner Kleinwort Bank, uses wikis to help their employees collaborate on a common platform around the world.

Motorola is extremely active on social media sites. They use 4,400 blogs, 4,200 wiki pages and have 2,600 people actively involved in content tagging and social bookmarking.

Many organizations have benefitted from using existing social media platforms to promote their company for collaboration, communications and decision-making. However, simply using existing platforms has a number of limitations. The organization has to rely on the security of the servers of the social media company and important confidential data might be leaked if their servers are hacked. Also the design of most social media platforms is for the general population. They are not designed specifically for organizational uses of collaboration and decision-making. Hence organizations might have to develop a personalized and customized social media platform that suits their needs.

### **5.1.2 Custom social media tools**

Many organizations either choose to purchase customized social media platforms or develop their own platforms. Here are some of the major organizations and their ventures into the social media universe with the use of customized technologies.

Dell is among the forerunners in adopting custom social media tools for its organization. The director of social media at Dell, Richard Margetic, describes their venture into social media: “Michael Dell’s leadership really paved the path to us becoming a social business” (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013). Since 2006, Dell has been adopting social media for its organizations. They started in 2006 with blogs and started a crowd sourcing initiative in 2007 (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013). The crowd sourcing initiative by Dell is called IdeaStorm, which was launched in February 2007. The idea behind IdeaStorm was to provide consumers a platform with which they could interact with one another and brainstorm over the development of new technologies. Since its implementation, “IdeaStorm has crossed the 16,000 idea mark and Dell has implemented nearly 500 of these ideas. As Dell is always moving forward and innovating, so is IdeaStorm.” Using the social media platform of IdeaStorm, Dell has “Storm Sessions” in which consumers who have innovative ideas can post them, and “Extensions” where other users can comment on these ideas. The ideas receiving maximum “Extensions” are the ones that are taken to upper management for innovation and decision-making purposes (<http://www.ideastorm.com/>). In 2010, Dell set up a command center to listen in on users discussing Dell or technology in general on various existing social media platforms. In 2012, Dell automated the system so that any discussions regarding Dell, its competitors, and innovative technologies would automatically be compiled, sorted and analyzed. Dell used this tool to understand customer needs and preferences for a

particular technology or trend and utilized those valuable data for the innovation and decision-making process (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013).

Starbucks: Another organization that has developed its own social media platform for communicating with their consumers and for innovation is Starbucks. Starbucks started a social media platform called “My Ideas” in collaboration with Salesforce.com (<http://mystarbucksidea.force.com/>). Starbucks uses the social media platform to build “...an online community dedicated to sharing and discussing ideas and allowing you (consumers) to see how Starbucks is putting top ideas into action.” (<http://mystarbucksidea.force.com/>). Users first have to sign up to the social media platform and post ideas for new coffee, new experiences, community events, entertainment and so on. Other users can “like” the idea and post comments and opinions on those ideas. The most popular one is selected by a specialized team, which forwards the idea to upper management and key decision makers. These ideas are then implemented and the progress of implementation is also shown on the website, making the consumers feel that they have a key role in the company. Having their own platform, they can control the content on their website by banning profanity and inappropriate content, and disallowing repeat offenders.

Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company uses an internal collaboration platform called ‘Spot’ that connects employees from across the company. Spot is a customized social media tool developed internally in which Yammer ([www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com)) has been integrated with SharePoint. This customized platform was developed after input from both technical and non-technical teams (Kass, 2012). This platform is utilized daily by employees to resolve questions and queries from customers. For example, a Nationwide customer was stranded on a vacation because his RV broke down. The customer contacted Nationwide to inquire whether their policy covered such incidents.

The Nationwide agent wasn't sure if the customer's policy covered everything, due to the specific circumstances of the problem. The agent promptly posted his query on the company's internal collaboration platform and within 30 minutes the call center agent had an answer to all the customer's queries and concerns. With the help of an internal collaboration tool, the issue was resolved quickly, whereas without it the issue might have escalated and taken hours or days to resolve (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012b).

GE Aviation has found unique ways to adopt social media. GE Aviation was looking to go social to connect to the younger generation by showing innovations in their organization and modernizing its brand image. They started simply by being active on existing social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, but they soon found limitations in using existing social media platforms and decided to go commit to social media. They approached salesforce.com and used their Chatter platform ([www.salesforce.com/chatter](http://www.salesforce.com/chatter)). They found this platform so useful that the CEO of GE Beth Comstock noted that, "What might've taken a team – in the best case – a week, can now be done in minutes." (Solis, 2012)

BestBuy created a social media site called Blueshirt Nation. It encourages employees to open an account on the social media site, where they can exchange rich ideas and have creative discussions on various forums. The end result of this social media site is much better than the company had hoped. The creative discussions and ideas shared on the site have been useful in changing important company policies. Besides helping the employees this has also provided a richer customer experience (Brandel, 2008). However Blueshirt Nation was shut down and replaced by a better performing Microsoft Share Point, which could integrate with phones and their existing corporate emails (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010).

Deloitte created their own social media site called D Street with the help of their internal IT and communications team. D Street is designed to be similar to Facebook in terms of functionality, except that every employee's profile is pre-populated with his or her basic information. D Street is useful for employees to network with each other. They can write blogs, and post pictures and comments on guest books (Brandel, 2008).

IBM has developed a similar social media site called Beehive. Just like D Street, Beehive is also a social networking site where the website is pre-populated with basic information about employees, which can then be personalized. A part of the Beehive experience includes sharing experiences from company travel, writing blogs, information tagging and "friending" (Brandel, 2008). Beehive was upgraded into a new social media platform called SocialBlue where individuals could write something about themselves and share that information on other's profiles, similar to Facebook (Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

As seen in these examples, companies either use existing social media platforms or create their own. However the impact of using social media sites by the public and private organizations has been substantial. A survey by Kiron et al found that 52% of the managers surveyed found social media completely important or somewhat important to their organizations (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012b). Many small companies have seen significant jumps in sales after promoting their company on social media. Major organizations have made it easy for their employees to collaborate on constructive work and spend time exchanging ideas and feedback.

## **5.2 Use of social media for decision-making outside of the business world**

Social media has not only revolutionized the internal communications, collaboration

and decision-making in organizations, but it has had a vast impact in other aspects of life. Below are a few examples where social media has played an important role in decision-making outside of the business world.

### **5.2.1 Politics/Elections**

An important area in which social media can be implemented for decision-making process is politics. The 2008 elections in the USA was an initial foray for social media in politics. Almost all the candidates participated actively on social media not only to spread their message, but to drive interest in their candidacy. All parties want to get people, especially youth, interested in politics, and thus used social media in their campaigns. Almost 27% of youth agreed that they obtained their campaign information via social media sites (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Social media proved to be an important tool for exchanging information. Almost 15% of Americans used social media to urge other people to support a particular candidate and almost 10% made contributions online (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Young adults made contributions via social media sites not only to promote their candidates, but in communicating with others and helping them in the decision-making process for voting. They used social media to interact with one another, form online communities to discuss the merits and demerits of the candidates, and post comments on various blogs and social networking communities. Importantly, the candidates took part in political discussions and debates using questions posted on YouTube as opposed to having a moderator formulate them. Social media thus played an important role in political discussions, communications and decision-making processes for the 2008 United States elections and will likely continue to do so in elections to come. The current U.S. president, Barack Obama, realized this potential and is currently active on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media sites. It

should however be noted that social media not only had an important effect on young adults' political decision-making processes, but it also gave them a voice and a platform for active discussions regarding politics. Since social media can be used to educate and empower youth regarding politics, it will be an essential platform for political parties and their candidates (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

### **5.2.2 Arab spring revolution**

The use of social media for collaborative decision-making outside of the business communities can also be seen in recent popular uprisings around the world. Social media facilitated the Arab Spring Revolution and Revolts of 2011. After the success of the Tunisian revolution, people in Egypt wanted President Hosni Mubarak out. The first demonstrations against the president started on January 25, 2011. This revolution gained momentum via social media. Individuals created Facebook and Twitter posts to gain support of the masses and gain momentum for the resignation of the President. The President attempted to block the Internet, as he knew people collaborating over social media could topple his regime. Finally with revolutionaries refusing to back down, on February 11, 2011, Mubarak decided to step down. This successful revolution proved the power of social media for bringing people together for a common collaborative decision (Nepstad, 2011). However, this revolution was only the beginning of a continuing long struggle of people of Egypt electing new people to power. The Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi, followed by General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, replaced Hosni Mubarak. The Muslim Brotherhood got so popular over now banned social media sites that they have decided to create their own Facebook-like social networking site, to circumvent Egyptian controls. Even though the situation continues to remain unstable in Egypt, the power of people coming together via social media remains.



### **5.2.3 E-Government**

Another application of social media for decision-making is in the government sector. Transparency and access to government information is an ongoing demand from citizens around the world. This access is now internationally regarded as essential to the democratic process for building trust in government, prevention of corruption, and informed decision-making (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). Social media applications for e-governance can be the ideal platform to provide such access. Government can post important public service announcements on social media sites for speedy disbursement of information. Government can obtain instant feedback from the public regarding the implementation of new policies and whether they need to be amended. Interdepartmental communications can be smoother, which makes decision-making process in governments faster. Social media technologies have substantial transformative capabilities, which can help governments in effective communications among different departments and with citizens, and in performing effective collaborative work helping in speedy decision-making. This will eventually help in forming a transparent and corruption-free e-government.

## **Chapter 6: Guidelines**

### **6.1 Guidelines for harnessing potential of social media in organizations**

As noted by the Professor of Strategic Marketing, Moira Clark, social media tools and other collaborative technologies are here to stay. “ Competitive advantage will not merely emerge from applying social networking tools and collaborative technologies, but from adopting a completely different mindset. New business paradigms need to be considered with higher levels of trust and looser control, whilst at the same time having a systematic way of leveraging the contributions of Web 2.0. Whether we like it or not, social networking tools and collaborative technologies are here to stay. The question is can we rise to the challenge?” (Macosenz & Ladougla 2010). The opportunity for social media is clear. Many employees, consumers, stakeholders and decision makers are familiar with and comfortable using social media tools and are connected to each other via existing tools. Organizations need to leverage the power of social media tools for everything from internal collaboration to community building, from internal communications to connecting with end users, from marketing to customer services and most importantly for decision-making.

However, before embarking on a large-scale adoption of social media in every aspect of an organization, decision makers should have a clear direction and a defined roadmap. In the final sections of the thesis, some guidelines are offered to organizations that decide to venture into the social media universe.

#### **1. Commit to the cause of adoption and implementation**

Organizations should not adopt social media haphazardly or half-heartedly but must be committed to the goal of going social. Commitment should be demonstrated in terms of integration of the organization’s functionality with social media.

Commitment to adopt social media should be followed by channeling appropriate financial and human resources. It is common for organizations to allocate resources during the adoption of social media. However, under-funding of the social media tools and half-hearted commitment by allocating insufficient resources sometimes follows adoption. Organizations should not only have a long-term vision for the adoption and implementation of social media but also completely commit to its adoption (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012a).

## 2. Focus on the functional and not the financial aspect of social media

As noted before, social media can help organizations in reducing expenses for communications and marketing. However, it would be incorrect for an organization to make that a goal for adoption of social media. Social media should be looked at as an initiative to improve traditional business functionality. Only then can the true potential of social media can be achieved by the organization (Macosenz & Ladougla 2010).

## 3. Use social media as a tool for innovation

Social media can be a unique tool for innovation. Innovative new products and services can be developed not only by brainstorming sessions among board members and decision makers, but by obtaining ideas from the actual end users. Listening to their feedback for improving existing products, soliciting ideas from experts in their respective fields, and inviting external audiences to help solve R&D problems can help organizations innovate (Macosenz & Ladougla 2010).

## 4. Use suitable social media tools

As explained earlier, organizations can either choose to adopt existing social media

tools or develop their own customized tools. However it is important to choose these social media tools wisely. Organization should consider key aspects before adopting social media tools such as

- a. Fit for the organization in terms of level of formality
- b. Ease of use for employees and consumers
- c. Integration with existing tools of communication and collaboration
- d. Ease of accessibility for employees and decision makers
- e. Security of tools with safety and backup options

After considering these aspects, executives should introduce the tools of social media that are suitable for their organization. Committing to the right tools is essential for long-term adoption (Macosenz & Ladougla 2010).

#### 5. Be a good listener

Organizations should focus on establishing long-term relationships with their end users. The consumers and employees should be able to express their opinions freely, even if they are negative. Honest opinions should not only be encouraged by the organization, but should be paid heed, since they will help with improving products and services. Organizations should look to find positive outcomes in the negative associations projected by the consumers (Macosenz & Ladougla 2010).

#### 6. Focus on relevant, concise and interesting content

The importance of adopting social media, especially for a major organization, is to seem small and friendly, and connect with consumers directly. To do so, the

organization must use social media to post interesting content to get the consumers engaged in their brand, and keep them interested. The content should always be fresh and offer thought provoking conversations with employees and consumers. However, to reap maximum benefit, the maximum number of employees possible should be using social media tools. But not everyone within the organization might be interested in using social media. It is necessary to provide incentives for its use within the organization (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

#### 7. Judge success by results

Since venturing into social media tools requires re-thinking, re-designing and re-developing the ways of performing everyday tasks in an organization, it is imperative for an organization to measure the return on investment in social media. A survey by Kiron 2012 revealed that most executives and decision makers have difficulty in measuring the return on investment from their social media ventures (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012a). Managers should only measure success by considering whether the social media tools are helping them and their employees perform their tasks more efficiently and effectively. As Capital One's Tom Poole aptly states, "We try not to hold ourselves to a pure constraint of measurable gains. I think we still believe we're in an experimentation phase and trying to learn." (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Kruschwitz, 2012a).

It is important to note that an organization should not look at social media with a narrow focus and use it simply for marketing and for promoting their brand on social media but rather view social media as a broad-based tool for innovation, collaboration, communication and decision-making. It is also important to consider which social media tools a company chooses to adopt for decision-making purposes, as this will

impact the quality of decisions made. Hence, it is essential to choose the right tools that merge well with the brand-image as well as the everyday workflow of an organization (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011). Social media can be a brilliant tool for collaboration and decision-making in organizations, to prepare them for the challenges of the future and advance the organization more predictably towards their business goals. However, there are various drawbacks involved in adopting social media as discussed above and organizations should be aware of them and take proper precautions before adopting social media.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and Future Research**

Social media can be used in practically every industry from automobiles to airlines, from manufacturing to service, from marketing to finance, and from public sector to private. There are wide applications of social media for managing customer relationships, innovation, operations, and leadership. The potential use of social media is almost endless. It is up to the organization to determine how they want to benefit from this phenomenon. The social media technologies available today are transformative. The influence of social media intensifies as professionals, educators, students, enterprises, and governments fully utilize the potential of its applications for communication and collaboration. Social media provides millions of people a way to connect and gather information. Whether it's for personal or professional gain, there are social media technologies tailored for each specific purpose.

### **7.1 Observations and views regarding use of social media**

As observed in this thesis, social media can outpace traditional forms of communications such as emails, phone calls, instant messages, and private intranet network connections. Information created on social media sites has both the advantages and disadvantages of being visible to everyone, unrestricted, non-perishable, editable, reusable and easy to search. Social media tools allow information to flow in multiple directions, keeping executives and employees informed and well connected. Hence social media tools can prove to be a true collaborative and communicative tool and give them an edge over most of the existing traditional forms of communications.

Social media tools also enable employees and executives to communicate freely among themselves as well as talk directly with their consumers. This can help them

with collaboration and innovation. With such a valuable and powerful tool in hand, executives and other decision makers can use it to manage customer relationships, for effective leadership and efficient decision-making. Decision-making should be a group effort rather than a one-person job and social media tools can help in achieving that goal. As noted earlier, various examples suggests that many personal and managerial decisions can be made simply, cleanly, effectively, and swiftly through the use of social media.

However, no tool is perfect, and social media tools are no different. There are challenges in adopting social media in organizations. Social media can be a time and resource-consuming tool. Hence management needs to be fully committed to the goal of using social media tools. Other challenges include language barriers, security, loss of control, unwillingness to share information, and information overload. However, in most cases the advantages of adopting social media outweigh the challenges. It is possible to overcome these challenges through a combination of organizational will and technology. Though it is clear that these new technologies are proving to be useful for decision-making, there is a long way to go before they reach their full potential. Large corporations are still very cautious about adopting social media. However, it would be a mistake for organizations to wait until the social media technology matures further, as these tools are here to stay.

## **7.2 Potential future research**

There are many existing and custom social media tools that organizations can use for internal and external communications, interdepartmental collaborations and business decision-making. Existing social media tools provide the organization an opportunity to connect to an existing user database while custom tools provides the organization



with the ability to fine-tune the social media tool per their organizational needs. However, there is no perfect social media tool that an organization can instantly adopt. It is clear that organizations either use social media to reach out to their customer base or use their custom made social enterprise tools to connect internally. There are only a handful of organizations using both readily available and custom social media tools to their fullest potential. What is needed is a cross between existing popular social media tools and private social enterprise network tools in one complete package, where the organization can obtain the best of both worlds. With such 'hybrid' tools, users could connect, communicate and engage in social discussion among each other, just as they do now using readily available social media tools, while organizations have freedom to personalize the tool for internal collaboration and decision-making, staying connected with same user base.

Language is one of the great barriers to adoption of social media across all countries and cultures. As English is the most popular language of social media like Facebook and Twitter, a large number of posts on such sites are in English. If a person posts something in English in the United States, a person in China would not be able to read the same post if they do not understand English. Currently some social media sites like Facebook allows the site to be translatable in language of your choice. However, if a friend posts some content in English, the post does not translate into the language of your choice. Language options are available on some social media sites, which lets one post in different languages. However, no translators are available which can translate an entire site with all its contents. More research needs to be done in development of a true universal translator for social media in order for people around the world to easily adopt them.

Security features of social media are another major area where a lot of work needs to

be done. Everyday hackers exploit new security loopholes and new hacking scams are reported. Social media today contains a lot of personal data, which will only increase as more, and more organizations adopt it. A truly secure server with no loopholes is almost an impossible task. However, continuous work and research needs to be performed so that organizations don't feel threatened by using social media. A 2009 survey revealed that 24% of small and medium sized businesses (SMBs) have been victims of multiple hacks due to use of social media by their employees (Chi, 2011). This number has gone up substantially since then and focus on security should be one of the major areas of future research.

Another important area of research that needs to be undertaken in social media is the 'art of listening'. Currently, social media as a marketing tool is all about posting promotional data, videos and other content. However, there are very few organizations that truly listen to consumers via social media posts. Tools need to be developed to help organizations filter through the messages posted on social media and selectively reply to the ones that are related to their organizations. This can help consumers interact directly with organizations and develop a relationship with them. Home Depot has specifically assigned some associates to 'listen' to the data being posted on social media and reply to relevant postings with useful information (Schultz and Peltier, 2013).

However, the important question remains - that is social media truly here to stay, as expected, or is it just a passing fade that will play out and disappear? Will social media truly turn out to be the 'change agent' that most people are suggesting? Has social media reached its peak or will it continue to grow in terms of user, consumers and its advocates? Commercially, organizations want it to succeed due to its various benefits. However, will users continue to adopt social media at a rapid pace even if

they are bombarded with various promotional content? Will a completely new technology, which hasn't yet been thought of, replace social media?

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